



A fleet of armored vehicles and shrink-wrapped helicopters awaits redeployment to the United States 17 June 1991 after service during Desert Storm. The highly successful logistical efforts during the war were due in part to the appointment of Lt. Gen. William "Gus" Pagonis as the single lead for sustainment operations. (Photo by Lt. Gary W. Butterworth, U.S. Navy)

The Pagonis Effect

A Doctrinal Future for the Support Area Command Post

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Since the Battle of Thermopylae, when Xerxes attacked into the Spartan rear area and King Leonidas countered with three hundred of his finest warriors to forestall the Persian advance toward

Athens, armies and their generals have seen the enemy's rear area as an enticing and, all too often, soft target. On the modern battlefield, the rear area is subject to the ravages of terrorism and disruptive effects of

strategically positioned insurgents. The objective has not changed in twenty-five hundred years: if you can destroy the supplies and means of sustaining an opponent's army then there is a clear path to victory. How a division commander thinks about the defense of his support area should be in direct correlation to the pitched fighting in the close and deep areas. Yet, no commander is interested in looking over his shoulder and diverting thought, energy, or resources to defending the sustainment operation once a battle is joined.

Given the current speed of warfare, the ubiquitous presence of both friendly and enemy unmanned aircraft systems (UASs), and the blending of terrorist and insurgent threats behind friendly lines, it is no longer enough to simply protect a division's logistical assets. Friendly forces must actively work to reduce the high tempo threat of outsized challenges to sustainment from developing. We argue that committing a fully functional headquarters focused on both sustaining and protecting ground lines of support and communication, while actively and aggressively targeting enemy forces, is a new imperative in warfare. The physical and doctrinal integration of protection, sustainment, and warfighting functions is the best method of controlling the support area. In this case, a deputy serves as the controlling agent to unburden the division commander. These are not new obligations but rather a modern variation on an ancient theme that armies neglect security of the support areas at their peril.

The history of the support area command post (SACP) as a concept dates back as far as the Roman legions, when there was an organizing function and set of principles that governed support area operations. The Roman army created specialized agencies to issue and transport weapons, equipment, and rations to front-line troops. They utilized wagons to transport supplies to and from the front lines with well-armed escorts. The army focused on constructing roads and bridges wherever it ventured to ease the burden of resupply. Military quartermasters and engineers trace their roots to this period.¹

Napoleon recognized the fundamental importance of safeguarding and expediting his logistical structure in maintaining a large army. Building on the Roman army's example, Napoleon's chief of supply, Claude-Louis Petiet, developed a formal system for supply requisition and appointed military commissaries to oversee resupply efforts. Supply functions such as bread baking, meat

processing, and foraging all had their own designated agencies and chiefs.² In the Austerlitz campaign of 1805, these innovations, combined with Napoleon's decision to divide his army into divisions with organic support units, proved significant. Buoyed by this advantage, the French army covered large swaths of ground, consistently outmaneuvered their enemies, withstood heavy casualties, and repeatedly achieved victory.³ Planning for and protecting extended lines of communication enabled Napoleon's success. His decision to empower Petiet was decisive in orchestrating these victories.

In World War II, the German army established rear area security on its eastern front. This was a measure taken to prevent the Russian army from dealing a devastating blow to their overextended supply lines. The Germans designated a rear area behind each front-line unit and put a single commander in charge of all security concerns. The security battalions were comprised of older World War I veterans, military units from the Baltic States,

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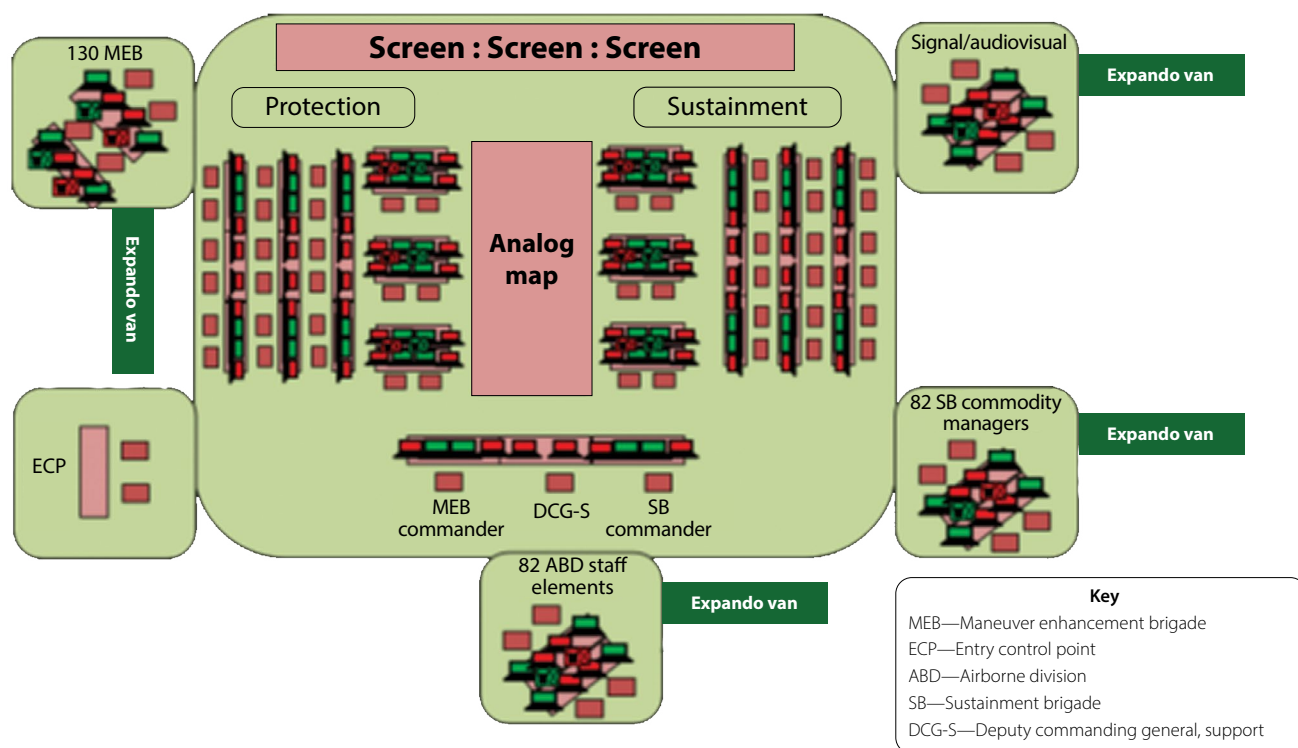
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(Graphic by authors)

Figure 1. Layout of the 82nd Airborne Division Support Area Command Post

and front-line soldiers who had temporarily returned to the rear for respite.⁴

Early failures to protect supply lines led to the introduction of a more refined security system. The system focused on clearly defining the supply transportation network and included requirements such as nonstop journeys between supply centers, rapid dispersal of supplies, and securing logistical stores from aerial observation and attack. The rail system was the main source of resupply and it was often targeted by partisan attacks. As a result, security details consisting of riflemen and mounted high-caliber guns often accompanied supply trains to provide protection to sustainment forces.⁵

The Pagonis Effect and Evolution of the Support Area Command Post Concept

Transitioning to the modern era, the Gulf War provides a clear parallel to what we are likely to experience in future wars. This was defined by a fundamental transformation from the commonly accepted doctrine of distributed logistical command to that of a single logistics leader.

During the Gulf War, Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf deviated from Army doctrine and appointed Lt. Gen. William “Gus” Pagonis the Central Command deputy commanding general for logistics to make a single individual in the command chain responsible for all sustainment operations. Pagonis controlled receipt and delivery of supplies by all methods in theater. As the single lead for logistics, he secured essential host-nation logistical support by working closely with the Saudi government to negotiate agreements. He directed his sustainers to establish “log bases” at key points in front of advancing forces. These temporary supply depots for expendable classes of supply were placed near main supply routes with instructions that they should be destroyed if compromised.

To do his job, Pagonis delegated significant authority to leaders at these log bases to adequately resupply combat forces and protect supply lines. This innovative approach ensured all sustainers across the theater could respond rapidly to exigent needs and remained flexible enough to address front-line requirements.⁶ The application of this single command approach for all logistical resources directly contributed to victory.



Over the course of the last two years (2016–2017), the Army's divisions have sequentially developed the concept of mission command within the support area. In each case, there are important connections to the extraordinary freedom of action accorded to Pagonis by Schwarzkopf. In determining the best doctrinal direction to move in managing the support area, the evolution of the concept of mission command provides an excellent historical narrative. Each division has contributed to the understanding and employment of the SACP construct by adding building blocks during successive warfighter exercises (WfX). Indeed, the deputy commanding generals for support (DCG-S) in each division have directly coordinated with one another through each of the WfXs described here, and the DCG-S dialogue across the Army continued as this article was being written.

1st Infantry Division. The SACP innovation was born out of necessity and defined by the commanding general of the 1st Infantry Division (1ID) during WfX 16-04. During his first command post internal training exercise, the division commander recognized the need for a SACP because enemy activity within the support area was consistently disrupting logistical support, forcing him to divert attention away from the fight in the close and deep areas. Ultimately, the 1ID SACP successfully seized objectives and engaged enemy targets in the support area. This allowed the

130th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division Sustainment Brigade, and division staff operate in a close, integrated command operations and intelligence center (as shown in figure 1, page 50) aimed at enabling closer and more direct coordination June 2017 at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. (Photo courtesy of the Mission Command Training Program staff)

commanding general to more effectively dictate the tempo of the fight in the close and deep areas.

1ID recognized the need to employ the capabilities of the National Guard maneuver enhancement brigade (MEB) attached to the division to operate the SACP at full capacity without shifting assets away from the division main command post (DMAIN). A highly capable National Guard or Army Reserve force can provide the inherent protection capabilities associated with an MEB. However, though liaison officers from the MEB participated in the WfX 16-04 planning process, the MEB had not worked with 1ID before in the field, so it possessed a very limited understanding of the SACP's role in the fight. In fact, the MEB commander (for the WfX) only just arrived for the start of WfX 16-04. Despite these integration challenges, the MEB was very effective at providing coordinated fire protection plans and counter reconnaissance patrols in the support area for WfX 16-04.



The 1ID quickly discerned that providing additional resources and manpower to the SACP greatly benefited the division as a whole. By the start of their second command post internal training exercise under WfX 16-04, the MEB and the SACP each had a platoon of UASs and additional armor assets. This resulted in greater freedom of movement in the support area and enabled maneuver elements to operate at a higher tempo and speed. To better synchronize the efforts of the SACP with those of the DMAIN and the division tactical assault command post (DTAC), 1ID broadcast key meetings (battle update brief, commanders update brief, and targeting board) through speakers into the SACP, which worked extremely well to increase shared command and staff understanding.

3rd Infantry Division. The next permutation of the SACP originated with the 3rd Infantry Division (3ID) during WfX 17-01. It is worth mentioning that the authors were integral members of the higher command for the 3ID WfX and so in an excellent position to observe their thoughtful refinements to the 1ID model. 3ID envisioned the SACP as a division mission-command node built upon its assigned MEB. The DCG-S oversaw SACP operations to ensure they were nested with the

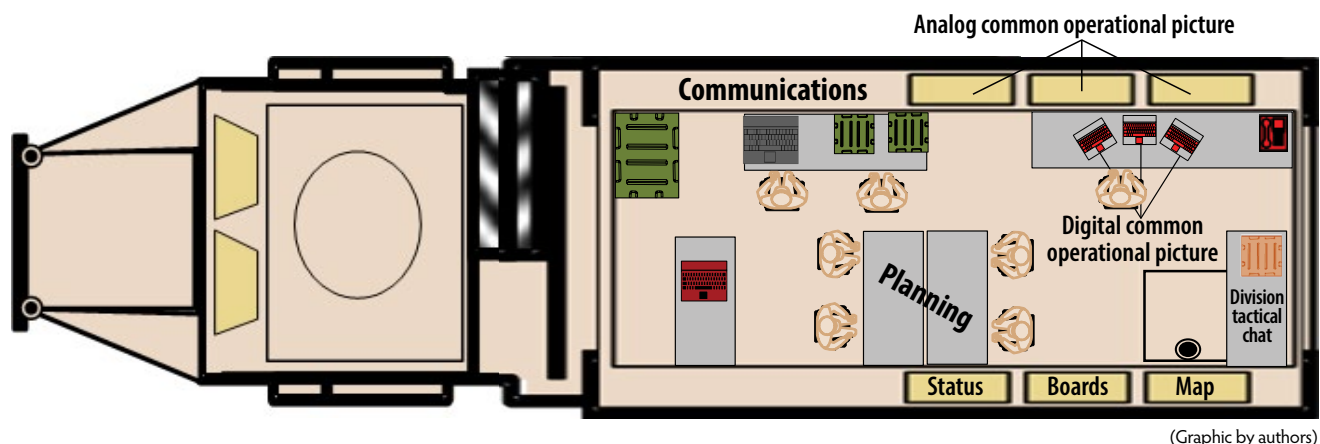
Expando vans form one of the main operational centers during a Bright Star command post exercise 4 October 2005 in Egypt. Expando vans can be combined in various configurations to create highly functional command posts. (Photo by Sgt. Alex Licea, Combined Joint Task Force–Bright Star Public Affairs Office)

commanding general's intent, and the division staff addressed manning gaps by augmenting with personnel and equipment. With 176 personnel assigned, 3ID's SACP was much larger than the 1ID model because there was substantially greater participation from their assigned MEB. 3ID immediately recognized the importance of integrating the MEB into the fabric of their support area infrastructure. In fact, the division leadership and staff began coordinating and training with the MEB four months in advance of the WfX, which served to reduce the inevitable friction associated with integrating a new unit into a division's task organization. Leaders from all elements within the SACP began to reform the structure and define processes through ongoing coordination.

With the 3ID version of the SACP, the MEB commander functioned as the SACP commander while the DCG-S provided operational oversight. This was the

standard chosen because the MEB headquarters provided most of the personnel and equipment employed by the SACP. The 3ID SACP structure was, essentially, the MEB tactical operations center (TOC) with added space for the division staff personnel and the DCG-S. 3ID

subsequent divisions would follow in terms of ease of communication and coordination. At the midway point of the WfX, both brigade commanders were directed to collocate with the DCG-S at the SACP and asked to sit on either side of him to flatten communications between



(Graphic by authors)

Figure 2. Expando Van Layout, Brigade Tactical Assault Center

also recognized the importance of liaison officers from non-Department of Defense organizations focused on external engagement, such as the Political Advisor Program, the United States Agency for International Development, and host-nation entities. These liaison officers enabled much better coordination across the support area.

In contrast to the 1ID approach, 3ID determined the SACP had the ability to issue orders specific to the support area and control elements occupying the terrain within it. 3ID's realization of the need for a senior division leader (in the form of the DCG-S) present who outranked all brigade commanders in the support area—and could more easily facilitate coordination than any division staff or subordinate-brigade-level commander—proved to be a key organizational innovation.

1st Armored Division. The 1st Armored Division (1AD) conducted its WfX, 17-02, employing the SACP as a coordinating command post tied to both the MEB and the sustainment brigade. The SACP was focused exclusively on current operations and direct coordination with the DMAIN to facilitate the management of protection operations in the support area. It lacked the capability to assume control of airspace or fires. Nevertheless, the sustainment brigade commander did serve as chief of sustainment and the MEB commander did serve as chief of protection, which provided the structure that

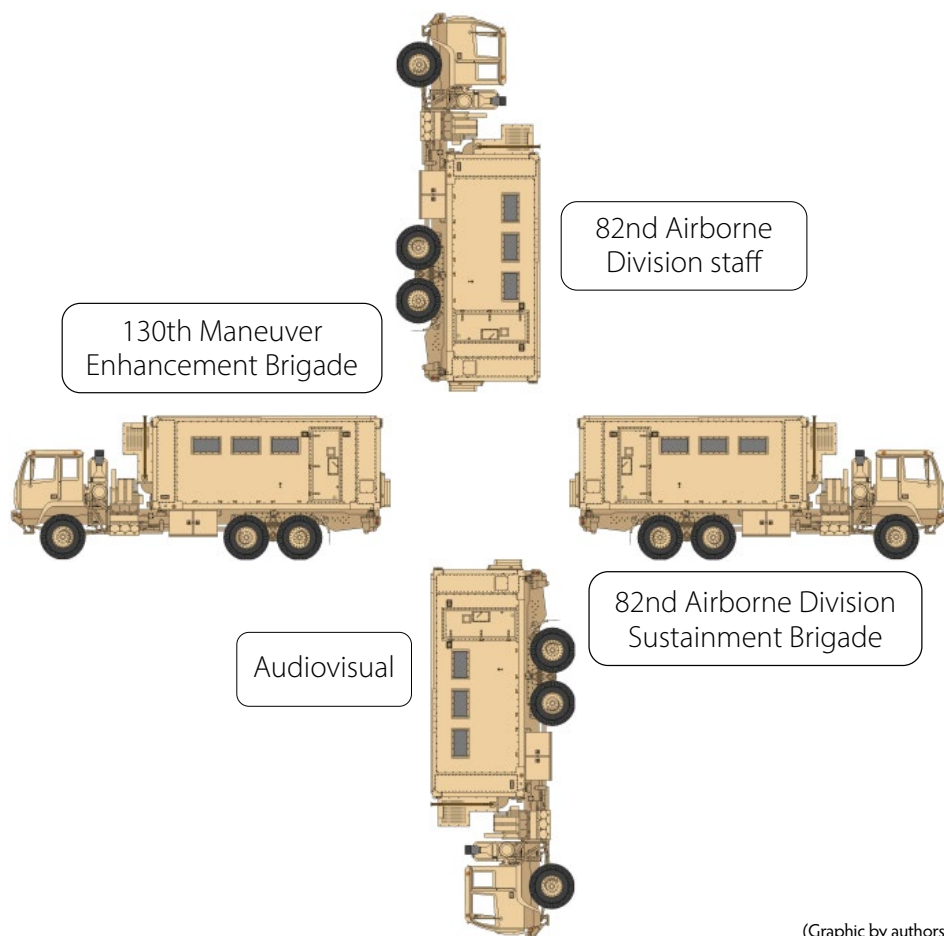
the sustainment and protection enterprises. They accomplished this after a few days of slower coordination and delayed problem solving while geographically dispersed. This was a groundbreaking step in the evolution of the SACP concept that was born out of necessity.

25th Infantry Division. The 25th Infantry Division (25ID) applied its own method to structuring its SACP during WfX 17-04 at Schofield Barracks in Hawaii. This was a well-organized and highly practiced approach that integrated a seasoned cross section of the division staff. The SACP's responsibilities relative to DMAIN and DTAC were clearly delineated by the DCG-S. The DMAIN was responsible for the close fight on the battlefield, while the DTAC was focused on either the deep fight or specific portions of the close fight such as wet gap crossings or brigade-level air assault operations. The DMAIN was focused on developing a targeting process that would address both the close and deep fights, while targeting in the support area was left to the coordination of SACP staff, but with only enough assets to protect ground lines of communication and insufficient capacity to control maneuver, fires, and effects.

Integration of the MEB was not achieved in advance of WfX 17-04 and occurred in limited terms during the exercise because the MEB was not focused on this as a primary training event (the Army Reserve

brigade commander did not participate). The senior representative for the MEB was a young and aggressive field-grade officer who had not worked with the division before. Despite the officer's best efforts, the lack of prior investment on the part of the MEB force made it impossible to appropriately integrate protection with sustainment. This was exacerbated by the fact that most resources required to control the support area came from a standard MEB Mission Table of Organization and Equipment. Because of this equipment and personnel integration shortfall, the 25ID SACP was only able to serve as a coordinating command post during WfX 17-04. The SACP synchronization meeting was the most valuable component of the battle rhythm relative to the coordination and management of the support area and served as an essential problem-solving venue throughout the exercise and yet another crucial refinement to the SACP concept.

The DCG-S of 25ID was at the center of all support area staff attention and all efforts within it were coordinated through him to either reinforce or complement DMAIN efforts. It was clear that the division assets required to address logistical prioritization issues were attached to the SACP and functioned at a high level. This enabled full and efficient management of the support area by the DCG-S. However, the resources, technical personnel, and systems required to fully control the support area were not available—to wit, the systems required to control and clear airspace and control fires, such as the Tactical Airspace Integration System, the Advanced Field Artillery Tactical Data System, and the Air and Missile Defense Workstation



(Graphic by authors)

Figure 3. Four Expando Vans Combine to Create the Support Area Command Post Tactical Assault Center

were not available, and the school-trained air defense, field artillery, and aviation personnel to run those systems were not on hand either. Nonetheless, the capacity of the SACP through this exercise brought the SACP closest to a position of control than all prior divisions and established the requirements for a SACP to become a controlling division command post.

Emerging Doctrine for the Support Area Command Post

Our experience in the 82nd Airborne Division through WfX 17-05 was informed by all other previous division experiences and represented a purposeful integration of every lesson learned. The structure of the SACP was developed with the intent of the commanding general in mind. Maj. Gen. Erik Kurilla made



clear that all command posts, including the SACP, were to be smaller, lighter, leaner, faster, more capable, and have more agile staffs. One principle developed with this intent in mind was achieving synergy between protection, sustainment, and warfighting command posts through colocation of TOCs. We combined 130th MEB (from the North Carolina National Guard), 82nd Airborne Division Sustainment Brigade (ADSB), and division staff elements into one SACP structure where brigade commanders and the DCG-S were within arm's reach of one another. All key staff from each of the three components were then working within essentially an open and contiguous set of tents to facilitate direct coordination (see figure 1, page 50).

The requirement to quickly relocate if the location was compromised by either UAS sighting or physical identification was achieved with the attachment of four M1087 five-ton expansible vans (expando vans). Three of the expando vans were aligned with each of the three TOC headquarters (MEB, ADSB, and division staff, respectively).

At the start of the WfX, we were focused only on utilizing a SACP tactical assault center (TAC) in a way that provided short-term mission-command responsibility while the SACP Main jumped to the location already established by the TAC. However, as the threat unfolded and operations proceeded, it became clear that the SACP TAC provides essentially the same capacity the

The 82nd Airborne Division established its support area command post (shown here) June 2017 on Holland Drop Zone, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, during Warfighter Exercise 17-05. (Photo by Capt. Benjamin Torgersen, U.S. Army)

DTAC provides to the DMAIN, offering the command increased flexibility. The limitations of the SACP TAC are effectively connected to the "control" component of the SACP, since there is not currently sufficient capacity to control any fight in TAC mode (no airspace clearance or fires capacity). Nonetheless, the coordinating power of a SACP TAC provides tremendous logistical tracking capability and additional capacity to exercise mission command. At a minimum, the approach we adopted enabled effective command post jumps.

The physical construction of the TAC as it un-plugs from the SACP is important to mention. Just as in the close and the deep areas, the support area will face exigent circumstances that require the primary command node to reposition rapidly to reduce vulnerability. How the staff are positioned to make these transitions while maintaining situational awareness is exceptionally important. Regardless of the type of division in question (e.g., infantry, armor, airborne), the use of expando vans is at least one workable method to employ (see figure 2, page 53). Implementation demands matching up one expando van with each of the

two brigades and another to the division staff element. Including an additional van to serve as the audiovisual center for all three units provided redundant secure communications in a quiet environment away from the bustle and noise of the other three vans.

Backing these expando vans into one another (see figure 3, page 54), connecting them with plywood flooring on the outside, and then covering all of it with both an oversized tarp and camouflage net provides a workable structure. It is also sufficient to not only assume “the fight” from the SACP Main but also to retain a degree of survivability in the process by employing the camouflage netting to reduce ground vehicle signature. Once the TAC takes control of the fight, the SACP Main breaks down as quickly as possible and jumps to the new position in close proximity to the TAC.

Collocating the DCG-S, MEB commander, and sustainment brigade commander in one command operations intelligence center is important to achieve synchronization of activities in the support area and to facilitate immediate coordination and deconfliction in a quickly developing engagement. Given the speed of operations, a sustainment brigade can only feasibly and effectively support one division at a time in a high tempo decisive action engagement. The WfX demonstrated to us that retaining the survivability of logistical support assets demands the integration of the sustainment brigade TOC into the SACP, rather than being positioned with an expeditionary support command. The addition of a DCG-S at the SACP enables coordination and deconfliction and greatly facilitates the receipt of critical assets from the DMAIN.

In WfX 17-05, the integration of the MEB, ADSB, and division staffs promoted rapid and effective decision-making through the creation of fusion cells across warfighting functions. A few of the most significant revelations uncovered during the WfX after-action review came from a close analysis of where key staff members sat during battle updates and where their work stations were positioned on the main floor (in relation to their counterparts). The early and continuous investment of cross talk between collocated brigade and division staff members is what sets this conceptual arrangement into motion.

During the planning phases of a military operation, there must be deep thought as to what assets, resources, and key personnel remain in the support area—through

which all critical classes of supply and sustenance for the fight will flow and be controlled. In a dynamic and fast-paced threat environment, there is simply no time to either shift resources or move another command post to the support area to shore up vulnerabilities. The development of the SACP provides a mission-command node with the capabilities and appropriate oversight (in the form of a DCG-S) to address threats as they present themselves, call for critical assets, and implement the commanding general’s priorities.

In a support area, current doctrine suggests that a sustainment brigade command post and maneuver enhancement brigade command post are appropriate to have set up and functioning.⁷ Emerging doctrine suggests that a division mission-command post is appropriate because organizing assets, resources, and command priorities demands a node capable of enforcing decisions already made by the commanding general and directing actions that are consistent with his intent.⁸ This is especially important because the threat in the support area will likely differ substantially from the nature of the threat in the close and deep areas.

The purpose of friendly forces in the support area will continue to be preventing the disruption of supply lines to ensure that maneuver forces are not starved of food, fuel, and ammunition. The preventive measures that are taken must be actively planned, aggressively implemented, and the structure that is chosen to synchronize these actions must be routinely practiced.

Closing Assessment of Integrating SACP into a Division

There are two possibilities for a SACP—coordinating and controlling. In a coordinating capacity, a SACP has no ability to either maneuver fires and forces or to direct the commitment of additional assets from a division’s task organization. Conversely, a controlling SACP would have all the critical elements associated with either a DMAIN or DTAC. Those critical resources would include mission-command systems that allow the SACP to clear airspace, monitor airflow, and provide counterbattery fire. The systems required to carry out such actions include the Advanced Field Artillery Tactical Data System, Air and Missile Defense Workstation, and the Tactical Airspace Integration System, along with operators with the expertise required to integrate the feedback

into a clear common operating picture. Based on our experience in a division's WfX, we assess the controlling SACP as the more dynamic and effective option. The SACP must be able to control and direct battles that may ensue to the rear of maneuver forces.

In both a coordinating and—especially—controlling SACP, the DCG-S increases the synchronization and capability of the command post. The DCG-S very often serves as the immediate supervisor in garrison for the combat aviation brigade commander, division artillery commander, and sustainment brigade commander. This established and close working relationship creates opportunities to capitalize on that preexisting relationship. For example, if there is a clear need identified to prosecute a target in the support area but the only artillery assets available are in general support, very often a simple phone call from the DCG-S to the division artillery commander can bring about a quick shift to direct support until that target is neutralized and the threat reduced.

When combat logistics patrols traveling along a main supply route into the support area come under attack without any attack aviation escort, the long-standing relationship between the combat aviation brigade commander and DCG-S can also lead to very responsive support. At the root of why this concept works so well is the element that undergirds mission command—trust. It is not the rank or position that makes these calls for support and associated responses quick; instead, it is knowing that someone you work with closely and trust needs help right away.

That human dynamic drives this component of the SACP concept. There is obviously a positive externality that is associated with the formal chain of command established in garrison, but that is always superseded by the commitment to help a close associate in need.

The vulnerability of a division's support area will remain cause for commander concern if the mission-command architecture is not aligned in a way that can effectively address the enemy's most dangerous courses of action, namely attacking into the support area. Commanders must apply appropriate leadership and resources to that location so that they can remain focused on the fight in front of them or battle plans will become unhinged as they did for King Leonidas as his Spartan warriors fell victim to this vulnerability at the Battle of Thermopylae. Despite the bravery of the three hundred, the Spartans lost the battle and Leonidas was killed. Conversely, the authority and control granted to Lt. Gen. Pagonis in Operation Desert Storm was unprecedented and so were the effective results. In an era of warfighting where information and formations move at alarming speeds, the delegation of authority and control of the support area to a DCG-S is what will allow a division commander the luxury of focusing on the fight in front of him without having to look over his shoulder. Applying a Pagonis-like structure to this enduring challenge will prevent tragic surprises like those at Thermopylae in ancient Greece, allow for a greater provision of creativity, and generate opportunities like those Pagonis seized during the first Gulf War. ■

Notes

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