

Platoon Autonomy in Multinational Operations

by Captain Jonathan E. Howerton

Howitzer Battery, 3d Squadron, 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment was the primary American contingent with the Nordic-Polish Brigade of Task Force Eagle, the Multinational Division (North) in Bosnia-Herzegovina. How Battery was in direct support (DS) of this multinational brigade for Operation Joint Guard from October 1997 until July 1998.

The Nordic-Polish Brigade occupies the largest area of responsibility within the task force: 4,400 square kilometers. In addition to the small contingent of American troops, the brigade consists of elements from Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Poland, Lithuania, Slovenia and Latvia.

DS fires for a brigade normally are provided by an FA battalion. For our How Battery to provide the same coverage, we had to task organize into four firing elements, bringing autonomous operations to a new level—the platoon. Although this is nothing new to our Paladin brethren, for an M198 battery with eight howitzers, this is a new concept.

Organization and Command, Control and Communications. To prepare for our unique mission, we took our table of organization and equipment (TOE) tailored to conduct battery autonomous operations and modified it further to conduct platoon autonomous

operations. (See Figure 1.) With a strength of 159 soldiers, the battery executed four manned and operational fire direction centers (FDCs) and four separate firing elements of two howitzers each. Basically, the platoon leaders fought mini-batteries and the battery commander fought a mini-battalion.

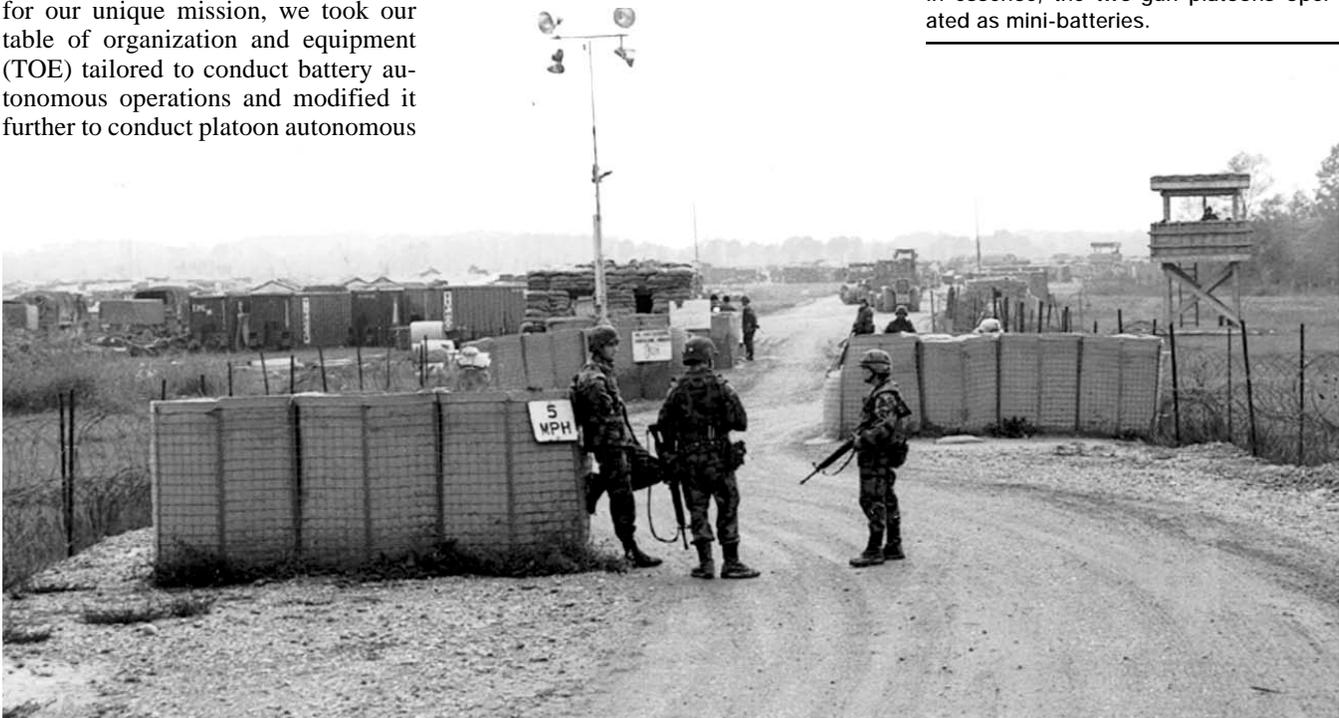
From a battery operations standpoint, working with the Nordic-Polish Brigade was really no different than working with an American maneuver brigade. This is because the Nordic-Polish Brigade used an American fire support element (FSE) at the battalion and brigade levels and American fire support teams (FISTs) for the maneuver companies as the liaison between the battery and the maneuver unit. It was transparent to the battery that it was to provide DS support to units from eight countries.

One of the battery's most unique challenges was our command relationship. The typical maneuver squadron task organization has the battery in a DS role to the squadron. The squadron provides the battery operational, logistical and administrative support.

But in the Nordic-Polish Brigade, the battery was supported predominantly by the Force FA Headquarters, which was the 1st Armored Division Artillery. However, the battery was still tied to the squadron for basic administrative and logistic purposes. Operationally, it was tied to the Nordic-Polish Brigade in a DS role and the Force FA Headquarters in a general support (GS) role and, logistically, to all three headquarters.

- Four Fire Direction Centers (FDCs) with Personnel and Equipment
- Four Firing Elements of Two Guns Each
- Organic Assets:
 - Survey Section
 - Four Ammunition Sections
 - Fueler
 - Wrecker
- Attached Assets:
 - Meteorological Section
 - Q-36 Firefinder Radar
 - Battalion Aid Station

Figure 1: Recommended 3x8 M198 Battery MTOE Alterations for Platoon Operations. In essence, the two-gun platoons operated as mini-batteries.



The battery occupied two base camps separated by 40 kilometers. In addition, the battery headquarters was 30 kilometers from the Nordic-Polish Brigade Headquarters, 125 kilometers from the squadron headquarters at Camp McGovern, 60 kilometers from the division artillery headquarters at Eagle Base and 40 kilometers from the regimental support squadron (RSS) at Guardian Base.

Our communications architecture supported the mission, but not without difficulties. We had retransmission sites for voice and digital communications, but because of terrain, we had to relay both through the Nordic-Polish Brigade FSE. Although the relays were effective, they were cumbersome and often slow. The battery also had mobile subscriber radio-telephones (MSRTs) and tactical satellite (TACSAT) as other forms of secure communications. AT&T phones were available.

The battery was organized into a light/heavy platoon configuration. The light platoon (1st Platoon) was collocated with the Danish Army at Camp Valhalla, and the heavy platoon (2d Platoon and Headquarters Platoon) was with the Swedish Army at Camp Caisson. Camp Caisson was selected as the battery headquarters because it's along the main supply route (MSR) between Camp Valhalla and Guardian Base. It also is closer to Eagle Base and Camp McGovern.

Although the "official" language of the brigade was English, it was important to understand that not everyone spoke English at the same level of proficiency. Daily intelligence briefings, fragmentary orders (FRAGOs) and operation orders (OPORDs) from the brigade headquarters were not always clear and precise. The familiar five-paragraph OPOrd format was used, which helped, but there were times when clarification was necessary. It was crucial to remember that communications frustrations went both ways and that everyone labored under the burden of the communications barrier.

We learned to ask about anything questionable. Although written orders and reports were, at times, worded a little unusually, the actual call-for-fire format was the same. Although we never had to fire a mission, there would have been very little misunderstanding of when/how to do it if we had.

Tactics and Operations. The battery's primary mission in the Nordic-Polish Brigade area of responsibility (AOR)



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was to provide artillery support during weapons storage site inspections. This was accomplished either by laying on a priority target from the base camp or conducting an artillery raid. In addition, the battery also conducted presence missions in the AOR. Any movement in the brigade's AOR required a minimum of four-vehicle convoys.

The Raid. The purpose of the two-gun raid was to provide fires in support of a unit conducting a weapons storage site inspection. The platoon conducting the raid would, if needed, fire on the weapons storage site, based on our graduated response/clearance procedures.

The initial raid process began with a map reconnaissance for the prospective position areas (PAs). The PA selection phase was difficult in the Balkan region because of the mine/unexploded ordnance danger. Indicators of a mine-cleared area include freshly mown grass, frequently traveled areas and graveled/paved areas. Two additional safety resources were the Balkan mine map and the Nordic-Polish Brigade engineer computer database, both of which indicated known minefields and areas with unexploded ordnance.

The next step was a more detailed reconnaissance of the proposed PA by a reconnaissance team composed of the battery commander, the two platoon leaders, the two gunnery sergeants and the battery survey section. Once the site was determined to be cleared, the reconnaissance party arrived at the PA and decided whether or not it was tenable. Factors considered when selecting the PA were site-to-crest, distance

from MSRs (force protection) and solidity of the ground.

The vast majority of the ground in the Nordic-Polish Brigade area is farmland. With the M198 howitzer weighing 16,000 pounds, most of that land can't support a howitzer during the winter season. Therefore, harder, more durable PAs had to be located when we arrived in Bosnia. The best alternatives were parking lots adjacent to the grassy fields or areas near coal processing plants that collect dust on the ground.

Once the PA was selected, survey control was conducted by the battery survey section and verified by the gunnery sergeants. All survey data and a sketch of the PA was sent to the Force FA Artillery Headquarters.

The battery received the next week's raid and priority target worksheet from the Nordic-Polish Brigade FSE on Fridays and was briefed Saturdays at the battery training meeting. Twenty-four hours before departing for the raid, the platoon leader determined the azimuth of fire from data provided by the Nordic-Polish Brigade FSE and the Force FA Headquarters. This was data on the location of the target, the target number, observer, weapons storage site number and the in-place ready-to-fire time.

Twelve hours before the raid, the section chiefs were briefed and a rehearsal using the PA sketch was conducted to identify any problems. Two hours before the raid, pre-combat checks and inspections were conducted. Thirty minutes prior to start time, the Force FA Headquarters issued a convoy number to the platoon.

Once the platoon had its convoy number, the convoy commander gave the convoy/safety briefing (see Figure 2). Because we didn't have a squadron-

- Intelligence Update
- Convoy Number
- Convoy Frequency (Single Channel, Secure)
- Route of March (Route Names and Checkpoints)
- Order of March
- Actions at the Halt
- Breakdown Procedures
- Region-Specific Safety Concerns (Road Conditions, Civilian Traffic Concerns, etc.)
- Force Protection Level
- Risk Assessment and Control Measures

Figure 2: Raid Convoy and Safety Briefing

Day One: Hot Gun and Sergeant's Time. The Hot Gun section lays on the targets assigned by the Nordic-Polish Brigade fire support element (FSE) to support patrols and weapon storage site inspections within the range of the section's Copperhead. When the fire direction center (FDC) receives a mission, it passes the laying data on to the section via radio, which passes the data on to the gun. The laying standard is three minutes under normal conditions and four minutes for adverse conditions with an additional four minutes added for out-of-traverse missions. The secondary mission of the Hot Gun section is to conduct Sergeant's Time training.

Day Two: Training and Maintenance. In the first half of the day, soldiers pull maintenance on their personal and section equipment. The second half is section-level training. The secondary mission is to support the battery's raid or presence mission.

Day Three: Force Protection. All the battery base camp guards for 24 hours come from the same section with the chief of section acting as commander of relief and the gunner as the sergeant of the guard.

Day Four: Reconstitution. This is a "day off" with the secondary mission of supporting a raid or presence mission.

Figure 3: Battery's Four-Day-Mission Cycle. Each section rotated through the four-day cycle during weekdays. On the weekend, only the Hot Gun and Force Protection tasks were performed by two sections on Saturday and two on Sunday.

level headquarters for immediate command and control, the Force FA Headquarters controlled and tracked our convoys.

The raid party consisted of the platoon leader, gunnery sergeant, two howitzer sections, half of the fire direction center (FDC) personnel with the lightweight computer unit (LCU), the platoon ammunition section, survey and the attached meteorological section. The ammunition section provided additional ammunition for all contingencies as well as Class IV materials for force protection.

Each howitzer section's advanced party man rode with the gunnery sergeant. Once the convoy was within three kilometers of the PA, the convoy split. The gunnery sergeant's vehicle with the FDC and Class IV/V vehicle moved ahead of the convoy to establish the position while the platoon leader and the two howitzer sections slowed down to give the advance party additional time.

When the howitzers arrived in the PA, the guides positioned the two guns and the gunnery sergeant laid them. The platoon leader then safed the firing elements.

The raid party arrived at the PA 30 to 45 minutes before the in-place ready-to-fire time established by the Nordic-Polish Brigade or Force FA Headquarters. This allowed the raid party to complete several tasks—verify survey control, fly a met, emplace observation posts, surround the PA with concertina wire and compute the initial firing data. Once it was ready to fire, the raid party remained in position and laid on the

target until the weapons storage site inspection was complete (time varied with each inspection). This gave the platoon leader the opportunity to assess the training of his gun sections and FDC in a field environment.

Presence Mission. This mission was similar to the two-gun raid in composition with the platoon sent into the AOR as a show-of-force. The planning procedures for the presence mission were essentially the same as those for the raid with the exception of not having an actual target to lay on and, therefore, no requirement for an in-place ready-to-fire time.

The presence mission doubled as a training mission, allowing the platoon leader to meet his training objectives to prepare for the battery's training objec-

tives. It was an opportunity to provide sections not involved with base camp force protection or Hot Gun tasks to train outside of the restrictive confines of the base camp. (See Figure 3.)

FDC Operations. A single howitzer battery supporting a brigade presented some unique situations for a platoon FDC. Because our platoons operated in a split configuration (two-gun raids), the FDC also split. The luxury of sending an entire FDC forward was not possible when a firing capability had to be maintained at the base camp.

We had two support missions, primarily for weapons storage site inspections: priority targets and two-gun raids. When raids were sent out, we sent the fire direction NCO (FDNCO) or the chief computer, a horizontal control operator and a vertical control operator in the fire direction shelter (M1037) with the LCU as the primary capability and the chart as the back up. The small number of personnel forward still had to meet mission processing time standards.

The rear element remaining at the base camp had to rely on other means of computing data. Because the platoon FDC had only one computer, the rear element relied on the backup computer system (BUCS) or chart-to-chart checks.

We had to study technical considerations a bit more carefully than usual. (See Figure 4.) The only live firing range in Bosnia is Glamoc, which was more than 200 kilometers from our two camps. Calibration had to be done, and done correctly, when the opportunity presented itself.

Logistics and Maintenance. The arrival of the battery headquarters at Camp

- 1. Accurate Target Location.** The fire support team (FIST) and firing element must have common survey and common call-for-fire procedures.
- 2. Accurate Battery Location.** All firing points must have proper fourth order survey data. The battery must have enough aiming circles to conduct split-platoon operations, if necessary.
- 3. Accurate Ammunition Information.** Calibration must be done at a suitable time and to standard.
- 4. Accurate Meteorological.** The battery's attached meteorological section can support two, two-gun raids only if the raids (platoons) are within 25 kilometers of each other. The battery must be alert to unusual effects changes when transitioning from the valley to the mountains or vice versa.
- 5. Accurate Computations.** For split-platoon operations, the battery sends the lightweight computer unit (LCU) forward with the raid and uses octant graphic firing table (GFT) settings and terrain-gun position corrections (TGPC) at the base camp. Position constants don't transition well for nonstandard missions unless fourth order survey is completed. If the firing element is unable to conduct registration, it must compensate with accurate survey.

Figure 4: Five Requirements for Accurate, Predicted Fire- Lessons Learned

Caisson set into action a series of tasks it had to accomplish. When the 1st Infantry Division's FA battalion left as the Force FA Headquarters, its critical logistical infrastructure left with it: service battery. Our biggest challenge in the logistical arena was to operate without a service battery. Because of the distance to our parent headquarters, we were given authority to receive all logistical support through the RSS at Guardian Base.

We had to be aware of battery limitations. The MTOE for a 155-mm howitzer battery is not designed for the continuous split-platoon operations we had to accomplish. We had to consider platoon operations demands on Class VII items, such as aiming circles, LCUs, power supplies and other property book items over and above what the battery had.

The battery's commodity areas began establishing supply accounts with the RSS and coordinating the delivery of all classes of supplies, mail, direct support maintenance and the delivery of equipment shipped by container. Without the transportation assets of service battery, our first order of business was to find the transportation unit assigned to provide logistics packages (LOGPACs) to Camps Caisson and Valhalla. Once scheduled, the LOGPAC ran three days a week to both our camps and provided our Class I, II, III, VII, IX and mail.

The LOGPAC brought the classes of supplies easily, but mail was a challenge. We had to submit a series of memorandums through commands to get our mail delivered to the RSS mailroom and then get soldiers certi-

fied as mail-handlers. The mail came via LOGPAC three days a week—the other days we had to pick it up at Camp Eagle.

Because of our size, RSS didn't provide a forward area support team (FAST) for services or DS repairs. The first thought was to send the equipment through the FAST at Camp McGovern, but distance made that impractical. After coordinating with the RSS, a DS support contact team was sent from Guardian Base on an as-needed basis.

One of the limitations of an M198 battery is its hauling capabilities. Even with a battery ammunition section, the battery only can haul one-third of its unit basic load (UBL); each prime mover only carries 25 complete rounds. To increase the ammunition count forward on raids, we used one of the ammunition section's trucks to carry an additional 34 complete rounds. The truck's ammunition trailer carried the Class IV items required to secure the raid PA. This Class IV/V truck accompanied all raid and presence missions. The remainder of the UBL was stored in tactical download sites at each howitzer. These sites alleviated the necessity of base camp ammunition supply points.

Units preparing for deployment to an isolated area should consider several



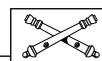
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issues—not the least of which are logistical issues (see Figure 5).

Operating in the Nordic-Polish Brigade was not only operationally challenging, but also environmentally challenging. Sharing base camps with two very proud Scandinavian armies, the battery existed in an environment unlike any other company level unit in the task force. Although Camps Caisson and Valhalla did not have all the amenities of a large American base camp (Sprint morale phones, email services, an on-base chaplain, contract food services) it did offer unique benefits. Our soldiers shared cultural, sports and professional experiences with our allied partners.

Serving DS to a multinational brigade and executing platoon operations for nonstandard missions was a challenge for our How Battery. But one can only see more of such unique challenges for America's artillery in the future.

- Who will provide the logistical support for the unit?
- How often will this support be needed?
- What items will be required in the unit's logistics package (LOGPAC)?
- How will rations be delivered?
- What are the requirements for cooks? (Some base camps might not have contract cooks; recommend three to four cooks per battery base camp to allow for leave and contingencies.)
- Who will provide direct support (DS) maintenance?
- Will the unit work directly with the DS maintenance elements or will a forward area support team (FAST) be provided?
- What is the maintenance work order process?
- Is the unit's support element qualified to pick-up and deliver mail?
- What are the qualification procedures for mail handlers?
- Are there authorized ammunition storage areas available to store the remaining part of the unit's basic load (UBL)?
- How will routine communications operate? Who will establish voice and digital retransmissions?



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Figure 5: Logistical Considerations for Units Deploying to Isolated Areas