Sustainment Rehearsals and Synergizing Efforts:

Must-Haves for the 21st Century

By Dr. O. Shawn Cupp and Maj. Edward K. Woo
Sustainment units that make the most of their division sustainment rehearsals will encourage transparency, sharing of information, and synergistic efforts.

Rehearsals are important to every military operation. They confirm tasks, eliminate redundancy, and support collaboration. Nations depend on their militaries to perform at a high level of aptitude. In fact, a nation's survival often depends on this level of competency.

Sustainment planners are no strangers to analyzing armed conflicts and sustaining the force in the face of regional instability. Even the most seasoned sustainer likely will profess that there is no simple formula to solve the intricacies of dynamic unified land operations.

Within the current context of mission command, these types of deliberations often induce an unwieldy and complex planning effort interlaced with ambiguous environments in a variety of logistics ecosystems.

How do we solve this sustainment problem while supporting an infantry division facing a threat in a non-permissive environment? How do we train well with limited means? What is the best type of training that involves leaders and subordinates and integrates sustainment into combat operations? If we look to doctrine, we can answer these questions. The answers to all of them start with rehearsals.

Doctrine

Army doctrine outlines the procedures and types of rehearsals. Chapter 8 of Army Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (ATTP) 5–0.1,
Command and Staff Officer Guide, provides details for rehearsals. According to the manual, there are four types of rehearsals:

- Backbrief.
- Combined arms rehearsal.
- Support rehearsal.
- Battle drill or standard operating procedure rehearsal.

Leaders employ these rehearsal types through six basic techniques: network, map, sketch map, terrain model, reduced force, and full dress rehearsal. All of these techniques require different kinds and amounts of resources. Their applicability covers a range of operations and units. Within each of these techniques, planners consider four factors: time, echelons involved, operations security risk, and terrain.

Chapter 8 of ATTP 5–0.1 fully explains the benefits and challenges of the four factors associated with these six techniques. The techniques in figure 1 are depicted in relation to the resources required and the understanding gained.

Which rehearsal to implement usually depends on how much time is available and the level of understanding required. In terms of understanding gained as a function of resources required, the terrain model is in the middle. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand why leaders employ terrain model rehearsals (rehearsal of concept drills) most often. It is the so-called “sweet spot” that provides the most knowledge with limited resources.

Army doctrine recommends rehearsal responsibilities and details the roles of commanders and staff officers. However, two even more significant areas must be considered. One area is the projected outcomes of conducting a rehearsal—what the unit gets out of conducting the rehearsal.

The other area to consider is the “rules of thumb” to determine how leaders should conduct the rehearsal. The outcomes and the rules of thumb are important because rehearsals use significant training resources, such as dollars, time, and space.

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Rules of Thumb

There are four rules of thumb that will help leaders to determine if a rehearsal is necessary and to plan for it accordingly.

Rehearse what has not yet happened. Needing to prepare for future operations is usually the primary reason to conduct any type of rehearsal. A rehearsal under these conditions not only assists in executing the operation but also in conducting future rehearsals. Rehearsals provide the opportunity for a commander to guide and direct the execution to a specific level of detail.

Sustainment operations are inherently expensive. In fact, sustainment is accounted for through the expenditure of resources. Numbers of Soldiers, weapon systems, track miles, blade hours, and gallons of fuel are the substance of sustainment operations. Conducting rehearsals for sustainment operations is important for commanders to adequately and judiciously use the resources provided by the taxpaying public.

Rehearse what is forgotten. In recent years, the Army conducted operations primarily from established support bases and into mature forward operating bases (FOBs). The tasks, conditions, and execution of nonpermissive or even permissive reception, staging, onward move-
ment, and integration are unknown to most Soldiers.

Many senior leaders have performed these tasks, but many junior leaders and Soldiers have not. Rehearsing these forgotten tasks and operations enhances any unit’s overall readiness.

Rehearse to empower subordinates. Both friends and foes look at the U.S. Army as outstanding. One of the primary reasons is that it provides guidance and accepts that junior-level leaders make life and death decisions.

Junior-level leaders execute rehearsals to appreciate how sustainment forces execute mission command. Interweaving the many key stakeholders and maximizing participation is important to an effective rehearsal.

Meanwhile, it empowers and challenges junior leaders to observe the bigger sustainment picture. This tenet gives junior leaders the ability to be calm, clear, accurate, succinct, proficient, resourceful, and efficient in nesting their tasks and purposes in the commanding general’s intent.

Rehearse the easy and the hard. To engage the audience in the full spectrum of the operational environment, rehearsing the easy and simple is critical. Simply identifying the main supply routes, key terrain, expected weather, and location of cities is imperative to examining and conducting sophisticated and complicated problems. Rehearsing the simple can be resupply operations, for example.

Planners must also rehearse the hard and complex to test the fidelity of the sustainment plan and the proficiency of its planners. Rehearsing the complex requires thinking about the second and third order effects of a trigger, such as the loss of a combat sustainment support battalion (CSSB), a fragmentary order to a defense, and internally displaced persons or detainee overflow.

How a sustainment unit responds to these situations will affect the way customers (maneuver and enabler Soldiers) judge their supporting unit.

Rehearsals in Practice

Chapter 8 of ATTP 5–0.1 provides some specific suggestions for develop synergy, and reach the widest prospective audience.

Combined Arms Rehearsal

During the combined arms rehearsal, as part of the script, each maneuver brigade commander and enablers brief the audience. The combined arms rehearsal does not exclude sustainment considerations. Often the division G–4 and sustainment brigade commander are the main sustainment briefers in the rehearsal.

The experienced division G–4 briefs an overall concept of the sustainment support plan according to each phase of the operation. Depending on the climate of the rehearsal, the division G–4 briefs succinctly and uses a few key points.

While the G–4 briefs, the G–4 subordinate staff records the details of the briefing. The G–4 plans officer usually organizes these records and shares them in subsequent sustainment synchronization meetings.

The other key sustainment briefer is the sustainment brigade commander, who discusses the sustainment brigade’s task and purpose, which are nested within the maneuver brigade commander’s tactical task and purpose.

This is an opportunity for the sustainment brigade commander to brief the commanding general pri-
arily on the security of the CSSBs and contingency plans in the event of an asymmetric threat compromising a sustainment unit. The seasoned sustainment brigade commander can articulate the plan to replace any compromised capabilities.

Under the principles of unity of command, a sustainment brigade can have a direct support relationship with the division. The division G–3 can update and analyze the decision support template for the division operation and consider any security assets to help secure CSSBs, refuels on-the-move, forward arming and refueling points, and main supply routes.

**Division Sustainment Rehearsal**

Ideally, the division sustainment rehearsal should follow the combined arms rehearsal because most of the key leaders are already there. This is the venue in which all the key sustainment planners execute the sustainment rehearsal until completion using the same combined arms rehearsal terrain model (such as a hangar, gym floor, or bay).

After reviewing any updated commanding general’s direction from the combined arms rehearsal, the G–4 and sustainment brigade commander can better visualize and synchronize the sustainment effort within the commander’s intent. The sustainment rehearsal’s key products include the maneuver synchronization matrix, sustainment synchronization matrix, roll call, sustainment annexes, and functional products.

During execution, the sustainment planners can validate the sustainment concept based on the sustainment principles of anticipation, integration, continuity, responsiveness, economy, survivability, simplicity, and improvisation.

Execution helps all key stakeholders visualize the conditions for actions and triggers for change. Proactive planning and herding all key sustainment planners are important to ensuring a sound sustainment plan for a division-level offensive operation.

Two critical products that should result from the sustainment rehearsal are a validated sustainment annex for division operations and a final sustainment synchronization matrix. This allows all sustainment planners to speak the same language during subsequent sustainment synchronization meetings (usually through voice over Internet protocol or Defense Connect Online).

After the rehearsal is complete, the recorder should restate any changes, adjusted move times, route changes, coordination, or clarifications directed by the commander and provide an estimate for when a written fragmentary order to codify the changes will be complete.

Effective sustainers understand the importance of anticipating changes and adjustments based on the rehearsal’s outcomes.

The benefits of a division sustainment rehearsal are multifold. First, all sustainers visualize and adjudicate the sustainment plan in the same way that their division maneuver and enabling brethren have a detailed understanding of a sustainable offensive operation.

Second, division sustainers can identify key events that affect operational sustainment. Third, based on the rehearsal’s outcomes, the G–4 can revert to the first decision point in the decision support template with the G–3 and discuss any potential sustainment plan changes resulting from maneuver decisions.

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**Figure 3. Terrain model materials.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Representation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rope</td>
<td>Outline the operational area</td>
<td>Sides of the terrain model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineer tape (white), 5 x 8 cards (white)</td>
<td>Outline control measure symbols</td>
<td>Phase lines, boundaries, engagement areas, assembly areas, main supply route, objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 x 8 cards (blue), wire stands, tape</td>
<td>Represent friendly forces</td>
<td>Friendly unit symbols; division main command post, brigades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 x 8 cards (red), wire stands, tape</td>
<td>Represent opposing forces</td>
<td>Enemy unit symbols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 x 8 cards (various)</td>
<td>Represent individuals and organizations</td>
<td>Displaced persons, non-governmental organizations, criminal activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surface (either floor or dirt/sand composition)</td>
<td>Provide context</td>
<td>Hills, buildings, terrain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camouflage net/felt/tissue paper/tape (green/blue/black)</td>
<td>Represent terrain</td>
<td>Mountains, rivers, ridgelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pole, whip antenna, retractable pointer</td>
<td>Used by briefer to point in motion</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Planners discuss branches and sequels, specifically if they affect throughput operations for fuel and ammunition.

Fourth, the sustainment plan shapes intelligence gathering for the G–2, particularly reverse intelligence preparation of the battlefield and intelligence estimates.

Fifth, the sustainment plan ensures that leaders integrate all the warfighting functions with the responsiveness required to meet the commanding general’s intent.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the division sustainment rehearsal sets the tone and conditions for brigade-sized units to execute their own sustainment rehearsals. Rehearsals encourage transparency and sharing of information, which are fundamentals of a proficient organization. Transparency is the key to rehearsals because it generates efficiency, flattens complex organizations, and encourages effective collaboration among all warfighting functions.

We cannot afford to lose time or focus because of stovepiped tendencies that inhibit planners from generating sophisticated solutions. The rehearsal process is a way to encourage synergistic efforts and is every sustainment leader’s intrinsic responsibility.

During a rehearsal at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, a coalition movement and maneuver leader explains actions on the objective upon crossing a phase line while sustainment planners anticipate resupply operations. (Photo by Maj. Cheryl Sparks)

Dr. O. Shawn Cupp is an associate professor in the Department of Logistics and Resource Operations at the Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and he is a retired lieutenant colonel. He has a doctorate degree in adult education from Kansas State University and is a graduate of the Command and General Staff Officer Course.

Maj. Edward K. Woo is a member of the Eighth Army staff in the Republic of Korea. He has a master’s degree in military art and science from the Army Command and General Staff College and a bachelor’s degree from New York University. He is a graduate of the Command and General Staff Officer Course.