

# DIVISION SUSTAINMENT at National Training Center Rotation 24-03

■ *By Maj. David B. Ellington*

The 1st Armored Division (1AD) conducted a division-level National Training Center (NTC) rotation to stress artillery, aviation, and sustainment. In this exercise, 1AD set conditions in the division deep area and built combat power before the 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team (ABCT), 1AD, conducted a forward passage of lines. The 1AD Division Sustainment Brigade (DSB) supported the division during the rotation. Sustaining 1AD and its enablers posed a challenge, and the DSB provided sustainment with 25% of the brigade's sustainment capability. I designed the concept of support that outlined how the 142nd Division Sustainment Support Battalion (DSSB) would function and execute sustainment. This article explains how the 1AD DSB

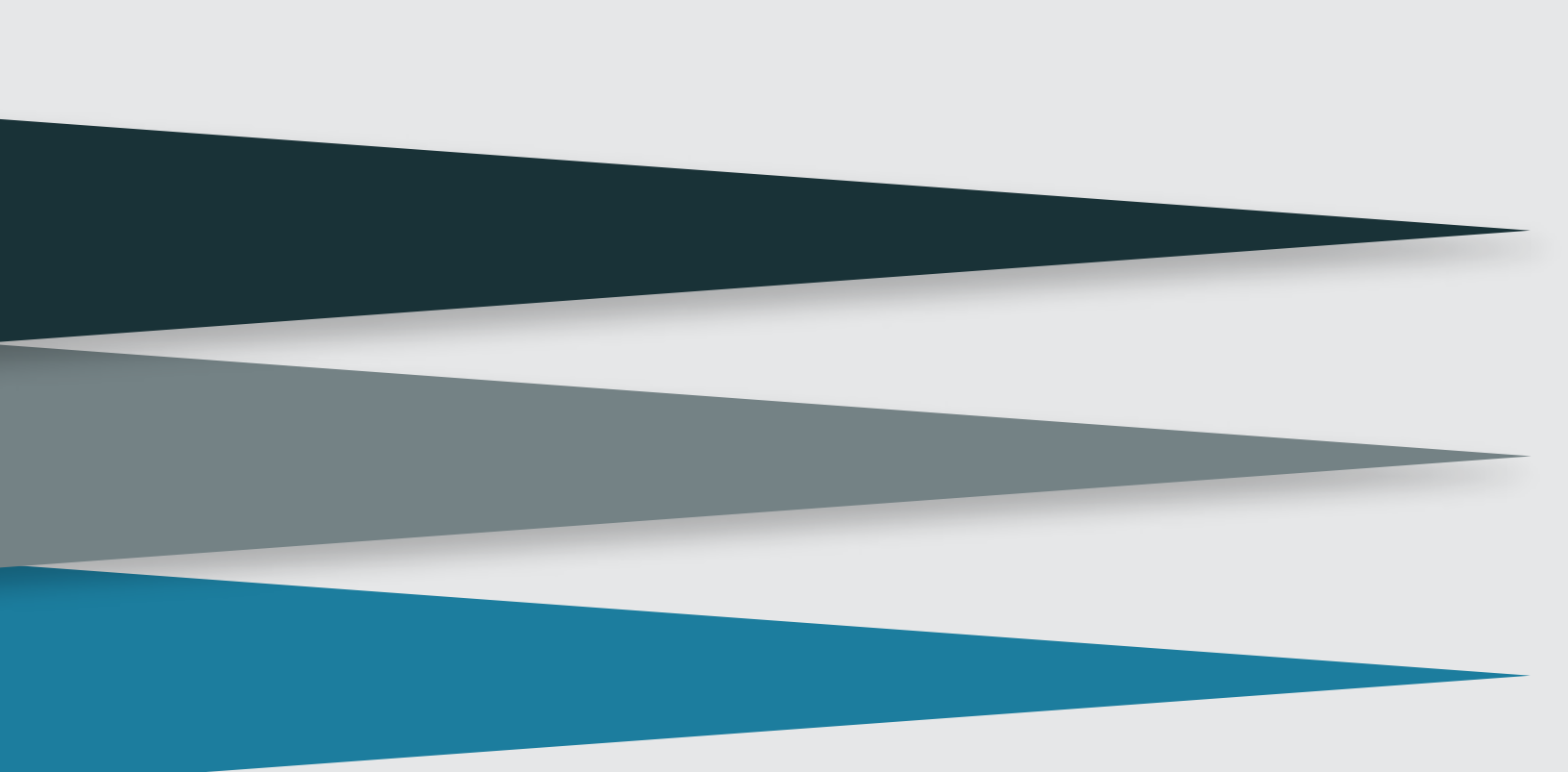
sustained America's Tank Division during NTC Rotation 24-03 in real time and in the simulated exercise environment, discusses the friction we encountered, and shares the lessons our team learned.

U.S. Army Forces Command 350-50-1, Training at the National Training Center, sets the requirements for an ABCT rotation, but no standard exists for division rotations. An ABCT must be capable of moving 350 pallets of supplies, 25,000 gallons of water, 100,000 gallons of fuel, and 24 heavy-tracked vehicles in one turn.

The initial planning estimates determined the exercise would require a minimum of 12 palletized load system crews to support the 2,885 Soldiers and 1,072 pieces of rolling

stock that 1AD units and enablers would use. These crews would move bulk water, bulk fuel, and palletized supplies to multiple nodes, and support the movement of the division command post (CP) throughout the exercise. A maintenance platoon would provide vehicle recovery and pass-back maintenance. The support requirements for field feeding, theater gateway, and signal support were based on historical requirements for NTC rotations.

The DSB aligned capabilities to provide sustainment at doctrinal distances during the NTC rotation. The DSB headquarters would command and control sustainment executed by elements from the division sustainment troops battalion (DSTB) and DSSB. The DSTB would provide field feeding, theater



gateway, and signal support, while the DSSB would conduct the distribution of supplies as the execution arm of sustainment operations. The DSB would split three field feeding teams among the division to support 1AD units and enablers. The human resources company would provide two teams capable of receiving personnel at two nodes. The signal company would establish communications at the DSB CP and DSSB CP. The DSSB would receive classes of supply and execute logistics package (LOGPAC) missions to support 1AD units.

On its surface, this is not a complex problem, but the 142nd DSSB had only a fraction of its capability: the composite truck company was deployed; the maintenance company was deploying; and the heavy

equipment transporter company (identified to support NTC Rotation 24-04), the 3rd ABCT's gunnery, and the 5th Army Reserve Mobile Force Generation Installation were all unavailable. Therefore, the only available assets the 142nd DSSB had for the rotation were their headquarters and headquarters company, 40% of Alpha Company, 23 motor transport operators, and 19 mechanics from Fort Cavazos, Texas. To overcome this lack of capability, the DSB resupplied units before moving into the box, maximized internal sustainment capabilities, and used logistics release points (LRPs). By all accounts, we had a solid plan going into the exercise, but never stopped planning. As President Dwight D. Eisenhower once said, "Plans are worthless, but planning is everything."

When the rotation started, the DSSB could move 144 pallets of supplies, 10,000 gallons of water, and 30,000 gallons of fuel. We established a forward logistics element (FLE) in the northwest corner of the training area to stage supplies forward and overcome the capability shortfall. We also coordinated with the 916th Sustainment Brigade to stage and resupply 5,000 water and fuel tanks at key locations, increasing Class I (B) and Class III (B) capacity. The FLE, equipped with a 5,000-gallon water tank, a 5,000-gallon fuel tank, a Role II medical team, a maintenance team, and a field feeding team, enabled the DSSB to drop supplies for units, reducing the time spent at an LRP.

On Day 0, the first LOGPAC set out to meet at LRP1, located in the central corridor, and units were

tracking the time and place for their initial resupply. The enemy cast their vote without delay, preventing the DSSB from moving to LRP1 and forcing them to LRP2, located in the western corridor. The DSSB pushed this link-up change over the joint battle command platform, but it did not reach all the supported units, causing some to miss their resupply. This was our first friction point, and it took 48 hours to deliver the first resupply to every 1AD unit. On Day 2, the DSSB pushed supplies to LRP1 again, and all but one unit received their resupply. The unsupported unit misunderstood their pickup instructions and took only a portion of their resupply. This caused them to nearly run out of rations, a situation we resolved by Day 4.

We traced the failure of the LOGPACs and units to fully resupply to a communication breakdown. Sustainment during a typical rotation moves through a brigade support battalion (BSB) to a forward support company (FSC) and to the supported unit. For this exercise, the DSSB delivered to supported units at LRPs with no BSB or FSC in between. Before Day 0, I assembled all the supported brigade support operations (SPOs) officers and S-4s to conduct a sustainment rehearsal to review the plan for the first 96 hours. The brigade-level leaders clearly understood the plan, but the convoy commanders and those receiving the LOGPACs did not. Conducting a more thorough rehearsal with convoy commanders could have prevented these issues.

Another inhibiting factor was a lack of communication. Some

units did not have upper tier tactical internet. As a result, once deployed into the division close area, they could not communicate with the rear command post (RCP). This stopped them from sending logistics status reports and from attending daily logistics synchronization meetings. Units had liaison officers in the RCP, but some either did not understand their task and purpose or could not communicate with their unit. To solve this, we pushed the supplies we estimated each unit would need based on running estimates and made sure the DSSB knew each unit's allocation. We continued to refine this process and hit our stride in the second half of the exercise. No unit ran out of food, fuel, or water at any point, but they ended up backhauling a significant amount of supplies on each LOGPAC because we only had HIPPO water tanks and M969 fuel tanks to move Class I (B) and Class III (B).

The difference between the virtual exercise and the live operation was another source of friction. The DSB had a fully manned DSSB and a combat sustainment support battalion in the simulation, capable of distributing 120,000 gallons of bulk water, 550,000 gallons of bulk fuel, and 2,000 pallets of supplies. We conducted operations with the same assets in War Fighter 23-04, Command Post Exercise 1 (CPX1), and CPX2 that we had in the simulation in NTC Rotation 24-03. These assets allowed us to carry out any required support mission, but they also required personnel from the SPO to track and manage them. This meant personnel in the SPO were tracking and managing the live missions and

requirements, and that other personnel were managing the virtual missions. To avoid confusion between live and virtual missions, capabilities among the SPO sections were split. This required each section to work harder and communicate more.

In NTC Rotation 24-03, 1AD conducted a division-level rotation that emphasized artillery, aviation, and sustainment. The DSB sustained 1AD and its enablers throughout the exercise with a fraction of the DSSB and support from the 916th Sustainment Brigade. The SPO team successfully tracked and coordinated sustainment in both the virtual and live environments, overcoming numerous friction points. This was only possible after splitting SPO into two teams, one for the live environment and one for the virtual. We refined our daily syncs, mission trackers, reports, and other products that will be codified in standard operating procedures to drive success in future exercises. The key to our success was that we strove to improve each day and continued to refine our products and systems.

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