

Gun Trucks in Brigade Support Battalions— How Much Longer?

By MAJ Damian A. Green

The U.S. Army needs to provide the organic capability of convoy escort to the organization that conducts the mission—that way there is no competition for limited resources. Failure to provide the sustainment units with convoy security vehicles and associated equipment has led to many units making these changes themselves. According to MAJ Thomas J. Foster, Kansas Army National Guard, in the May-June 2006 issue of *Army Logistician*, “Brigade support battalions (BSBs) and other logistics units do not have organic security elements. Many units in Iraq actually develop a platoon or team to provide security for combat logistics patrols and to act as personal security teams. The Army should consider adding a security section to future designs of the BSB.”

A unit operates best when it is able to control as many variables as possible. Separating the mission of convoy escort from the unit to be escorted hinders execution. My bias, based on personal experience and historical research, says that logisticians can train to the Army standard on this task and perform their other responsibilities within their branches.

Since not every experience is published, the following list of documented examples represents merely the tip of the iceberg. These examples illustrate an ongoing problem that has not been effectively addressed.

Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). There are numerous examples from the war in Iraq.

- The 203rd BSB, 3rd Heavy Brigade Combat Team (BCT), 3rd Infantry Division, supported 626 convoy escort missions, including resupply, recovery, barrier material escorts, retrograde of supplies, escort of civilian contractors, and so on. This does not include the missions that were performed by the base security squad, which was also the unit’s responsibility.

Because of the nature of operating in a counterinsurgency environment, the maneuver battalions were not consuming the amount of supplies that the support battalion was designed for. In addition, the combat battalions were able to stockpile supplies at fixed locations, which also allowed the BSB to pull soldiers from other doctrinally required missions to build the convoy escort capability.

- During OIF 2004–06, 1st Corps Support Command had two brigade combat teams tasked to assist it with

the escort of “more than 300 gun truck missions” per day.

- The 548th Corps Support Battalion, 10th Mountain Division, modified 12 5-ton cargo trucks with increased protection to perform the missions of convoy escort, recovery and other ad hoc missions during OIF I from May 2003 to March 2004.

- The 180th Transportation Battalion (Heavy Equipment Transport [HET] equipped) was given the mission and subordinate companies to move the M1 Abrams tanks of the 4th Infantry Division and subsequently 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment from Kuwait into Iraq in support of OIF. The commander of the 180th at the time explained, “In a radical shift from normal peacetime procedure, the combat vehicle crews would stay aboard their vehicles after they were loaded onto the HETs to man the crew-served weapons on the vehicles, thus providing an elevated level of force protection for the convoys.” First Armored Division, as part of its redeployment from Iraq in the summer of 2004, also used combat vehicle crews to augment convoy force protection.

- LTC Shawn Walsh, the 240th Quartermaster Battalion commander, wrote in 2004 about his command’s shortfalls in hardened vehicles, mounts for crew-served weapons, night-vision goggles and global positioning systems. All combat service support units need to be able to traverse “extremely dangerous supply routes in Iraq, often without any external security such as military police support.”

Joint Readiness Training Center. CPT Dean Dominique, a Joint Readiness Training Center observer-controller, reminded the logistics community in the May-June 2002 issue of *Army Logistician* that our convoys are high-payoff targets that typically, in a training environment, are not supported by the military police or other tactical units.

Haiti. Ten forward support battalions supporting the 10th Mountain Division during Operation Uphold Democracy

The improvised weapon mount on the roof of this Humvee keeps the soldier’s M249 squad automatic weapon visible, which helps deter enemy attack and places the weapon in a ready-to-fire position.



U.S. Army



Soldiers with the 203rd Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, conduct convoy training at Camp Buehring, Kuwait.

in 1994 dedicated two trucks to serve as gun trucks for their daily convoys.

Vietnam. The problem with convoy security is not new. A recently declassified memorandum shows that operations in Vietnam faced similar challenges. In 1969, the 1st Logistical Command (responsible for the logistical support to U.S. Army forces in Vietnam) recommended to the commander of U.S. Forces in Vietnam; the commander in chief, U.S. Army Pacific; and the Department of the Army's assistant chief of staff for force development that transportation truck companies be provided an organic security escort capability. The 1st Logistical Command recognized that their efforts to harden task vehicles (vehicles designed to carry supplies), while beneficial, had some definite disadvantages. The endorsement memorandums and subsequent actions by the U.S. Army, however, recommended that additional military police (MP) be deployed with a specialized vehicle to perform this mission. The cited reasoning was that the MPs already had the doctrinal mission for convoy security and that giving this mission to transportation units would "fragment the responsibility for providing convoy security."

Korea. During combat operations in Korea, United Nations forces required between 32 and 37 percent of the combat forces to protect the supply lines.

World War II. U.S. experience in

North Africa required approximately 16 percent of the available combat forces to secure the Allied supply lines against the potential attack by "Axis parachutists, saboteurs, and air attack," according to historian Martin Blumenson.

Time for Change. The Army has provided resources for logistics units to defend themselves. Ring mounts, which are placed on cargo vehicles in order to mount an M2 Browning .50-caliber machine gun or Mk-19 automatic grenade launcher, provide the firepower. Units have the ability to communicate via line of sight with FM radios and, when fielded to them, satellite-based systems such as Blue Force Tracker or Movement Tracking System. These tools are not the right ones, however. Sustainment units (for example, brigade support battalions and forward support companies) require a more maneuverable vehicle that has the specific purpose of convoy escort or "gun truck," which is documented on the support unit's authorization documents—that is, the modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE).

Furthermore, we need to recognize that the sustainment soldiers can staff this equipment themselves, within their current MTOEs. With the requisite amount of training time, supported with live-fire training and appropriate leadership, an MOS immaterial soldier

can move from being a fuel handler to gunner or supply-parts specialist to driver or mechanic to convoy commander. The Army has since recognized this capability by publishing TC 4-11.46 *Convoy Protection Platform Gunnery* and providing the ammunition authorization for sustainment units to qualify their crews, but there is still more to accomplish.

Army leaders have many options available to address this critical issue of organic convoy security for logistics units. The least preferred option is to do nothing and maintain the status quo: Provide the additional trucks and required equipment with no decrease in current MTOE levels. The unit can decide what equipment is not required and either not deploy it or leave it behind when they perform their missions.

The next option, while much more expensive, is my recommended course of action: Authorize the equipment and the personnel to operate it by making the changes to all convoy executing units in the Army (active, Reserve and National Guard). Fund as much as the service can budget. Change the distribution of soldiers and NCOs to fill the shortages with priority to deploying units and work backwards from there. Put units in a position where they can provide documentation that supports them getting the equipment.

We need to realize that the sustainment community has the soldiers and leaders with the skills necessary to take on the mission of convoy security. *Army Logistician* has published numerous articles over the last 14 years that show the need and desire of logisticians to perform this mission. Arguably, the rest of the Army community could recognize this ability and start implementing changes. We have been talking about this topic for too long. □

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