

Sustainment Planning in Decisive Action

Lessons Learned From a Division Warfighter Exercise

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An elaborate system of tents and supporting vehicles occupies the location of the 1st Infantry Division Warfighter Exercise 16-04 on April 7, 2016, at Fort Riley, Kansas. (Photo by Andy Massanet)



Sustainment integration is most effective when it is continuous and concurrent, providing detailed logistical analysis throughout all steps of the military decisionmaking process. This article details lessons learned during the 1st Infantry Division's (1st ID's) decisive action Warfighter Exercise (WFX) 16-04 facilitated by the Mission Command Training Program at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and executed at Fort Riley, Kansas.

Planning

Three concepts were critical to successful sustainment planning for decisive action: anticipation and running estimates, sustainment preparation of the operational environment, and task organization to solve the problem.

Anticipation and running estimates. Anticipating bulk fuel requirements, ammunition, and casualty rates were a point of debate throughout the planning process. Running estimates are the bedrock of sustainment planning and continually change throughout the planning process. The division staff used planning factors from the Logistics Estimation Workbook, medical and casualty estimation simulation, and the Theater Sustainment Battle Book (ST 4-1) to populate the sustainment running estimates.

The staff's experience varied; low estimates were based on counterinsurgency operations, while high estimates were based on recent experiences in decisive action rotations at the National Training Center, at Fort Irwin, California, and the Mission Command Training Program. For example, casualty estimates for the division wet gap crossing from the G-1 section and the

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“Understanding and echeloning sustainment forward allows for a division combat team to gain, maintain, and exploit the initiative to gain a position of relative advantage during combat operations. Understanding logistics is imperative to that success.”

*Maj. Gen. Wayne W. Grigsby Jr.,
Commander, 1st Infantry Division*

division surgeon's office ranged from 250 to 1,200. This wide range of estimates drove critical discussions regarding the allocation of medical assets and the positioning of forward surgical teams and the combat support hospital.

Fuel consumption and artillery expenditure estimates showed similar disparities. In the end, the division staff reached a consensus that the higher estimates were more relevant for decisive action operations. Regardless of the final decision, the estimate discussions and resulting creative friction increased the division staff's appreciation for the problem and allowed it to be more responsive in supporting the maneuver plan.

Sustainment preparation. Sustainment preparation of the operational environment provided continuity throughout the concept of support. The physical network analysis, as outlined in Army Doctrine Reference Publication 4-0, Sustainment, focused on host-nation support, airfields, road networks, possible logistics nodes, main and alternate supply routes, and logistics support area requirements.

For example, analysis showed that logistics nodes needed to be closer to the forward line of troops. To meet this need, the staff created options for primary and alternate logistics support areas that supported various courses of action. This resulted in a deliberate decision point where the commander could choose to slow the speed of maneuver operations to ensure continuity of support.

Ultimately, integrating sustainment planning into the operations process prevented unnecessary operational pauses and provided required materiel to the organization at the right place and time.

Task organization. One of the most important lessons from sustainment planning was that clear command and support relationships contribute to the simplicity of sustainment operations. The division staff debated the construct of the exercise's

sustainment support model. Ideas ranged from a modular construct, assuming a distribution-focused logistics system with a single sustainment commander in theater, to the legacy division support command concept. The solution rested in a compromise. The WFX was supported by an expeditionary sustainment command and three sustainment brigades.

The combined joint forces land component command allocated one sustainment brigade in direct support to each division, with the understanding that the direct support sustainment brigade was still responsible for providing support to the corps enablers within the division's area of operations. The 1st ID positioned sustainment forces on the battlefield so that it could weigh the needs of the main effort and, in turn, provide more tailored support. Specifically, the division positioned units with palletized load systems and bulk fuel storage and distribution capabilities forward to mitigate the forecasted sustainment risks.

For example, the 1st ID was augmented with two multiple launch rocket system battalions and one high-mobility artillery rocket system battalion. Although forward support companies were allocated with them, the sheer volume of fire support tasks and required rocket pods vastly exceeded the 1st ID's transportation capability. This shortfall could not be backfilled by the brigade support battalions because they were already transporting vast quantities of munitions and other commodities on their palletized load systems. Having a direct support relationship enabled the division to develop solutions with the sustainment brigade to properly position logistics assets on the battlefield. It also allowed the staff to adapt the plan to the changing environment and met the needs of the supported commander.

Preparation

Properly preparing to support the WFX was crucial to creating a thorough understanding of the situation

among the commander, staff, and participating units. The most effective methods were conducting sustainment rehearsals and building the division's WFX team.

Rehearsals. Rehearsals are critical to sharing the understanding developed during the planning process. Units often forgo the sustainment rehearsal and miss the transition from planning to preparation. The 1st ID staff found that the plan continued to adapt as understanding increased throughout rehearsals. The staff maximized coordination and synchronization with subordinate, adjacent, and higher echelon units through three command post exercises (CPXs) and the WFX. All exercises included division confirmation briefs from the brigades, teleconferences with adjacent units, and combined arms, fires, intelligence, and sustainment rehearsals. They also included one briefing and rehearsal with the corps commander and staff. One of the most valuable inputs from a sustainment standpoint was the unique perspectives of the maneuver units, enablers, and maneuver support elements. Their participation ensured that they understood how their operations were going to be sustained and allowed for the development of contingency plans.

Building the team. The coordination and synchronization of sustainment in conjunction with maneuver support planning involves the unity of command, a common operational picture (COP), and timely decision-making. Unity of command and a shared understanding are extremely difficult to achieve when the supporting unit is not organic to the supported organization. The sustainment brigade assigned to the 1st ID's WFX was an Army Reserve unit. The 1st ID did not have a habitual relationship with the unit and had not operated with it prior to the WFX. Therefore, integrating the unit through shared training and exercises was imperative.

The partnership began nearly six

months before the WFX and was sustained throughout the three subsequent CPXs. The 1st ID's staff and sustainment brigade assisted in training and preparing the Army Reserve unit for the exercise. The 1st ID shared planning products, running estimates, sync matrices, graphics, and orders. It also provided a robust liaison team and assisted the unit's leaders with their military decision-making process to ensure that it was integrated with 1st ID's planning process.

The Army Reserve sustainment brigade was included in all of 1st ID's CPX and WFX battle rhythm events, including briefings, rehearsals, and reporting requirements, in order to build the relationship through repetition and familiarity. It also provided several officers to fill the requisite liaison officer roles within the division's main command post. This paid huge dividends by establishing a range of skills that were tested during the WFX.

Execution

Situational awareness requires the use of a sustainment COP, maintaining asset visibility and commodity tracking, and employing effective distribution services. During the WFX, well-laid plans were understood across the division and the sustainment brigade regarding the optimal locations for logistics support. As the 1st ID moved past the division's wet gap crossing site, the staff realized that the plans were based on the assumption that the adjacent division would match the 1st ID's operational tempo and protect its southern flank. However, delays and significant attrition of the sister division allowed the enemy within indirect-fire range of one of the 1st ID's proposed logistics support areas.

The sustainment COP created superior situational awareness and enabled adaptability within the sustainment plan. The COP was updated continually and shared with the sustainment brigade through the division's daily sustainment synchro-

nization meeting, battle update brief, movement board, and commanders' updates and assessments.

Because the COP allowed for effective situational awareness, the sustainment brigade, in coordination with the 1st ID staff, redirected a forward logistics element to a division objective just east of the wet gap crossing site, far enough north to avoid enemy artillery fire.

The decisive action fight is a high-intensity conflict and an unyielding war of uncertainty with high attrition rates. Supporting decisive action operations requires adaptive sustainment leaders who can think critically and solve problems while supporting multiple missions and adjusting to changing conditions. The initial investment of time, resources, and personnel for planning for the WFX created the understanding needed to provide logistics at the right place and time. Intensive planning allowed the staff to anticipate issues, develop appropriate responses, and minimize response times to achieve precise effects. The 1st ID's staff gained an understanding of the importance of sustainment planning as a basis for developing and communicating a common view of support for decisive action operations.

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