



Paratroopers of the 54th Engineer Battalion, 173rd Airborne Brigade, prepare a simulated casualty for evacuation with Canadian and Slovenian soldiers while conducting sustainment operations during exercise Allied Spirit IV at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany, on Jan. 20, 2016.

Enabling Multinational Operations at the Tactical Level

This article outlines nine lessons learned by a multinational forward support company during Allied Spirit IV.

■ By Capt. Shane Covert

Allied Spirit IV involved military forces from eight countries fighting as one multinational task force (MTF) in a decisive action training environment at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany. During the exercise, the forward support company (FSC) from the 54th Brigade Engineer Battalion had attach-

ments from four other countries and supported a mechanized infantry battalion from the United Kingdom. This article outlines nine lessons learned by that MTF FSC during Allied Spirit IV.

1: Integrate Immediately

The first and most basic lesson when operating as an MTF FSC

is to physically integrate during reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (RSOI). Unfortunately, integrating attachments from multiple countries during RSOI is not easy. Coordination must take place well in advance, and units must know who they will be fighting alongside.

Coordinating for living arrange-

ments needs to be a priority. Ensuring all attachments within the MTF FSC live together facilitates team cohesion. This arrangement will also allow language barriers, misinterpretation of acronyms, and misconstrued military definitions to be resolved early.

Daily operations, such as wake up, living space cleanup, and leadership huddles will posture the MTF FSC to accomplish day-to-day operations as a team. Eventually the MTF FSC will refine these simple tasks so that it can accomplish difficult ones. Do not wait until a combat training center rotation or, even worse, combat to build this team cohesion.

2: Conduct Troop Issue With All Attachments

Troop issue is a complex task that needs to be under the mission command of an MTF FSC. Drawing classes I (subsistence) through V (ammunition), mission rehearsal exercise equipment, and multiple integrated laser engagement system gear are all part of troop issue during RSOI.

Working through how an MTF FSC will obtain all of these resources is simplified when everyone lives in the same area because details can be communicated throughout the day with ease. Accomplishing these tasks as an MTF FSC allows resources to be shared between nations. Throughout this process, the MTF FSC members begin to learn each country’s vehicle capabilities. They also learn how to accomplish basic logistics, such as operator licensing, fuel compatibility, and equipment staging.

Do not let administrative constraints such as acquisition and cross-servicing agreements prevent troop issue from being synchronized and led by an MTF FSC. Given the complexity, each country will have the tendency to conduct its own troop issue. Do not let this happen.

3: Bring Enough Radios

As an MTF FSC, FM radio communication needs to be practiced at every opportunity, specifically during the situational training exercise (STX). Accents and language barriers

make FM communication challenging. Another challenge is that the single channel ground and airborne radio system (SINCGARS) is not compatible with NATO’s other FM platforms. Two solutions to this compatibility shortfall are to establish a tactical voice bridge (TVB) or to distribute additional SINCGARS to allied forces.

The TVB is established by connecting each nation’s radios to a tactical voice gateway utilizing W2 cables. Establishing a TVB allows each nation to use its own radios so that they do not have to be trained on an unfamiliar system. The problem with the TVB is that it creates a substantial amount of static. Deciphering accents and overcoming language barriers with heavy static makes communicating with a TVB very challenging.

The preferred method is to distribute additional SINCGARS to partner nations’ attachments. The additional time spent training on the SINCGARS pays dividends. For this reason, plan to bring additional SINCGARS to train with prior to



A Soldier from the 54th Engineer Battalion, 173rd Airborne Brigade, briefs a group of Canadian and U.S. Soldiers during Allied Spirit IV at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany, on Jan. 21, 2016.

deployment. Ensure that all components, such as the appropriate cables, headsets, and simple key loaders, are brought as well.

4: Use Support Requirements for STX Training

During the STX, the MTF FSC will be engaged in two separate efforts: fulfilling real support requirements and accomplishing training objectives. Supporting the battalion by providing food, distribution, vehicle recovery, maintenance, and field feeding will remain the priority and distract from the FSC's training objectives. Additionally, RSOI and troop issue requirements prior to the STX do not allow much time for training preparation.

Waiting until the STX to overcome communication challenges and become familiar with partner nations' capabilities dooms an MTF FSC to failure. Developing and practicing standard operating procedures for FM communication, analog tracking, gun truck management, field trains command post (FTCP) operations, and logistics release point (LRP) operations are all training objectives that need to be exercised before combat. Three of these areas are easy to incorporate during the STX: FM communications, analog tracking, and gun truck management.

During the STX, treat each support requirement as if it is happening during combat. For example, if a supported unit has a broken-down vehicle, do not immediately dispatch a recovery team without conducting radio checks, submitting a trip ticket, and attaching convoy security.

Coordinate the deliberate training events such as logistics convoys, LRP operations, and FTCP operations toward the end of STX. Ensure that everyone in the MTF FSC has a task and purpose during these events. Coordinating these events toward the end of STX ensures that everyone in the MTF FSC can participate and that they

are not committed to any troop issue requirements that may have carried over into the STX. This allows more time to refine FM communication, analog tracking, and gun truck management before engaging in training with opposing forces.

5: Have the Issue Yard Configure MCLs

Mission configured loads (MCLs) reduce time at LRPs and expedite combat missions such as obstacle emplacement. Unfortunately, developing MCLs is very challenging and needs to be coordinated for in advance.

Knowing exactly what the using unit wants in the MCL is one of the most difficult tasks and requires constant communication and engagement with the using unit to find out what to put in MCLs. Once this is known, contact the corresponding troop issue yard to see if it can assist in configuring certain items. This will reduce the amount of unneeded supplies received and the time spent configuring an unmanageable number of items.

For example, the using unit wants 58 pickets, but the troop issue yard configures and distributes only pallets with 400 pickets. The unit now has 342 unneeded pickets and must separate the 58 pickets from the 400 pickets. Having the troop issue yard configure MCLs is possible with enough lead time and mitigates the problems that arise when brigade support battalions (BSBs) and FSCs configure multiple MCLs.

6: Use MCL Flat Rack Exchanges

When MCLs are distributed from one unit to another, they are typically distributed by flat rack on the back of a load handling system (LHS). LHSs use flat racks in order to strap down and transport various supplies. Flat racks are 20 feet long and 8 feet wide and are raised and lowered by an LHS internal crane.

An efficient technique to transfer supplies from one unit to the next is to conduct a flat rack exchange in

which the distributing unit swaps a flat rack full of supplies for an empty flat rack from the requesting unit. This eliminates the need to unload supplies from one flat rack and load them onto another.

For example, if flat rack exchanges were not used and the BSB distributed 40 pallets of concertina wire to the FSC, then the FSC would need to unload the 40 pallets from the BSBs flat racks and load them onto the FSC's flat racks.

If a forklift were not available, then Soldiers would be forced to move these pallets by hand. Each pallet weighs approximately 500 pounds. But if a flat rack exchange were used, then the BSB and FSC would simply exchange approximately five flat racks.

Units are hesitant to conduct flat rack exchanges because flat racks are serial numbered items, and they don't want their flat racks confused with those from another unit. An effective technique to assist with property accountability is to paint the tongues of the flat racks with a vibrant color specific to the unit. That way each unit can easily identify its flat racks.

7: Use a Map and Trackers in the MTF FSC CP

The MTF FSC command post (CP) is the centralized information hub where orders are disseminated during combat. This CP needs to have a constant flow of communication and needs designated personnel to update analog tracking systems and monitor radio communications.

Incorporating representatives from each nation inside the CP is critical. Maximize the opportunity during STX to exercise CP operations. Real-time information about the enemy, the MTF, and other friendly units needs to be clearly displayed in the CP. An effective way to do this is to develop two large boards: one depicting information on maps and the other depicting information with graphics and trackers.

The map board needs to include

significant activities from the enemy, friendly units, designated checkpoints, and the FTCP security plan. This information needs to be updated in real time and shown to personnel departing for support missions. Once the personnel return from their mission, they need to be debriefed inside the CP and the map board needs to be updated with any additional significant activities that took place during their mission.

The other board needs to be populated with details such as convoy information, resource allocation, and battle damage assessment and repair statuses. One technique for capturing convoy details is to have places on the board for blank, current, and completed trip tickets. Each trip ticket needs to include all details associated with who and what is in the convoy. Items such as battle rosters, sensitive item information, vehicle administrative numbers, and commodities can be listed on the trip tickets.

Use magnets on the back of key vehicle graphics such as gun trucks to create a visual representation of resource allocation. Battle damage assessment and repair statuses need to be provided by the maintenance control section (MCS) and updated on the board every time the reallocation packet moves to the next echelon.

8: Centralize Gun Trucks

During Allied Spirit IV, the MTF FSC was responsible for supply convoys, casualty evacuation, vehicle recovery operations, enemy prisoner of war transportation, and reconstitution transportation. All of these missions required convoy security. Reaction time for these missions depended on how fast vehicle operators could stage vehicles, submit trip tickets, and receive mission briefs.

During Allied Spirit IV, nine times out of 10, slow reaction times were caused by inefficiencies in gun truck allocation. Appointing a noncommissioned officer-in-charge (NCOIC) responsible for managing all convoy security gun trucks will mit-

igate inefficiencies and increase gun truck availability. The NCOIC needs to have constant radio communication with the CP in order to receive missions. This communication also enables the CP to update the mission command boards.

An effective way to centralize gun trucks is to place all of them at the FTCP and to have designated gun truck teams act as a quick reaction force. Use one team for daytime operations and another at night.

Another task for the gun truck NCOIC is to ensure that enough MK93 gun mounts are brought from home station in order to mount the M2 .50-caliber machine guns, M240B machine guns, or M249 squad automatic weapons onto the gun trucks. Without the MK93 gun mount, these weapons systems cannot be used on the gun trucks.

9: Split the MTF FSC

The main body of the MTF FSC needs to establish an FTCP instead of being inside the brigade support area (BSA). By doing this, the MTF FSC is able to react faster to the using unit at the forward line of troops.

This also allows the FTCP to remain small and mobile. However, having the MTF FSC establish an FTCP creates a disadvantage because there are not as many personnel available to provide perimeter security. A sergeant of the guard should be designated to manage the security posture of the FTCP and to communicate FTCP head counts to the CP. This security posture should be visually depicted on the map board in the CP.

Large items of equipment associated with pass-back maintenance such as the forward repair system, the standard automotive tool set, and the MCS expansible van need to stay at the BSA. These items of equipment should be accompanied by a small maintenance team to provide pass-back maintenance, conduct MCS operations, and act as a liaison between the BSB and the FSC. Another FSC liaison team needs to be at the battal-

ion TOC to maximize shared understanding—especially if the battalion is from a different nation.

Initial preparations such as living arrangements and troop issue are the building blocks for a successful MTF FSC. Solving problems during this less threatening time builds the confidence needed to accomplish complex tasks such as MCL development, flat rack exchanges, CP operations, convoy security, and FTCP operations.

Initial integration rarely occurs in an MTF FSC because of its complexity and a lack of understanding about how beneficial it is. Do not overlook this initial integration as so many others have. Arriving prepared with FM communication equipment, marked flat racks, and analog tracking systems will set the MTF FSC up for success.

Be sure to use the delivery of support requirements during the STX as opportunities for combat training. Defining roles and responsibilities for key positions such as sergeant of the guard, radio operators, convoy security NCOIC, and gun truck teams will further increase the MTF FSC's proficiency. Splitting the FSC between the FTCP, the BSA, and the battalion TOC will maximize shared understanding. Applying these lessons learned to any FSC operating as part of an MTF will ultimately make multinational operations a success.

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