

Deliberate Reorganization: Reconstituting the Force



by Colonel M. Thomas Davis and Captain Steven A. Sliwa

“Dragon 3, this is Red 6! We’ve been hit with massive artillery! Can’t tell yet, but probably lost all 1st Platoon—many casualties! 2d Platoon looks better but had at least one howitzer and one FAARV [Field Artillery ammunition resupply vehicle] destroyed!

“Am gathering wounded for treatment and evacuation! Will provide more details as available! Will be out of action until further notice!”

Receiving such a frantic and sobering call in the battalion tactical operations center (TOC) is every commander’s worst nightmare. It not only means that soldiers, perhaps many soldiers, are dead and injured, but also that the ability of the battalion to perform its combat mission is at least temporarily degraded—perhaps even lost. Units must be prepared to get back into the fight as quickly and as effectively as possible while dealing with the terrible stress caused by mass casualties and the loss of major fighting systems.

Under such demanding circumstances, time becomes a greater enemy than ever before. Decisions have to be made regarding evacuating the dead and wounded, organizing maintenance teams to begin work on battle damage assessment and repairs (BDAR), shifting key personnel and, perhaps, reorganizing entire units.

These are decisions that require two key ingredients: the rapid transmission of information on the status of personnel and equipment and reliance on established procedures and standards for dealing with a situation of such enormous turmoil and confusion. The battlefield is always a poor place for improvisation, but this tenet takes on greater meaning when the fighting unit, the enduring constant of combat, becomes one of the major casualties of a battle.

The 4th Battalion, 82d Field Artillery

(4-82 FA) and its parent organization, the 42d Field Artillery Brigade (42d FA Brigade), then stationed with the United States Army Europe (USAREUR), used a winter rotation to the Grafenwoehr Training Area (GTA) in Germany to conduct a Deliberate Reorganization Exercise. The exercise assessed the battalion’s ability to recover from mass casualties, prioritize and conduct field repairs, reorganize surviving assets, incorporate a new unit into the command and rapidly restore combat capabilities. Although soldiers initially were somewhat dubious about the nature of this exercise and whether it merited another day in the cold and mud of a “Winter Graf,” when completed the exercise was valued as one of the high points of a most successful GTA rotation.

Deliberate—What?

There is some overlap and confusion as to the meanings of reorganization, regeneration and reconstitution. *AR 310-25 Dictionary of United States Army Terms* defines “reorganization” as restoring “order in a unit after combat by replacing casualties, reassigning men, if necessary, replenishing the ammunition supply and performing whatever other actions are necessary or possible to prepare the unit for further attack or pursuit of the enemy.”

FM 100-9 Reconstitution describes reconstitution as the “extraordinary action

that commanders plan and implement to restore units to a desired level of combat effectiveness commensurate with mission requirements and available resources.” The manual further describes reconstitution as a total process having as its major elements “reorganization, assessment and regeneration, in that order.”

According to FM 100-9, there are two types of reorganization: immediate and deliberate. Immediate reorganization is “the quick and usually temporary restoring of degraded units to minimum levels of effectiveness.” This type of reorganization is best illustrated by those actions taken by units when consolidating and reorganizing on the objective to be prepared to either repel counterattacks or continue the attack. Deliberate reorganization is considerably more extensive. It is conducted farther to the rear and may include replacement resources as available, extensive equipment repairs and cross-leveling and, perhaps, some limited retraining.

By contrast, regeneration is the substantially more involved process of rebuilding a unit. It necessitates “large-scale replacement of personnel, equipment and supplies.” Regeneration is controlled by the higher headquarters distributing the replacement assets and is executed by a regeneration task force (RTF) formed by the commander directing the regeneration. This could involve replacing the chain of command and conducting mis-

sion-essential training to restore the “new” unit to acceptable levels of combat capabilities.

As defined by FM 100-9, the exercise conducted by the 42d Field Artillery Brigade and the 4-82 FA was a “deliberate reorganization.” The battalion was forced to disengage from its direct support (DS) mission, evacuate its casualties and damaged equipment to the rear, accept limited replacements and return to the fight within a day. As defined, a deliberate reorganization is the most exhaustive effort in the reconstitution process that a battalion-sized unit can execute in the absence of substantial external support.

Preparing for the Worst

Before the GTA rotation, the battalion took several steps to prepare to accomplish the various tasks inherent in the reorganization exercise to be administered by the 42d FA Brigade. First, the battalion commander and operations officer revised the mission-essential task list (METL) to add reorganization, established the conditions and standards under which the task would be performed, and determined any associated battle tasks (see Figure 1).

Second, the S3 wrote a new annex to the battalion field standing operating procedures (FSOP) describing the procedures to be used. (See Figure 2 for the responsibilities of the S1, S3 and S4, as outlined in the FSOP.) This annex defined command and staff responsibilities, established priorities of effort and, most importantly, defined minimum personnel and equipment requirements for fielding and fighting a firing battery.

Third, the battalion’s existing matrix reporting system was analyzed to ensure it covered the categories of information the batteries needed to report their status after catastrophic losses. The matrix covered 26 kinds of reports the battalion might need from a battery with each report including up to 11 subsets of information. The matrix included reports on casualties and damages that would facilitate a reorganization—for example, Casualty Spot Report, Medical Request, Equipment Loss, etc.

While the battalion developed its procedures, the 42d FA Brigade staff developed an exercise to realistically, yet safely, evaluate the battalion’s ability to conduct deliberate reorganization in a demanding scenario. Using related tasks from the heavy brigade Army training and evaluation program (ARTEP), the brigade staff

METL Task: Conduct Deliberate Reorganization

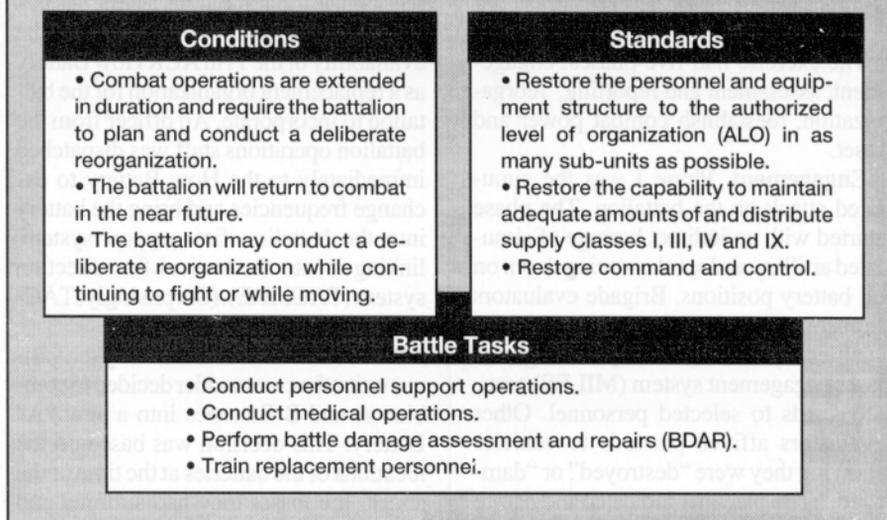


Figure 1: 4-82 FA added Conduct Deliberate Reorganization to its mission-essential task list (METL), determined the conditions and standards under which it had to be prepared to execute the task and identified the associated battle tasks.

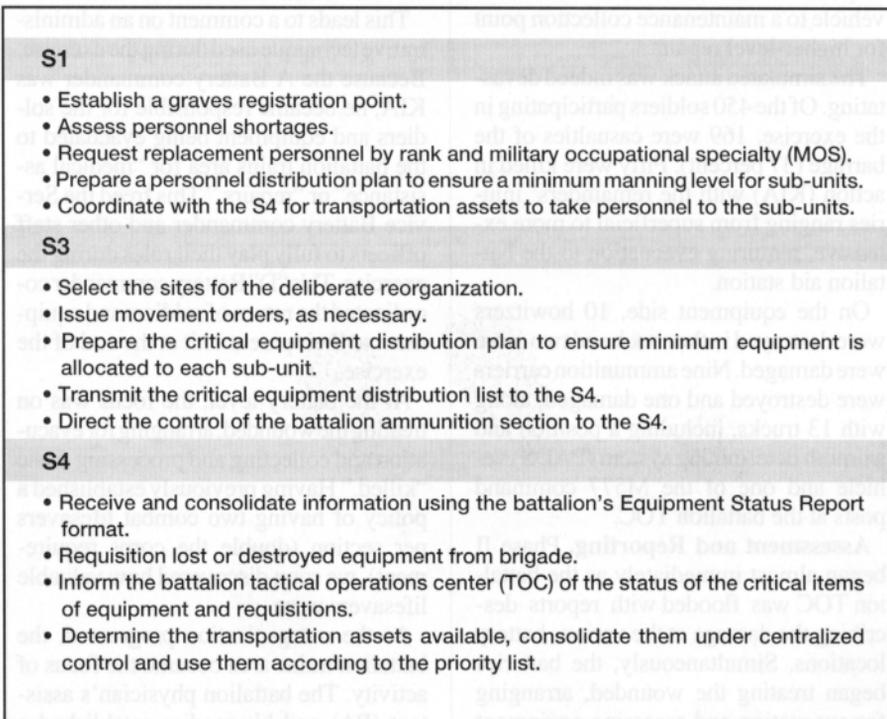


Figure 2: Responsibilities of battalion staff members when conducting a deliberate reorganization (taken from the battalion’s field standing operating procedures, or FSOP).

developed a task-condition-standard checklist to evaluate the battalion’s ability to execute its procedures as defined in the new reorganization annex to the FSOP.

The scenario for the Deliberate Reorganization Exercise was built around other major training events previously planned by the battalion. The 4-82 FA had planned to finish its GTA rotation with a four-day field training exercise (FTX), concluding

with an offensive scenario depicting the battalion DS to the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR). The exercise was conducted with the Howitzer Battery of the 1st Squadron, 11th ACR as part of the How Battery’s rotation to GTA. The How Battery was the replacement unit used to test 4-82 FA’s ability to quickly and effectively incorporate a weapons system replacement unit.

Conducting a Deliberate Reorganization

The exercise had five phases: engagement, assessment and reporting, reorganization, reestablish combat power and reset.

Engagement. Phase I was the simulated attack on the battalion. The phase started with an indirect barrage of simulated artillery and smoke raining down on all battery positions. Brigade evaluators immediately fanned out to assess the casualties by issuing multiple integrated laser engagement system (MILES) casualty cards to selected personnel. Other evaluators affixed placards to vehicles showing they were “destroyed” or “damaged.” The placards indicated the nature of the damage and the length of time the vehicle would be unavailable, assuming the battalion had the appropriate parts, dispatched a mechanic or evacuated the vehicle to a maintenance collection point for higher-level repairs.

The simulated attack was indeed devastating. Of the 450 soldiers participating in the exercise, 169 were casualties of the barrage (37 percent). Fifty were killed in action (KIA) with the remainders’ injuries ranging from superficial to more extensive, requiring evacuation to the battalion aid station.

On the equipment side, 10 howitzers were destroyed in the attack and two more were damaged. Nine ammunition carriers were destroyed and one damaged, along with 13 trucks, including a position and azimuth determining system (PADS) vehicle and one of the M577 command posts at the battalion TOC.

Assessment and Reporting. Phase II began almost immediately as the battalion TOC was flooded with reports describing the damage at the various battery locations. Simultaneously, the batteries began treating the wounded, arranging for evacuation and assessing equipment damage. It was quickly evident that the battalion had been rendered temporarily combat ineffective.

Reorganization. During Phase III, a report was sent to brigade asking for authority to conduct a deliberate reorganization of the battalion. This request was approved and the brigade staff (notionally) began drafting plans to address the immediate loss of fire support while the reorganization was executed.

As a picture emerged regarding the scale of the losses, the battalion commander

and his S3 began considering how best to reorganize the remaining assets. At this point, the brigade staff announced the availability of the 11th ACR How Battery as a replacement organization for the battalion to incorporate. An officer from the battalion operations staff was dispatched immediately to the How Battery to exchange frequencies and bring the battery into the battalion fire support system, linking it into the tactical fire direction system (TACFIRE). (Surprisingly, TACFIRE had survived the attack.)

Based on the losses suffered by the various units, the commander decided to combine A and B Batteries into a new “A” Battery. This decision was based on the locations of the batteries at the time of the attack, the losses they had suffered and the availability of key leaders. Because the A Battery commander had been KIA, the B Battery commander was directed to assume command of the new unit.

This leads to a comment on an administrative technique used during the exercise. Because the A Battery commander was KIA, he became responsible for the soldiers and equipment being evacuated to the battalion trains area for “medical assistance” or “repairs.” This freed the Service Battery commander and other staff officers to fully play their roles during the exercise. This “D” Battery commander coordinated the return of soldiers and equipment to their parent unit at the end of the exercise.

At the battery level, the focus was on treating the wounded, arranging for evacuation and collecting and processing those “killed.” Having previously established a policy of having two combat lifesavers per section (double the corps requirement), we soon discovered how valuable lifesavers were.

As the reorganization progressed, the battalion trains area became the focus of activity. The battalion physician’s assistant (PA) and his medics established a triage area and began “treating” those needing immediate care and arranging for further evacuations of the more seriously wounded.

Simultaneously, the battalion maintenance technician assessed vehicles to determine which needed new parts and which were either donors or recipients of carefully controlled cannibalization. The battalion motor officer spent his time supervising and prioritizing the evacuation of equipment.

Within a few hours, the battalion field



Throughout the reorganization, leaders must focus on putting the battalion “back in business”—if at all possible.

trains were heavily loaded with “wounded” soldiers and “damaged” equipment.

Reestablish Combat Power. In Phase IV, the battalion completed its reorganization. At the TOC, the S3 continued efforts to return as much of the battalion as possible to combat capability. The new A Battery and C Battery had regained a firing capability and How Battery had been incorporated into the battalion fire control system and was up on the fire nets.

To check the effectiveness of the reorganization, a battalion time-on-target mission (live fire) was received from the 11th ACR. When the mission was fired, the results indicated the battalion was “back in business” after a very intensive 10 hours of deliberate reorganization.

Reset. In Phase V, we unscrambled the equipment and soldiers and returned all to their parent units.

Exercise Analysis

During this exercise, we learned several lessons about conducting deliberate reorganizations.

SOP Procedures and Criteria. There must be a portion of the battalion SOP that establishes procedures for reorganization reports and the criteria for determining when units will continue and when they will be combined. The criteria must define the minimum manning and equipment

that must be on hand for a unit to retain viability. We determined, for instance, that a unit had to have at least five howitzers with a firing capability to be a battery and that each howitzer had to have at least a seven-man crew.

Obviously, the criteria can be adjusted based on many competing and, perhaps, some enabling factors. Many people have argued that an M109 howitzer section can operate effectively with less than seven people and cite operations at the Combat Training Centers (CTCs) with four-man crews. While this is true, one must not forget to factor in the demands of 24-hour operations, security requirements, preventive maintenance and the inevitable stress induced in a unit suffering heavy losses. The commander must choose between having a greater number of less capable guns or a smaller number of more capable guns.

Rapid Reorganization Reporting. A simple reporting format, amenable to digital transmission, is a *must*. Everyone must clearly and easily understand the format and the information required in the format—confusion inevitably will cloud an already cloudy situation.

When disaster strikes, battalion staff members will be eager for information, often calling for that information from opposite points of view. The S3 and battalion TOC will focus on what has survived while the battalion logisticians focus on what has been lost. Under the level of stress generated in such a disaster, it's incredibly easy for "three howitzers destroyed" to become "three howitzers operational."

Having a hard copy reporting capability will minimize the potential for errors with digital the best communications method. A key decision that must be made early is whether to place a variable-format message entry device (VFMED) or a battery computer system (BCS) at the battalion administration and logistics operations center or with another command and control node operating in the battalion field trains.

One lesson that was particularly useful and a bit surprising was the limited utility of communicating casualties using battle roster numbers (BRNs). Although using BRNs expedited reporting, it did not provide the information necessary for the battalion personnel section to requisition replacements immediately. The BRNs had to be cross-referenced with other lists to determine the skill levels and military

occupational specialties (MOS) of the casualties. At the end of the exercise, we determined that the raw data of MOS, skill levels and grades was more useful for personnel requisition, which is the immediate concern. The BRNs are more useful in "cleaning up the battlefield"—preparing notification information, evacuating remains and processing awards.

Support Assets. Several assets and items proved to be particularly valuable in dealing with heavy losses of personnel and damage to equipment. As previously mentioned, having two combat lifesavers per section minimized casualties and maximized personnel availability. There will never be enough medics under such demanding circumstances, so large numbers of lifesavers are the best alternative.

Vehicles to be used to evacuate the wounded need to be identified quickly. This is a priority mission. Each howitzer platoon should have two heavy tow bars, and every vehicle should have, as a minimum, a tow cable to facilitate vehicle evacuations—which can simultaneously become casualty evacuations.

There will never be enough recovery vehicles so FAASVs may have to be pressed into service to either evacuate howitzers or become "prime movers" for the howitzers that can still fire. Throughout such a disaster, a battalion should never forget that its firing capability is what allows an artillery unit to do its job.

Leader Decisions. At the battery level, the commander (or his successor who suddenly finds himself in charge) needs to make several quick assessments.

- What is the "larger" problem: equipment, people, senior leadership and supervisors, ammunition, firing capability, fire direction computation or communications? This assessment needs to be passed forward immediately as it will be vital input for major decisions the battalion or, perhaps, brigade commander must make.

- Are the key leaders identified? Those who find themselves in charge need to *know* they're in charge. This is especially true for the smaller sections, such as ammunition or fire direction centers (FDCs).

- Can a firing capability be maintained? The battery needs to report its ability to deliver fires and with what limitations to the battalion S3 as soon as it's feasible.

- Are additional attacks likely? At all levels, but especially at the firing battery level, leaders need to decide whether or not to relocate the unit. This decision will

be based on the type of attack received (artillery or aircraft) and if additional rounds are landing. Leaders must factor into the decision that relocating will magnify the difficulties of fully assessing the unit's capabilities and complicate personnel and equipment evacuations.

If the unit is still receiving fire missions and if the supported unit is in contact, firing elements should remain in place—if at all possible. The decision to stay or move under such circumstances is a tough one the unit leader must face.

There can be no question that operating under the adverse conditions of major personnel and equipment losses will be difficult. But units can accomplish the reorganization tasks while under great stress if they have prepared for such an eventuality during demanding, realistic training. Units must temper the ideas and observations offered in this article to apply to their circumstances in different environments.

Deliberate reorganization—potentially a complete reconstitution—is a tough mission, but peacetime training will help protect soldiers and keep the unit in the fight if the commander's worst nightmare becomes reality.



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