

The Sustainer's Foxhole and Preparing for Unified Land Operations

Our Army has vast wartime experience, but because sustainment units have been operating from established forward operating bases, Soldiers and leaders have not developed the skills necessary for effective field operations.

■ By Capt. Eric M. Stangle

The decisive action training environment is designed to refocus and reorient the Army for unified land operations in austere locations through the simultaneous combination of offensive, defensive, and stability operations. For tactical sustainment units, this means supporting on the move and employing certain skill sets and field craft, many of which have been largely undertrained or greatly diminished over the past decade.

Training in the field is the only way to become proficient at field operations. Regaining and honing the skills needed to operate in the field poses a challenge for sustainment units because they must balance the daily support requirements of their customer units and the training needs of their Soldiers.

The need for decisive action training extends beyond enlisted Soldiers; many noncommissioned officers (NCOs), company-grade officers, and even some field-grade officers have not had the opportunity to participate in this type of training for a long time.

FOB Versus BSA

Supporting from an established forward operating base (FOB) differs greatly from supporting from a brigade support area (BSA). The ways that we train for the two types of operations also differ.

During mission rehearsal exercises at combat training centers over the past decade, sustainment units almost exclusively operated out of

fixed facilities that replicated any given FOB in Afghanistan or Iraq. During these exercises, life support, entrance control points, maintenance areas, motor pools, bunkers, and perimeter defenses are already established and usually transferred over to the incoming unit as they would be during the relief-in-place process. Units typically do not have to establish these necessities from scratch, and the training environment has reflected that fact.

On the other hand, during decisive action rotations and unified land operations, it would be very unlikely that suitable hard-stand facilities would exist to establish support areas; therefore, support units would have to operate in the field, particularly during offensive operations when maintaining momentum is key to success.

Operational sustainment in decisive action brings into the planning and execution processes skill sets and procedures such as site reconnaissance and quartering party operations, tactical march techniques, site establishment, security, and incorporating additional entities, such as field trains command posts and joint and multinational partners. These skills are not necessarily used during a typical deployment to a FOB.

As an Army, we have vast wartime experience. Indeed, most of our leaders and Soldiers have several deployments under their belts. However, a FOB mentality is prev-

alent and a significant knowledge shortfall exists in conducting field operations.

Basic Field Craft

The enemy gets a vote, and for the tactical-level sustainer, managing logistics data, providing distribution, providing medical treatment, or conducting maintenance can only be accomplished after first securing yourself or you may not live long enough for logistics to matter. Securing the perimeter is a top priority of establishing a BSA, and so is clearly delineating priorities of work in order to do so quickly.

Leaders may be unfamiliar with the resources and time it takes to accomplish the multiple tasks required to establish and secure new field sites. Soldiers and NCOs may be unfamiliar with common tasks that support mission-essential tasks, so simultaneously establishing security and life support and conducting logistics tasks can be difficult. The consequences are unsynchronized and inefficient operations and inadequate rest plans that hinder operations as time progresses.

Many Soldiers just do not know what their individual responsibilities are in a field environment and are uncertain as to why these tasks are important. Many company-level leaders are equally inexperienced and therefore cannot adequately identify training requirements or effectively manage myriad tasks during field operations. Senior trainers

at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center have observed the following trends:

- Unfamiliarity with properly constructing and emplacing fighting positions and concertina obstacles.
- Difficulty transitioning from cell phones to tactical communications.
- Unfamiliarity with drafting and understanding range cards and sector sketches.
- Not using camouflage nets.
- Lack of trained field sanitation teams.
- Relative unfamiliarity with guard mount duties, responsibilities, and procedures.
- Not employing challenge and password procedures.
- Not adhering to noise and light discipline standards.
- Not comprehending the rules of engagement.
- Not positively identifying conventional and unconventional threats.
- Unfamiliarity with chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high-yield explosives tasks.
- Lacking standard operating procedures for field operations.

How is it that we find ourselves in this situation? Many of our senior leaders have experienced multiple field training exercises of this nature in their careers. Certainly, most of our sergeants major have dug their share of fighting positions as they came up through the ranks.

The answer is simple; we have been focused on the wars at hand. Counterinsurgency, counter-improvised explosive device training, and managing the Army Force Generation process, along with other key tasks, was our focus as we prepared for each deployment. But more than that, perhaps it has been taken for granted that these basic, seemingly simple skills are as ingrained in our Soldiers today as they were into our senior leaders many years ago.

Training Management and Mission Support

Providing sustainment in unified land operations is not about going “old school.” It is about sustaining the skills we have in our wartime deployments and building upon them to operate in the most austere environments. In other words, do what we know how to do without doing it from a FOB.

As logisticians, our daily duties require us to be technical experts; we are great in a motor pool, warehouse, or troop clinic. As a consequence, we tend to be less tactically proficient than our combat arms counterparts even though we have a decade of experience securing tactical convoys, reacting to enemy contact, and operating in a counterinsurgency environment. These are all skills we need to sustain and incorporate into future training.

So how do we tap into the knowledge and experience we have and build upon it? How do we get our NCOs, platoon leaders, and company commanders the knowledge they need to train their Soldiers in these

areas and be efficient and effective managers of logistics in the field? We begin with research. The Army has set the conditions for this transition and is providing resources for commanders and leaders to access.

Some doctrine and training methodologies have changed, but some have not. For example, Field Manual (FM) 22-6, Guard Duty, hasn't changed since 1975 and is still the current doctrine for guard duty. On the other hand, FM 7-0, Training the Force, from 2002 recently evolved into Army Doctrine Publication and Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 7-0, Training Units and Developing Leaders. But it does not matter how old or how new the doctrine is if it goes unused.

Doctrine and other training resources are easily accessible online through the Army Publishing Directorate (<http://www.apd.army.mil>) and the Army Training Network (<https://atn.army.mil>). The Center for Army Lessons Learned has newsletters and bulletins from pre-2001 training center rotations that



Soldiers from the 3rd Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment, conduct a mission rehearsal and walkthrough during a decisive action training environment exercise at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany, on Oct. 24, 2012. (Photo by Spc. Fredrick Willis)

Equal Opportunity Leaders Courses, among many others, will always be a necessary fact of Army life. But it also means that when coupled with daily support requirements, troop-to-task and manning requirements can quickly become a concern. When conducting training conflicts with providing support to the customer, the training event is often sacrificed.

To avoid this dilemma, commanders must clearly define their mission-essential tasks and desired end states with the intent to ruthlessly enforce training calendars. Only then can subordinate commanders conduct backwards planning, battalion and company crosswalks, and resource training and manage their support requirements effectively.

Sergeant's Time Training

Only by ensuring that our NCOs have the necessary resources and time to train individuals can we expect them to execute effective training events. Commanders can further reduce uncertainty by being creative in their approach to training.

For example, leaders can conduct maintenance at a field site for a few days instead of in the motor pool, even if it is just a platoon at a time, and incorporate and reinforce individual-level field skills. Commanders should encourage junior leaders to conduct opportunity training and use any available time to train individual and collective tasks while still conducting daily support activities.

It's all about training as you fight. It's all about leader development. It's all about conducting the military decisionmaking process. It's all about efficiency and adaptability. Training individuals, teams, leaders, and units is all about a lot of things, and it can be overwhelming, especially when confronted with tasks that are unfamiliar.

Training Methodology

So where should we start? ADRP 7-0 tells us to train fundamentals

first—a logical axiom that assumes the trainers are themselves proficient in the individual and collective tasks they are expected to teach their Soldiers. And if they are not, what is the next best step after reviewing the doctrine?

Officer and NCO professional development sessions present good opportunities for those most experienced to review and teach in a forum that is conducive to leader and trainer development. Start with skill level 1 tasks and work into skill levels 2, 3, and 4, along with other mission-essential task list (METL) supporting tasks. This should go beyond classroom instruction and incorporate practical exercises in a field environment. (See figure 1.)

Take your sergeants, lieutenants, and company commanders out to a field site and give them shovels, sandbags, lumber, a .50-caliber machine gun with tripod, and blank range cards and instruct them to build a crew-served fighting position to standard.

Not only will this allow them to gain appreciation for the amount of work that goes into these types of tasks in the field, but it also will give them the experience they need to expand their unit's training plan and quality of instruction.

Individual training is continuous and constantly builds and reinforces individual task proficiency through repetition with a series of desired outcomes that support the desired end state. A METL task of "deploy/establish support area," for example, encompasses multiple subtasks for subordinate units, such as "occupy a new operating site," which involves multiple collective tasks and individual tasks.

The individual task of camouflaging equipment can be partially trained in the motor pool or company area. Sewing the nets together, calculating how many and what configurations are required for assigned equipment, and the fundamentals that explain survivability

can be taught within a few hours. Build upon this to create crew drills and time standards that reinforce individual responsibilities.

Next, incorporate such training into a field environment and use the natural terrain patterns, dispersion techniques, and proper setup procedures. Several individual tasks can be trained in the same way and in conjunction with other mutually supporting tasks. In this way, we are not just checking the block on tasks, conditions, and standards; we are creating the basis for the desired outcome, which is to support the mission-essential task of establishing a support area.

As the Army transitions over the next few years, it is not a question of if we will be prepared for unified land operations and future conflicts; it is a question of how well we will be prepared. Strong command emphasis on dedicating training time and resources will help ensure the basics of field craft are incorporated into unit training.

We as sustainers and leaders must safeguard to the best of our ability the limited time we have in our schedules to conduct sergeant's time, individual, collective, and job-specific training. Officers must participate in training just as they must assign the training tasks to subordinate leaders and hold them accountable. Building efficiency in the basics of field craft will result in adaptability in any environment and will allow sustainers to better support customer units.

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