

INSTRUCTOR TRAINING DIVISION
GENERAL INSTRUCTION DEPARTMENT
THE ARMORED SCHOOL
Fort Knox, Kentucky

ADVANCED OFFICERS CLASS #2

1 May 1948

MILITARY MONOGRAPH

TITLE: SUPPLY OPERATIONS IN COMBAT

SCOPE: Supply operations of the 81st Armored Reconnaissance
Battalion of the 1st Armored Division in Tunisia,
Africa and Italy. Period covered from January 1943
through December 1944.

41-119

Prepared by:

Frank S. Sears
FRANK S. SEARS
1st Lt., Cavalry

INTRODUCTION

Supply operations in combat deals with the operations of the 81st Armored Reconnaissance Battalion in Tunisia, Africa and Italy. Specific missions will be referred to in order to show the different problems encountered to supply this type of unit under the various battle conditions to which subjected as the reconnaissance battalion of the 1st Armored Division. The conclusions from the overall experiences will then unvail to coincide with the present day teachings of logistical support for the reconnaissance battalion of the armored division.

The final training of the 81st Armored Reconnaissance Battalion was conducted in North Ireland during the period of May to October 1942 under the Command of Lieutenant Colonel H. H. D. Heiberg. The many field maneuvers and command post exercises conducted during this period proved of great value in that close and well coordinated control over unit trains and supply procedure was of great concern to the unit commander. It was found that the trains of the reconnaissance battalion could operate to a greater advantage under unit control rather than division or combat command control. The division granted permission for the reconnaissance battalion to operate its trains separately and independent of the division trains commander except that the locations and dispositions were to be reported to the division trains commander at all times.

A unit standing operating procedure was developed to simplify administrative matters when in combat. The company commanders were to be relieved of great volumes of reading matter and complicated reports which are of little value when a company is engaged in a fight. The unit supply officer being required to stay with the battalion forward command post and always informed as to the situation could estimate a companies requirements should the commander become involved and not be able to report. The following simplified standing operating procedure was adapted:

1. Battalion trains to operate under command of the headquarters and service company commander.
2. Company trains to revert to battalion control when companies are committed, kitchen trucks remain under company control and revert on company order.
3. Battalion maintenance platoon with battalion trains and company maintenance with respective companies.
4. Reports of expenditures to be submitted to battalion S-4 by 1800 hours daily.
5. S-4 relay reports to headquarters and service company commander who supervises the forward movement of trains under cover of darkness, and company guides pick up trains for respective companies at a designated point.

6. All resupply of battalion trains coordinated by S-4 and headquarters and service company commander.

The administrative transportation for logistical support of the organization gave each of the three reconnaissance companies five 2½-ton trucks which were broken down into two kitchen, one supply, one ammunition and one fuel and lubricant. The light tank company had two trucks, one kitchen and one supply with one ammunition and one fuel lubricant attached from headquarters and service company, this varying with the situation. The supporting elements in the transportation platoon consisted of eight fuel, three ammunition, one rations, and one Class II.

PART I

Station de Sened

The night of 30 January 1942, the battalion, less Company B and one platoon of light tanks moved from the bivouac area in the vicinity of Bou Chebka to Gafsa via Thelepte and Feriana. At Gafsa we received orders to move at once, bypass Station de Sened, take positions on the high ground to the east, and maintain observation of the avenues of approach to Station de Sened from the north and east.

At approximately 0130, 31 January, the 81st pulled into an assembly area vicinity Zannouch Station. In the assembly area all companies resupplied, and provided the troops with a hot meal. The trains were then moved back, before first light to vicinity Gafsa taking cover from hostile aircraft.

The combat trains for this operation consisted of the battalion maintenance platoon, medical detachment and engineer supplies for the engineer platoon attached. These trains followed without interval on the battalion command post. We stressed keeping all vehicles in running order therefore the maintenance was well forward. These elements proved of little value due to enemy air superiority. Maintenance crews were helpless, and the engineer supply trucks were soon destroyed by enemy air attacks. All vehicles in need of maintenance had to be abandoned and picked up later by small teams and evacuated to the rear out of artillery range.

The day ended with exaggerated losses and expenditures. Trains were out of radio contact but no time was to be lost in resupply procedure. Finding six trucks not knowing just what was happening and looking for information was just like a dream. Just one round trip to the corps supply points vicinity Gafsa placed the battalion in good shape for Class III and V supplies. All units were carrying five days Class I therefore that was no worry at this time. The next day the trains were contacted by messenger and moved up to approximately five miles of the main line of resistance. All trains and maintenance were placed in one bivouac except company maintenance sections which were left under company control. The following days of this action was very successful from the logistical angle except over estimates of ammunition expenditures which ended up in an overload which had to be evacuated because of the Class V shortage.

The lessons learned from this action were; to keep battalion maintenance platoon where they could work, trains forward but out of artillery range and well dispersed for protection from enemy air, do not move supply vehicles during daylight hours unless in case of emergency, and do not ask for something if it is not needed.

On 3 February the 81st Reconnaissance Battalion less Company B was ordered to move back covering the withdrawal of the infantry and tanks. The enemy was threatening to the north.

This move was north to Sbietla a distance of approximately eighty five miles to be closed in by daylight 4 February. This forced the trains to go in bivouac at a half-way point with two ammunition, three fuel and one ration truck completing the march.

At this time S-4 contacted S-4 CCA to get a report on Company B. The light tanks attached to Company B had lost two tanks and Company B one scout car. This sets the battalion losses to date three tanks and two scout cars. The battalion was informed by Division that some scout cars would be in the next day but no tanks available. The scout cars came in five days later.

PART II

Sbeitla-Sidi Bou Zid

6 February 1943 the 81st Reconnaissance Battalion was in Sidi Bou Zid in need of time for reorganization and maintenance. Here it was possible to take advantage of the slow moving situation and make the first issue of clothing and other class II items as they were rotated, one being in division reserve for approximately one week. Many items were critical with all supply services and those we did get were slow due to the long supply line.

Battalion trains moved with the command post to a position south and east of Sidi Bou Zid.

This move gave close and quick support of the reconnaissance companies and by being well forward eliminated much of the enemy air which was making repeated attacks on rear areas such as division trains in the vicinity of Sbeitla. All supplies from Sbeitla to Sidi Bou Zid had to be moved under cover of darkness due to enemy air on the Sbeitla Faid Road.

The trains bivouac was perfect until 14 February when Company C, on the right flank reported thirty four enemy tanks moving out of Meloussi Pass, Company A in Matley Pass was cut off and CCA to the north was being hit hard by tanks, artillery and air. This called for an immediate withdrawal of the trains to vicinity Sbeitla and the only route was cross country.

Limited use of trails made the move difficult for loaded trucks. A hasty reconnaissance and the use of the ten motorcycles in headquarters soon marked a route and the trains began their withdrawal with five minute intervals between vehicles. The heavy sand and wadies to be crossed caused several trucks to have mechanical failures and this required heavy wrecker service which soon told the enemy air the route of withdrawal. The heavy air attacks to follow were so harrassed by the 50 caliber fire from the column that the bombing and strafing was inaccurate. The losses on the movement were one truck and heavy damage to the M-1 heavy wrecker. Personnel losses were five men wounded and two captured.

The night of 14 February the trains less four trucks moved back to the vicinity of Kasserine Pass. The four trucks and two M-3A1 scout cars were used as combat trains. The scout cars were used to move supplies forward to the two reconnaissance companies and the light tank company.

The division Class III supply point and railhead at Sbeitla was set for demolition approximately 16 February and all empty gasoline trucks of the battalion were filled and pulled out just as the demolition signal was given.

The battalion was unable to supply its companies for the period 16 and 17 February and when the unit was assembled at El Ma El Abiod the limited time was used to reorganize what remained of the battalion. Company A was captured with all vehicles, the tank company had only one platoon left and the two remaining companies had suffered heavy losses. Light tanks were issued to the battalion from the armored regiments of the division to bring the company up to strength and personnel transferred from headquarters and headquarters company to man the replacement vehicles.

The next action takes the battalion into Kasserine Pass via Tebessa and Thala. This was the Division counterattack which stopped the enemy drive. The battalion was supported by a so called element of combat trains composed of one kitchen truck, and one fuel lubricant per company with two ammunition trucks for the two remaining reconnaissance companies and light tank companies.

This section of trains under the command of S-4 moved in bounds slightly to the rear of the battalion command post.

The division, having secured Kasserine Pass reverted to corps reserve and assembled at El Ma El Abiod. During the next few weeks while the division reorganized and reequipped, the reconnaissance battalion has the mission of observing the enemy in vicinity Faid Pass to the northeast and in vicinity of Moulares to the southeast. This mission required two reconnaissance companies and two were all that remained. The supply lines for the two companies were approximately seventy miles to the north and sixty miles to the south. The companies were moved out with one kitchen truck and two trucks for supply of fuel, ammunition, rations, water, and any other available items. It required from trucks of each company, two going and two coming with all movement made during hours of darkness. This although a special mission and under orders of the late General G. S. Patton had its problems mainly heavy rain, mud, and distance.

The division had all units reorganized in March and was ordered to attack through Sened to Maknassy. During the period 15 March to 15 April the 81st reconnaissance experimented with the employment of a combat train and field train. This period being the first typical offensive missions made it ideal to see what composition would work best.

The composition of the combat trains under command of S-4 was; battalion maintenance platoon company kitchen trucks, four fuel trucks, and three ammunition trucks. This system was used for two weeks and the battalion commander then decided that the S-4 would be more advantageously employed at the command post and the trains commander combine all trains and stay within supporting distance of the unit. Supporting distance was set at approximately thirty minutes blackout driving time to the battalion command post. At a point vicinity the command post guides from the companies would pick up the supply vehicles for their respective companies. The supply vehicles would upon supplying companies return to the trains bivouac on their own and eliminate road congestion and possible night attack from enemy air. This system enabled the S-4 to act as a staff officer, keep up with the supply situation within the division and all trains in one bivouac gave better control for this type unit. Companies could be resupplied in sufficient time to enable the personnel of line companies to refuel their vehicles, draw rations and still get the rest which is always required to keep men going. One vehicle tank recovery was kept forward to assist companies in recovery of vehicles which was beyond their limitations.

The medical detachment was organized with three ambulance half track M-3, three trucks $\frac{1}{4}$ -ton, one truck $2\frac{1}{2}$ -ton and one ambulance $\frac{3}{4}$ -ton.

The detachment was broken down in five sections as follows: one ambulance half track to each reconnaissance company, one truck $\frac{1}{2}$ -ton to the light tank company, one truck $2\frac{1}{2}$ -ton to battalion trains and the ambulance $\frac{3}{4}$ -ton with one truck $\frac{1}{2}$ -ton to the battalion command post. The battalion aid station operated in the vicinity of the battalion forward echelon and all casualties were evacuated from the companies to the aid station. At the aid station the battalion surgeon gave additional aid to many casualties before they were evacuated to the division collecting companies.

The battalion surgeon operated a small field hospital with captured and improvised equipment. This special equipment in addition to that authorized enabled such surgical work as the collapsing of a lung and many aid measures which normally required the facilities of an evacuation hospital. The wheeled ambulance was equipped for use as an operating room under blackout conditions.

Medical supplies were carried on the truck $2\frac{1}{2}$ -ton with the battalion trains. A balanced stock of medical supplies were maintained at all times and by keeping this stock the aid men were never without the essential items to care for the wounded. Vehicular first aid kits were on hand for exchange for those short items.

The ambulance half tracks were modified to make the rear door eight inches wider. This permitted easy loading of patients.

This was a theater approved modification. Heaters were also provided for each ambulance.

Major problems encountered through-out Parts I and II were water and spare parts. Water being critical in this theater the enemy was very attentive to the water points and would bomb them at every possible chance. This forced close supervision over the use of water in all units.

All vehicles damaged beyond repair were stripped of all usable parts to keep a stock of spare parts and make needed repairs.

PART III

Anzio

The 81st Armored Reconnaissance Battalion landed shortly after D-Day at Anzio with the 1st Armored Division. For this operation all trucks of the battalion were turned over to the control of Division G-4 and loaded with ammunition and gasoline. These trucks reverted to battalion control immediately after the division assembled on the beachhead.

Logistical support of the battalion during this four months operation was comparatively easy due to short supply lines. All resupply was accomplished under cover of darkness due to enemy artillery observation. The front line units were supplied with $\frac{1}{4}$ -ton trucks for reasons of security and to prevent loss of equipment.

Assault guns and mortars of the battalion were under the 69th Armored Field Artillery in support of the First Special Service Force. The nine 75MM assault guns fired approximately 25,000 rounds of ammunition from one position. The ammunition resupply was accomplished with M-3 half tracks with a unit dump in vicinity of the gun positions. The operation of a unit ammunition dump kept vehicles off the road during heavy enemy air attacks at night and a supply was always on hand in the event of a delay in resupply due to enemy air and artillery.

The many raids into enemy territory were supplied by establishing dumps well forward on the route of each column. Half track ammunition carriers were loaded with a proportionate part of all types of ammunition and with radio communication ready to move forward to resupply tanks and armored cars involved in the raid. All dumps were established and evacuated at night. The corps supply problem was critical and all supplies were supervised closely allowing no Class I, III, or V to be left and marked off as expended.

Replacements of all types of supply was very good and well coordinated by higher headquarters. All major items of equipment were allocated on a priority basis, due to the critical transportation problems and landing of all supplies under enemy artillery fire.

The battalion trains on the beachhead were operated under two designations, battalion and company.

Each reconnaissance company was responsible for the operation of five trucks and the tank company three trucks. This took eighteen trucks out of battalion trains and allowed for more dispersion and security from enemy air and artillery. All vehicles were dug in below wheel and radiator depth to protect tires and engines from bomb and shell fragments. Gasoline and ammunition were always unloaded in the bivouac area and placed in dugout positions, each dugout having only one truck load and designated to a particular vehicle. The use of these precautions reduced the losses of trucks for the organization to only one for the four months period. This truck was hit enroute to Company A with gasoline.

The heavy vehicular casualties during the early days of the beachhead presented a difficult problem of maintenance. The shortage of shipping space reduced the number of vehicles which would accompany the battalion to the beachhead and part of the maintenance vehicles remained in Naples. Division ordnance was carrying an extra amount of maintenance work and units were doing all possible to repair their own vehicles. Units could perform many third echelon jobs due to the slow moving defensive situation.

PART IV

Mountain Operations

Mountain operations is far from being suitable for armor but in September 1944 the 81st Reconnaissance Battalion under CCB pushed across the Arno River to the mountains between Lucca and Pestoia. All bridges on the Arno River had been blown by the enemy and this made the supply problem difficult. The reconnaissance immediately on crossing the river moved up an additional five days supply of rations, gasoline, and ammunition. These additional supplies proved to be the only solution to such a problem because the heavy rains which followed cut the supply lines and prohibited the use of the bridges the engineers had constructed on the combat command main supply route.

The mountainous terrain soon became so difficult in the vicinity of Piscoia that the reconnaissance was dismounted and moved forward as infantry. Three troops were used on the line with one in reserve used to supply the forward elements. The situation soon developed that one troop could not pack sufficient supplies to keep the three going and all available personnel was needed to deal with the enemy. This logistical problem was solved by going back to the declared obsolete four legged beast, the mule. Forty mules were procured from the British Sixth South African Division which was working on the division right flank.

These mules did a wonderful job of moving supplies forward over the rough terrain.

The average load for a mule using the Italian pack saddle was six cases of type "C" rations or two case of small arms ammunition. Loads over two hundred pounds would not agree with the mules sense of humor.

Mountain operations in the Appenine Mountain Ranges presented many logistical problems. The roads were poor and demolitions by the enemy made the going difficult. The reconnaissance was employed dismounted most of the winter 1944-45. Forward dumps were established out of enemy observation and the dump area designated as battalion middle echelon. The terrain afforded very limited bivouac areas for trains therefore the majority of the squadron vehicles, including combat vehicles not necessary for communications were bivouaced well to the rear. The enemy air had been so limited by this time that supply vehicles could be moved during hours of daylight with no worry of attack.

PART V

Administrative Procedure and Summary

The use of controlled item reports by the division eliminated many requisitions. A controlled item report was submitted monthly for items of equipment covered by each technical service. These reports listed all major items of TO and E and special theater authorizations showing quantity authorized, on hand, short and over.

These reports were forwarded to the division G-4 who in turn distributed them to the supply service concerned for action and the shortages were issued without the use of requisitions. The use of controlled item reports gave the G-4 an accurate status of the supply in all units.

The division G-4 had each unit submit weekly a G-4 summary which reflected the status of supply within the unit covering all classes. This report gave a total of all major losses and issues for the week which was of great assistance to the G-4 as a check on the coordination between the unit S-4's and the various supply services.

The conclusions drawn by this unit were that the trains should operate under battalion control at all times, and their movement coordinated with the S-4 of the combat command when attached to a combat command or with division when acting as division troops. Kitchen trucks with companies when at all possible because they are of no value to the men back in the battalion trains area.

Unit S-4 should stay with the forward command post so that he will be available to help the companies and know the situation. It is not practical to have the S-4 back with the trains because under this condition he is of no value as a staff officer. The S-4 should make frequent visits to the trains and division supply service to enable proper coordination with the higher echelons of supply and the forward movement of supplies.

Supply in combat is suction and not force. Unit S-4's can not wait for the higher echelons to send it up, they must exert a great amount of pull or it never happens. The S-4 must make frequent visits to the lower units when in combat and in assembly areas. In this way a better understanding of their needs is established.

The supply of attached units is always a problem to any unit and it was found to be a great advantage if the unit would take over the supply of its attachments completely. It requires close coordination between the S-4's of all units but an attachment can be maintained at a higher degree of combat efficiency if the S-4 of the unit to which attached will draw and issue all items of equipment lost by the unit. The mother unit will in most cases provide administrative transportation for use in supplying the attached units and in this manner very little additional load is placed on any unit to give their attached units what they need.

There are many rules and guides laid down to follow but by the use of common sense, human initiative and a little work the proper supplies can be placed in the hands of the units who actually perform the job of destroying the enemy. These supplies must be there on time and in the right amount or the mission will not be accomplished.