

Convoy Operations in Afghanistan

BY MAJOR TIMOTHY S. MOON

During its deployment to Afghanistan, the 17th CSSB conducted logistics convoys over a large area of the country. Its experience may prove helpful to other battalions tasked with providing logistics convoy support.

In 2010 and 2011, the 17th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion (CSSB) conducted logistics convoys in Afghanistan, delivering cargo and supplies to customers throughout Regional Commands East, North, South, and Capital. The battalion established and refined its convoy procedures to address the challenges logistics convoys face in this austere country.

Convoy Preparation

In addition to Army troop-leading procedures, the convoy element and staff provided the battalion command team with a formal backbrief 48 hours before the execution of each mission, detailing the battalion's plan. The backbrief included an indepth enemy, route, and weather analysis; supporting battlefield enablers; a manifest with all personnel and equipment involved in the convoy; actions on the objective; rest and meal plans; and points of contact for each delivery location.

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The mission was planned and briefed, and the convoy element arrived at the battalion motor pool 4 hours before its scheduled start time. The Soldiers loaded their personal equipment while the leaders conducted pre-combat checks and inspections. The mission commanders verified their loads.

The Convoy Readiness Center

Two hours before departing on a mission, the convoy element moved into the battalion's convoy readiness center. The convoy readiness center created an environ-

ment free of distractions. It provided convoy commanders with an area in which they could issue their combat orders, conduct a manifest rollcall for all personnel and sensitive items, and complete a thorough mission rehearsal, including battle drills. It also allowed convoy commanders to complete their final preparations for their missions.

After concluding all required troop-leading procedures, the battalion chaplain and command team offered a prayer and some departing words of encouragement. The facility was stocked with last-minute comfort items, and Soldiers enjoyed a warm meal before starting the mission.

Convoy Mission Dangers

The 17th CSSB's convoy elements completed more than 400 logistics convoys over some of the most dangerous routes in Afghanistan. The Soldiers constantly faced a changing environment on these missions because as the war in Afghanistan continued, the enemy continued to adjust and change its tactics, techniques, and procedures. The convoys faced constant dangers as they maneuvered across the country from one forward operating base (FOB) to another.

In addition to enemy attacks, improvised explosive device strikes, and complex ambushes, other hazards were also present. For example, as the weather changed from season to season, the terrain became restricted, which caused severe civilian congestion. In highly populated areas, this scenario had the potential to turn violent at a moment's notice.

Protests were common, especially in conjunction with elections or after such unfortunate events as military-civilian accidents. The number of protesters could grow quickly, posing an extreme threat to logistics convoys. As rocks and objects were thrown, vehicle windows were damaged and the exposed gunners sustained personal injuries. Through effective and continuous communication with battlespace owners, the logistics convoys were often able to avoid these events. However, when they were unable to avoid the protests, 17th CSSB Soldiers displayed remarkable restraint and avoided any further escalation of these events.

Convoys on the Road

When the Soldiers departed for a mission, they planned to be gone for 3 to 7 days, but some of our elements were out for up to 25 days because of weather and impassable roads. While out on the road, the Soldiers rested overnight at FOBs across the combined joint operations area. Some FOBs were remote with austere conditions, while other, larger FOBs had post exchanges and morale, welfare, and recreation facilities and warm buildings for sleeping.

As our logistics convoys maneuvered across the combined joint operations area, they traveled through numerous battlespaces. The 17th CSSB's battle desk bridged the gaps between its logistics convoys and various battlespace owners by remaining in constant contact with other tactical operations centers. The battle desk managed the flow of information between the logistics convoys and the battlespace owners and coordinated for all required battlefield enablers. Route clearance packages, scout weapons teams, close air support, quick reaction forces, explosive ordnance disposal detachments, and medical evacuation assets were dispatched in support of our logistics convoys, helping mitigate the effects of enemy activity on the logistics convoys.

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TIME.

Accomplishments

The 17th CSSB also conducted joint and coalition logistics convoys. During the battalion's deployment, its logistics convoys safely delivered all classes of supply to more than 85,000 servicemembers on more than 35 FOBs across the combined joint operations area.

The logistics convoys successfully delivered more than 2.4 million gallons of petroleum, oils, and lubricants and more than 5,000 pallets of ammunition. They also delivered more than 639 vehicles and other items to stand up several new bases in support of the Presidential decision to increase the overall American troop strength in Afghanistan.

Through coordinated efforts, the 17th CSSB's logistics convoys delivered all materiel before the 2010 Afghani-

stan presidential elections. Another important accomplishment occurred before Christmas 2010, when several dedicated mail delivery routes were established. The battalion's logistics convoys delivered more than 150 containers of mail to ensure servicemembers across the combined joint operations area received their Christmas packages on time. This initiative ultimately saved the Government more than \$1 million in contracts.

Major Undertakings

As the largest CSSB in Afghanistan with more than 1,000 Soldiers, the 17th CSSB faced constant change. Not only were there changes in the weather, enemy tactics, and maneuverability throughout the country, the logistics convoys also faced constant change across the formations with the relief in place/transfer of authority of battlespace owners, sustainment brigades, joint sustainment commands, and 10 separate multicomposition units.

Another major undertaking occurred as the battalion assumed operational control of the Kabul base cluster, a mission previously supported by an entire brigade support battalion. [The 17th CSSB sent a forward logistics element of about 190 Soldiers to Kabul, which replaced a battalion of about 482 Soldiers.] This mission supported safe passenger and equipment movements in and around the base cluster. Upon arriving in Afghanistan, the 17th CSSB quickly established the first-ever convoy academy with its Afghan National Army (ANA) partners. This academy enabled the ANA to learn how to prepare for and conduct convoys within their sectors of Afghanistan. It also allowed the ANA an opportunity to create and develop a set of standards and procedures for its own use.

The mission that the 17th CSSB performed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom would not have been as successful as it was if not for its high standards and concern for all Soldiers and the mission. Its dedication to duty and high professionalism in executing tasks made this CSSB stand out and ensured overall mission success and will undoubtedly have long lasting effects. The 17th CSSB executed all tasks with 100-percent commitment and devotion to excellence. The Soldiers of the 17th CSSB remain "Always Ready!"

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