

Mobile Container Assessment Team Missions, Responsibilities, and Troop Leading Procedures

■ By 1st Lt. Steven Oh

In April 2012, the 427th Brigade Support Battalion (BSB) began conducting the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) Materiel Retrograde Element (CMRE) mission to assist units with processing materiel for retrograde, redistribution, redeployment, reset, and disposal. The 18th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion (CSSB) assumed mission command of the BSB's headquarters and headquarters company and maintenance company.

The 593rd Sustainment Brigade assumed mission command in August 2012 and refined the metrics for successful retrograde velocity. Success was measured in the number of 20-foot shipping containers retrograded per month.

MCATs in Afghanistan

Mobile container assessment teams (MCATs) assist units in establishing and conducting container management in order to gain container property accountability for sustainment and retrograde, redistribution, redeployment, reset, and disposal operations. Following troop leading procedures (TLPs) ensures that mission planning, execution, tracking, and assessment are executed throughout the phased operations. Before executing MCAT missions, it is imperative to conduct mission planning at the battalion, company, platoon, and team levels of operations.

In order to understand how specific MCAT tasks apply to the mission in Afghanistan, a brief overview of how forces are arrayed is necessary. The

Combined Joint Operations Area–Afghanistan (CJOA–A) is divided into six regional commands (RCs): North, South, Southwest, West, East, and Capital. Each RC is responsible for any task force in its area of operations.

Each task force is responsible for a specific number of bases within its area of responsibility. The bases can be described as operating on a hub and spokes model. One centralized base acts as the main operational base (a hub) with smaller bases (spokes) surrounding it.

Container Management

The container management structure in the CJOA–A is organized under the Joint Sustainment Command–Afghanistan and is described in depth in the CENTCOM Container Management Policy Letter of Instruction (CM LOI).

The container management process proceeds this way:

- The unit assigns a container control officer (CCO), preferably located at the base for which he is responsible for container management.
- The CCO is assigned responsibility for one or more geographic locations (GEOLOCs). (A GEOLOC is a container yard location that is created and maintained in the Integrated Booking System–Container Management Module [IBS–CMM]. At least one refrigerated or five dry containers are needed to establish a GEOLOC.)

- The CCO receives training on IBS–CMM from the Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command either online or in person.
- The CCO maintains the inventory and the status of containers in IBS–CMM.

Each task force should assign two CCOs, one to be the container officer-in-charge and another to be the noncommissioned officer-in-charge, for the bases within its area of operations. These individuals manage the CCOs located at each base in the task force's area of responsibility. Each RC should assign a regional container manager responsible for ensuring that CCOs or yard managers are assigned and trained on IBS–CMM for each base and location.

Yard managers provide monthly container inventory information for bases without GEOLOCs to the CCOs located at hub bases. The container information is updated in the hub base's GEOLOC; the actual location is noted in the remarks column in IBS–CMM. If a GEOLOC is established later, then the container number can be in-gated into the newly established GEOLOC.

An area container manager is assigned by a sustainment brigade and is typically located at one of the major operational bases, such as Kandahar Airfield, Bagram Airfield, or Camp Leatherneck. The area container manager is responsible for maintaining accountability of containers located at the cen-

tral receiving and shipping point or empty-container control point and for filling unit requests to use empty government-owned containers.

The area container manager also assists with ensuring that carriers are notified of empty carrier-owned containers that are ready for pick-up. Commercial carriers charge detention fees to the U.S. government for containers that are not returned within 15 days after delivery.

The country container authority is responsible for creating and closing GEOLOCs and providing supervision and guidance for reducing detention fees. The country container authority works with the container management element located in Kuwait to ensure that each GEOLOC is properly managed in IBS-CMM. The container management element is responsible for managing and operating IBS-CMM, providing CCOs with IBS-CMM user identifiers, and granting CCOs temporary or permanent access to update GEOLOCs.

The container management structure is designed to be operated by the units on the ground and to provide, through IBS-CMM, commanders and planners with a common operational picture of containers on the battlefield.

The MCATs are designed to fulfill the quality assurance function by assessing CCOs (acting as quality control managers) and their container management operations. The assessments include physical inventories of containers located at the various bases and GEOLOCs.

MCAT Missions

MCATs conduct missions based on requests by RCs and units located therein. MCATs also complete the CM LOI requirement to conduct periodic assessments of CCOs and GEOLOCs. RCs may request the direct support of an MCAT in order to assist CCOs in ensuring that all of the containers located on the base are included in IBS-CMM.

Containers that are not already in IBS-CMM need to be entered, or

“created,” in the system. Containers that are already created in IBS-CMM but not reflected in the correct GEOLOC need to be in-gated to the correct GEOLOC inventory record.

Containers that have moved out of the GEOLOC will need to be out-gated. Once the container is received and in-gated at the destination base, it will be reflected in the correct GEOLOC.

When a unit arrives at a new base, it may fall in on many containers that have accumulated there over the past decade. Containers already located at the base are considered installation property and contain items needed for life support (often in refrigerated containers) and force protection. Unit commanders are not required to sign for this property, and it is frequently managed by the mayor’s cell on larger bases.

All of the containers located on the base are required to be inventoried and updated in IBS-CMM. Units often fail to inventory all containers because they are not accountable items on their property books.

Maintaining container inventories is necessary for improving the availability of U.S. government-owned containers to be used as distribution platforms. The practice also helps to identify carrier-owned containers for movement to an empty-container control point in order to reduce detention costs.

The MCATs help to ensure that all of the containers are brought to record in IBS-CMM so that carrier-owned containers can be tracked and returned to carriers and empty government-owned containers can be made available to units.

Troop Leading Procedures

Mission planning for the MCAT is conducted through TLPs. The following guidelines are intended to assist leaders and planners by identifying key considerations. They are not intended to be an inflexible checklist to be followed in chronological order, but they should assist with maintain-

ing consistency and preparing for planning and execution.

The MCAT’s TLPs included the following:

- Receive the mission.
- Issue the warning order.
- Make a tentative plan.
- Initiate necessary troop movement.
- Conduct reconnaissance.
- Complete the plan.
- Issue the complete order.
- Supervise and refine.

Receive the Mission

TLPs do not necessarily have to be executed in sequence, with the exception of the first TLP, receive the mission.

CENTCOM provides the following stated mission for MCATs in the CENTCOM CM LOI dated Sept. 28, 2011: “Mobile Container Assessment Teams will conduct periodic site visits of container control officers to validate container management processes and procedures. [U.S. Forces-Afghanistan] will develop processes and procedures, to include organic sourcing, for regional MCATs.”

The CM LOI also says that U.S. regional commanders will source and employ regional MCATs to conduct full audits to validate IBS-CMM information using audit procedures and to capture and report all discrepancies between the physical inventories and IBS-CMM. Discrepancies should be tracked and reported through the container management element and country container authority until resolved.

Issue the Warning Order

For missions that have been approved by the SPO, the mission list is disseminated to the various battalion and SPO cells, including the S-3, S-2, SPO plans, and MCAT, for preparation to brief the concept of operations (CONOP).

Once the regional MCAT mission set is approved by the battalion CMRE SPO, a draft fragmentary order that explains the missions to be completed and includes relevant



Spc. Joseph Bofenkamp and Sgt. George Conkey, 1462nd Transportation Company, load 20-foot shipping containers onto an outbound convoy. (Photo by 1st Lt. Henry Chan)

contact information is submitted to the S-3.

A list of the MCAT bases to be visited is provided to the S-2. Coordinates should be provided if available. Ideally, the list should be given to the S-2 at least two weeks before execution to allow time for threat briefings to be prepared, the MCAT company to update the CONOP, the S-2 section to brief the MCAT leader, and the MCAT leader to brief the company commander, who will then brief the battalion commander.

A list of the MCAT bases and unit points of contact should be provided as a warning order. The mission planning tracker should be updated and provided to the SPO plans section for updating the production control schedule posted on a classified common-access calendar.

Make a Tentative Plan

A CONOP briefing and a composite risk management worksheet

will be developed for each mission set to be conducted by the MCAT. The MCAT platoon leader and team leader should estimate the amount of time to be spent at each base. The time at each base depends on the current container count, the contents and condition of each container, and training considerations.

Initiate Necessary Troop Movement

The MCAT leader will need to coordinate the final scheduling with the assigned bases' points of contact. It is a best practice to request that the container management contact have all units placard containers they are using so that unused, abandoned, or excess containers can be identified more easily.

The MCAT will also need to request temporary GEOLOC access for each base from the Kuwait container management element or the 1st Theater Sustainment Command. Access to the GEOLOC will permit the MCAT to have rights to create,

in-gate, and out-gate containers for the GEOLOC. Once coordinated dates are established, the mission planning tracker can be updated with those dates.

The MCAT should print out a container inventory listing for each GEOLOC to be visited, giving particular attention to carrier-owned containers and unknown-owner containers.

Conduct Reconnaissance

The MCAT leader will review the threat briefing information with the S-2 intelligence analyst before briefing the company and battalion commanders. The MCAT leader will have received additional coordination instructions from the point of contact located at the base.

Mission dates and locations may also be adjusted by request of the task force container officer-in-charge or brigade SPO based on the operational needs of the supported units. It is important to re-

main flexible when coordinating with the supported units and their respective CCOs. Since travel can be canceled because of bad weather, maintenance issues, or enemy threats, plan for an additional day or two for travel.

The base closure assistance teams (BCATs) are also augmented with an MCAT subject matter expert. Sometimes, because of the quantity of containers, the BCAT will require additional assistance from a regional MCAT. In these cases, the BCAT provides an initial container assessment.

Any risks identified from the threat briefing and unit coordination should be included in the composite risk management worksheet to be submitted to the company commander and battalion safety officer for review. The composite risk management worksheet is provided

to the battalion commander when the CONOP is briefed for mission approval.

Complete the Plan

Once the threat briefing has been completed and the mission dates are updated on the CONOP, any final information gaps are filled. The point of contact should be updated on the CONOP, which is posted on common-access portal for access by the battalion battle desk.

Issue the Complete Order

The CONOP is initially briefed to the MCAT company commander separately and then to the CMRE battalion commander. Areas to consider when conducting MCAT missions include the impacts of the presence of Afghan National Security Forces, movement, medical, container management, and base

closure and transfer.

If the mission is approved, then a copy of the signed composite risk management sheet should be provided to the battalion safety officer.

Supervise and Refine

MCAT leaders should schedule time to accompany the CCO during a full inventory of container data. They should use the CCO operations assessment to provide after action review comments. Conducting full audits of container inventories will ensure that IBS-CMM container data is accurate.

Leaders should provide a full container inventory report to unit commands and stakeholders, including CCOs and forward operating base mayors (as requested). They should identify which containers are correctly reflected in the IBS-CMM and which containers need to be created in the database.

The MCAT will conduct the container management battle drills in conjunction with the CCOs or container management stakeholders to support the unit. If a CCO is to be appointed by the unit, then the MCAT will provide a sample appointment order and initial IBS-CMM training.

The TLPs are necessary for conducting safe and effective MCAT operations. Applying the TLPs will encourage timely planning and execution while meeting the requirements of the CM LOI in a battlespace undergoing base closure and transfer.



Forward Operating Base Sharana materiel redistribution yard noncommissioned officer-in-charge Sgt. Andrew Markley, 289th Quartermaster Company, signals for a rough-terrain container handler to proceed forward to offload containers that have just arrived at his facility. (Photo by 1st Lt. Henry Chan)

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