

Preparing to Occupy and Defend the Brigade Support Area

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A Soldier from 123rd Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, provides security during Decisive Action Rotation 16-05 at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, on April 11, 2016. (Photo by Pfc. Esmeralda Cervantes)

BSB

FEATURES

“After two years of decisive action rotations, one of the biggest trends we see at the National Training Center is a direct reflection of 12 years of forward-operating-base logistics. This article addresses the main issues associated with brigade support area (BSA) operations. After occupation, the brigade support battalion must develop a defense plan that will secure and protect the BSA during decisive action operations.”

Maj. Gen. Flem B. “Donnie” Walker Jr., Forces Command G-4

Brigade support battalions (BSBs) and regimental support squadrons at the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, California, face the challenge of establishing a brigade support area (BSA) that is able to sustain a brigade combat team’s (BCT’s) tactical operations. Successful BSA operations develop during the planning process where rehearsed operations set conditions that lead to structured occupation of a BSA site. After occupation, the BSB must develop a defense plan that secures and protects the BSA support activities during decisive action operations.

Without defense, support cannot happen. Thus, both BSA operations and defense must be taken into consideration from site selection through occupation, and then the defense plan must be refined as conditions change.

Selecting a Site

During occupation planning, the staff must anticipate the mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops and support available, time available, and civil considerations for the proposed BSA sites. These considerations are needed in order to determine and recommend a defensible location to the battalion commander and to ensure the BSA footprint enables support operations.

While the size of a BSA may prevent it from being completely hidden, the intelligence preparation of the battlefield can find areas that may conceal it from possible enemy avenues of approach and population centers. This preparation can help to identify fields of view and possible observation posts.

The BSB staff must not only consider BSA defense in site selection. It must also consider support for sustainment operations located at the BSA including:

- Ammunition transfer and holding point operations.
- Fueling missions.
- Supply support activity operations.

- Staging areas for convoys.
- Medevac to the nearest role 2 medical facility.

These areas should be large enough to support all operations that are conducted on the BSA by BSB units, forward support companies, and a combat sustainment support battalion. In addition to calculating space for vehicle operations, the staff must consider the space required to incorporate aviation assets and the required helicopter landing zones for aerial resupply and air medevac operations.

Identifying road networks will promote ease of maneuver inside the BSA. Proper planning can minimize congestion as occupation takes place and thus mitigate vehicles’ times on station, negative effects on defense, and safety risks. Once a site is determined, occupying the BSA can take place.

Occupying the BSA

Occupation of the BSA is an organized and thoroughly planned action that begins with the quartering party. The quartering party is key to the initial execution. Its presence is the first opportunity that the unit has to see the terrain and make adjustments to the BSA and defense.

The quartering party verifies site selection and makes limited preparations in order to receive the rest of the organization. These preparations include initial security and chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high-yield explosive sweeps. The quartering party can also establish initial communications to begin the transfer of mission command from the tactical assembly area or intermediate staging base to the BSA. Finally, the quartering party establishes tenant areas of responsibility and changes the defense concept as needed.

After the quartering party completes its tasks, the other elements convoy to the BSA. These convoys are normally divided into three types: the advance party, the main body (the

number of main body serials will differ by organization and planning), and a trail party.

Determining when the BSA will achieve initial and full operating capability is essential for planning the concept of support and must be communicated across the BCT. Through the military decisionmaking process, planners must determine when elements of the organization will move to occupy the BSA.

The support operations officer and the S-3 must plan and coordinate when essential logistical platforms must move into the BSA and begin support operations. These movements must support the maneuver plan and the BCT's mission.

Using the clock method to occupy the BSA has been successful at the NTC. (See figure 1.) The entry control point (ECP), where all elements enter the BSA, becomes the first point of reference. Drawing a straight line from the ECP through the battalion tactical operations center and the perimeter places the ECP at 12 o'clock. The tactical operations center is in the middle of the clock, and the opposite side of the perimeter is at 6 o'clock. Next, the perimeter can be divided according to the relative combat strength of the each tenant unit.

The BSA occupation must be well rehearsed. All Soldiers arriving at the BSA should have an understood task and purpose. Unit standard operating procedures should establish the priorities of work for all Soldiers during the occupation and establishment of the BSA.

Establishing BSA Defense

The BSA defense plan changes during all phases of occupation. One of the most important pieces of the initial plan is the emplacement of the ECP. The ECP maintains positive communications with the mission command element and provides early warning of possible enemy threats traveling along high speed avenues of approach.

Many times the ECP has first con-

tact with the enemy and is the first line of defense. The ECP should be well fortified against possible attack and occupied by Soldiers who are trained in ECP operations such as searching vehicles, detaining individuals, and gathering intelligence.

The first priority of work at any assembly area is security. Some of the tasks associated with security are emplacing weapon systems, establishing communications, designating final protective fires and final protective lines, emplacing obstacles and mines, and building fighting positions. For sustainers on the BSA, additional tasks must be incorporated such as placing berms around fuel assets and the ammo in the ammunition transfer and holding point, identifying supply evacuation routes, and establishing decontamination sites. (See figure 2 on page 49.)

Once the perimeter defense is established and supplies are received and ready for distribution, rest and meal plans can be prepared. Without published, enforced, and rehearsed priorities of work, occupation will be frustrated and take longer to complete.

Developing Engagement Areas

As an initial security posture is established and fighting positions are developed, companies are given areas of responsibility that can be divided into three categories: platoon areas, squad or section areas, and fighting positions. Construct fighting positions based on the requirements established in the unit's standard operating procedures. Ensure fighting positions are mutually supportive with interlocking fields of fire. Emplace obstacles to create engagement areas where the unit desires to engage the enemy with its most casualty producing weapon systems.

The seven steps of engagement area development found in Field Manual 3-21.10, Chapter 5, are identify all likely enemy avenues of approach, determine likely enemy schemes of maneuver, determine where to kill the enemy, emplace weapons systems, plan and integrate obstacles, plan and integrate indirect fires, and rehearse the execution of operations in the engagement area.

Leaders must ensure fighting positions, for crew-served and individual weapons, and security are inspected and ready to go. This includes creat-

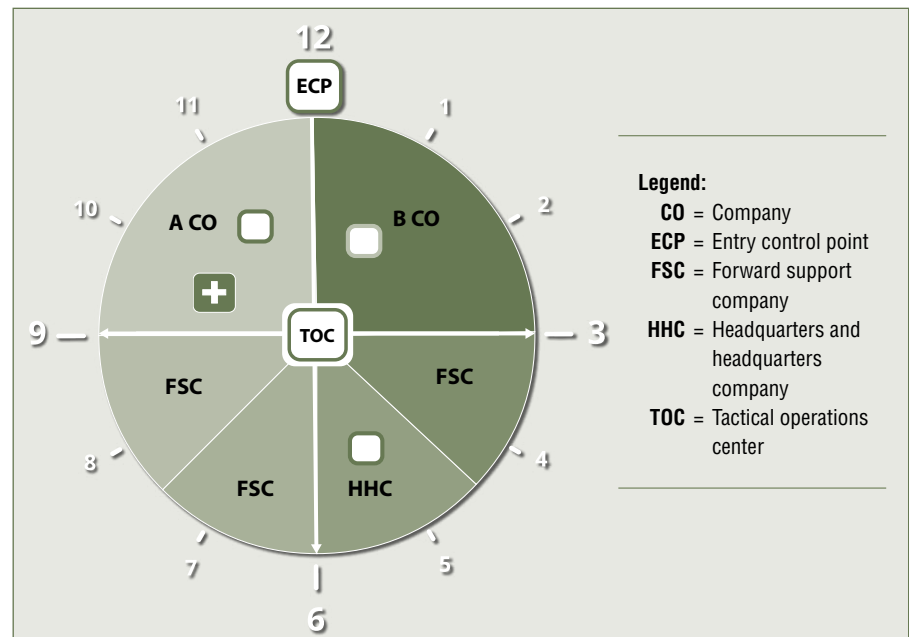


Figure 1. This diagram depicts the clock method for occupying a brigade support area.

ing range cards that help to develop situational understanding of the terrain the BSA occupies.

Range cards from fighting positions are compiled to build sector sketches up to a complete company sector sketch. All companies provide their sector sketches to the BSB S-3. These sector sketches are compiled to give an overall picture of the BSA perimeter defense and are used to develop a BSA sector sketch that can help to direct battle drill efforts.

Integrating Defense Enablers

With a complete picture of the initial defense perimeter, the battalion S-3 can further develop the BSA

defense plan by coordinating with the battalion staff and supporting units. A quick reaction force (QRF) should be established and fall under the command and control of the S-3 battle captain. During battle drills, the QRF provides reinforcing fire support and capabilities to BSA defenses at any location the battle captain specifies. It is imperative that the mission authority of the QRF is established and clear and that all battle drill rehearsals include the QRF.

Target reference points are easily recognizable points on the ground, either natural or man-made, used to control fires. Target reference points should be placed where enemy con-

tact is anticipated to make it easier to call for fire. Once identified, the target reference points are confirmed and coordinated with the BCT fires cell and the field artillery battalion for support.

Observation post locations can be identified and manned with intelligence reporting requirements that have been developed through synchronization with the battalion S-2. These priority intelligence requirements are distributed to all defensive positions. Debriefs should be conducted at the end of each guard shift in order to provide intelligence feedback to the S-2. Units can also leverage aerial intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets, such as Raven unmanned aerial vehicles and aviation assets, to gather intelligence and build defense capabilities. All of these assets provide the battalion commander with a better picture of BSA defense.

Maintaining Fluidity

Support activities conducted in the BSA can either be the force behind the brigade that extends operational reach, or the anchor that holds the brigade back from creating forward momentum in its operations. BSAs must maintain the agility to respond to the needs of the formation and must be mobile and flexible in order to move as required by the brigade's operational tempo.

As conditions change in the area of operations and on the BSA, the shape and perimeter of the BSA as well as its defense plan must be flexible and adjust. When the number and composition of tenet units change, the BSA defense plan also changes.

Leaders must communicate adjustments to ensure all units know and can execute in their respective areas of responsibility.

With limited BSA field training at home station and years of conducting operations from forward operating bases and combat outposts, the skill set and institutional knowledge required to establish a



Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, take cover and return fire as opposing forces assault the battalion's tactical assembly area at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, on Oct. 14, 2015. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Keith Anderson)



Medics treat simulated casualties at the 115th Brigade Support Battalion's aid station during a mass casualty exercise at the National Training Center, on Oct. 14, 2015. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Keith Anderson)

BSA have atrophied.

Defense of the BSA must be rehearsed just as any battle drill. It is the responsibility of leaders to ensure that Soldiers know and understand

how individual efforts support the entire defense plan. All applications of a unit's defense plan must be captured and continuously refined in a standard operating procedure.

As units become more proficient in defense of the BSA and its internal operations, BSBs and their subordinate units will be better prepared to extend operational reach of the BCT by providing coordinated and synchronized sustainment.

Priorities of Work	Time (NLT)
Establish security (minimum of 25%)	Immediate
Position listening and observation posts	+2 hours
Establish communications (to higher and lower echelons)	+2 hours
Emplace crew-served weapons	+2 hours
Complete range cards and sector sketches	+6 hours
Prepare defensive positions	+8 hours
Camouflage positions and equipment	+10 hours
Construct tactical operations center perimeter	+10 hours
Select and prepare alternate and supplementary fighting positions	+14 hours
Establish unit operations	+15 hours
Establish sleep areas	+15 hours
Conduct maintenance operations	+16 hours
Conduct personal hygiene	+18 hours
Serve meals	+19 hours
Rest	+20 hours

Figure 2. Example of priorities of work for a brigade support area.

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