

"Our enemy on freedom's frontier is adapting to our tactics every day, so we must adapt and change our tactics to defeat this threat." SMA Kenneth O. Preston

As convoy training and operations continue to evolve, Soldiers in various mission occupational specialties and locations learn about convoy operations differently. The bottom line is that mission and situation determine reaction, and that training is key to taking the correct action. All Soldiers learn that in an asymmetrical combat environment, every movement is a . . .

Movement to contact

By Master Sgt. Sue Harper

An infantry unit is attacked while mounted, and the road is not blocked. The infantry unit attacks. Under the same conditions, a combat service support unit is attacked. That unit lays down suppressive fire and speeds out of the area. Is this tactic, known in the theater vernacular as "blast," wrong?

No, experts say. The answer to the question of to blast or not to blast lies in the mission and in training. Combat service support (CSS) units and infantry units react to enemy fire on an unblocked convoy in different ways and both are correct. In an effort to keep up with, or stay ahead of, changing enemy tactics, convoy operations training continues to evolve with the help of leaders who assist in developing tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs). While this evolution of training and tactics takes different shapes at different locations, one element remains steadfast; vigilance by every Soldier in the convoy is a major factor for success.

"Every Soldier must now have the mindset that every movement is a movement to contact," said the Company B

Commander at the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy, Command Sgt. Maj. Edwin Moten who served as a command sergeant major for a unit that is still serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF).

But an attitude adjustment alone is not enough without training. And training evolves quickly in today's Army of innovation. Because of this, convoy live-fire classes are not conducted in the same way throughout the Army.

"At every installation where Convoy Operations training is conducted, it is done a little bit differently and continues to evolve with every lesson learned, said Training and Doctrine Command's Command Sergeant Major Anthony J. Williams. "This is because every installation conducting training on convoy operations has integrated combat veterans who also bring their lessons learned to the table."

But it's not just a difference of training from one coast to the other, it's a difference in training from one time to the next. Soldiers say, "This is not how we did this last time."

"This is of course a sentiment that is heard from every convoy live fire class, but even so, every convoy live fire class is not the same, and as long as there are lessons learned, the class will not be the same the next time the Soldier goes through the training," said Staff Sgt. Edward M. Stepp, an instructor for NCOES and Training



Photo by Maj. Mark Wright, 21st Theater Support Command PAO

Spc. Annie J. Fletcher, a gunner with 272nd Military Police Company, 95th Military Police Brigade, 37th Transportation Command, 21st Theater Support Command, keeps watch outside an Iraqi police station in downtown Baghdad.

Convoy Defense at the Transportation Officers Basic Course at Fort Eustis, Va.

For example, because of past lessons learned, the Transportation school trains its Soldiers to react as though they have no infantry escort, Stepp said. When the officer and Soldier graduates arrive in Iraq they will find that method of training valuable. Most CSS units currently supporting Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom, from small units like the Headquarters, Headquarters Command, 57th Signal Battalion, to large units like 13th COSCOM operating in the Baghdad area, provide their own security. Signal Soldiers providing security for signal Soldiers does not and has not invoked undue alarm from the command sergeant major of that unit.

"It all comes back to training. A trained Soldier will definitely react," said Command Sgt. Maj. Vernon Praymous. His Soldiers run in small convoys of homemade up-armored HMMWVs every 72 hours in the Baghdad area.

Command Sgt. Maj. Dan Elder of 13th COSCOM echoed this sentiment adding that in a combat environment with no clear front or rear lines -- which can translate into more military traffic -- convoy training is even more critical. In general, Elder's unit covered a million miles weekly. This mileage was reached by having about 1,000 vehicles on the road in around 200 convoys daily.

In roughly 111 convoy missions, the signal Soldiers have come under fire four times. That number of attacks might seem low, but Soldiers who are prepared and vigilant are less likely to come under fire, said Command Sgt. Maj. Jeffrey Butler of the 16th Military Police Brigade, which has a variety of missions in the Baghdad area including main supply route patrols and convoy security



Photo by Maj. Mark Wright, 21st TSC PAO

Capt. Jason Marquiss, 272nd MP Company commander, looks out through the bullet-scarred windshield of his Armored HMMWV in Baghdad, Iraq

escorts. Preparedness and vigilance are basic ingredients to convoy operations and training no matter the mission.

"There are no admin moves. You must always be on the offensive. Every Soldier must maintain a 360-degree security and alternate high-low," Moten said.

While remaining alert is not a magic talisman guaranteed to ward off all attacks every time, the opposite behavior is virtually an invitation to contact.

"We have seen that generally a softer

looking convoy is going to be attacked," Butler said. "Softer looking might be convoys containing contractor SUVs and civilian tractor trailers. Hard targets are convoys with vigilant gunners in the turrets and passenger Soldiers actively watching their sectors," Butler said.

Vigilant or not, once a convoy is attacked and the road ahead is unblocked, the convoy commander has two options; attack or blast.

"[The Soldiers of 16th Signal] have blasted through each time," Praymous said. "Our main objective is to complete the mission. My Soldiers are prepared to attack should the circumstances dictate that reaction."

Aside from the mission, the other reason his Soldiers don't stop and engage is the



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CONVOY OPS



DoD photo by Air Force Staff Sgt Ashley Brokop

Soldiers with the "Steel Dragons" of the 1st Cavalry Division provide security for a convoy to Taji, Iraq, June 14.



Photo by Spc. Brandi Marshall Coalition Press Information Center

A U.S. Army convoy rolls into Fallujah, Iraq, Nov. 13, in support of Operation Al Fajr (New Dawn).

risk of attrition of equipment.

“Never, ever leave anything with a U.S. on it behind,” Praymous said.

This blast through course of action can be the most tactically sound decision available.

“If you have a log pack of (military tractor trailers) maintaining tactical distance, you could have a convoy that stretches a mile and a half. To have a handful of Soldiers stretched out for a mile and a half launch a counter attack would not be tactically sound,” Stepp said.

With this in mind, units like the 16th Military Police, use both the blast-through and the attack to react to contact while mounted and unblocked as mission and

situation dictate, Butler said. His unit has endured 350 Improvised Explosive Device attacks and discovered 200 IEDs before they could be detonated during its 12-month tenure in the Baghdad arena. That number includes suicide bombers or vehicle borne IEDs, VBIEDs.

To combat VBIEDs, the versatile MP unit also helped develop TTPs, one of which calls for convoys to maintain a buffer zone that civilian vehicles cannot enter.

Warning shots are fired at suspicious looking vehicles that violate the buffer zone.

“This of course depends on the road you are on, traffic conditions, and other factors. Say for example, the buffer is

encroached by a family — man, wife and children — riding in a car. That is not going to be as suspicious, as say a younger single male driving an older car,” Butler said. That is not to say that tactics won’t change, and terrorists and insurgents won’t next use family groups for suicide missions.

“Convoy operations are critical in asymmetrical warfare or while fighting an insurgency because there are no front lines, there is no ‘rear’ area in which to stage and travel safely from, and every stretch of the MSR and ASR should be considered hostile territory,” Elder said. “Everybody has to get somewhere so no unit or individual is exempt from this requirement.”



Photo by Sgt. April Johnson, Coalition Press Information Center

U.S. Soldiers provide security during a convoy to Baghdad, Iraq, May 28.

Engagement considerations for convoy operations

Sources for this story suggest NCOs need to stress that while moving offensively in reaction to an ambush the following is kept in mind:

- Rules of Engagement do not change during an ambush.
- Target enemy, not the noncombatant.

- Soldiers should always be aiming; targeting what they are going to shoot and then shoot it. "Don't throw rounds at a direction or a sound. Soldiers should be acquiring a target and firing at that target."
- Direct target firing is preferred over suppressive fire.

- Muzzle awareness should always be maintained.
- Soldiers should return fire and shoot to kill.
- Before contact, Soldiers should know the unit Standard Operation Procedures and their chains of command.



Photo by Maj. Mark Wright, 21st Theater support command PAO

Sgt. Charles Bowers of the 272nd Military Police Company, 95th Military Police Brigade, 37th Transportation Command, 21st Theater Support Command, waves traffic away from convoy as he attempts to maintain a buffer zone between the convoy and downtown Baghdad traffic.

Training considerations for convoy operations

Sources for the story advise that in country training should continue in:

- React to contact from a vehicle – a non-standard class, and dismounted. Each of these areas must be graduated in difficulty and in urban threat environment.
- Familiarization and hands on training of foreign weapons including AK-47s, RPKs, RPG launchers and warheads, and PKMs.
- Load, fire, clear, and reduce misfires and stoppages of all crew-served weapons.

- Reflexive and quick fire training using burst fire. This training should include 9 mm, M249 Automatic weapons and shotguns.
- Conduct terminal effects demonstration on engine blocks, vehicle doors concrete and various materials using FM 3-06.11 as a guide. This training will help leaders choose the right weapon system and facilitate decision-making in combat.
- Practice weak-side firing and tactical magazine changes.
- Dismount drills upon contact.

- Mounted firing while moving.
- How to react to an IED/VBIED attack.
- How to respond during a mortar attack.
- Vehicle hardening techniques.
- Pedestal-mounted, crew-served weapons techniques.
- Radio communications.
- First aid and buddy aid.
- Crew drills.
- 9-line MEDEVAC procedures.
- Submitting spot/ salute reports.
- Unit SOPs and chains of command.
- Premovement, precombat checks.