



Religious Support During Large-Scale Combat Operations

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Introduction

The U.S. Army's readiness focus is large-scale combat operations (LSCO).¹ These combat operations typically involve multiple divisions, corps, and multinational partners. One mechanism that divisions and echelons above division use to prepare for LSCO operations is the Warfighter Exercise (WFX). In November 2022, the 3rd Infantry Division (3ID) was the training audience for WFX 23-02. 3ID fought a LSCO scenario in the European theater. One of the division's critical training objectives was operationalizing sustainment to facilitate successful combat operations.

The fluid, fast-paced, and destructive nature of LSCO stresses the sustainment warfighting function. The systems that comprise this warfighting function ensure freedom of action, extend operational reach, and prolong endurance for commanders and their units across the range of military operations.² Sustainment consists of four elements: logistics, financial management, personnel services, and health service support.³

To prevail in combat, leaders at echelon must ensure the appropriate level of support by integrating and synchronizing these elements across all the warfighting functions. Personnel services are the functions that "...man the force, maintain Soldier and family readiness, promote the moral and ethical values of the nation, and enable the fighting qualities of the Army."⁴ Religious support (RS) is a component of personnel services and is critical to operationalizing sustainment.

The 3ID division chaplain section (DCS) leveraged WFX 23-02 as an opportunity to develop and test systems for planning and synchronizing RS in an LSCO environment. 3ID RS leaders used the following performance objectives to initiate planning efforts: "The 3ID chaplain section and Unit Ministry Teams (UMTs) must provide comprehensive RS in an environment characterized by 1) A rapid tempo of operations, 2) constant re-task organization of battalions, and 3) an increased size of the organization, especially in the rear area/Division Support Area (DSA)."

Over the course of the pre-exercise series of command post exercises, WFX academics, and execution of WFX 23-02, 3ID RS leaders determined horizontal and vertical staff integration is vital to providing comprehensive RS in the LSCO environment because of the increased battlefield complexity.

This paper contains four subsections. The first section is an overall look at synchronizing the division's RS plan with the tactical plan from the division chaplain and master religious affairs noncommissioned officer (RA-NCO) perspective. The second section contains observations and recommendations from the RS team at the rear command post (RCP). The third section conveys thoughts from the division sustainment brigade (DSB) UMT in the DSA. The final section is the DSB RA-NCO's reflections on lessons he took away from WFX 23-2.

Synchronizing the Religious Support Plan with the Tactical Plan

Synchronizing the RS plan with the tactical plan throughout the operations process was vital to the DCS's ability to operationalize UMT efforts at echelon. The G5 team was one of the first staff touchpoints the DCS made each day because the operations cycle begins with planning.

The division chaplain and master RA-NCO, located at the main command post (MCP), leveraged several G5 and G35 products to anticipate RS needs down to the battalion level. This practice helped the DCS determine the RS priorities. One of the first and last products the team looked at each day was the operations schedule (OPSKED). The G5 and G35 sections updated this product daily to facilitate shared understanding across the division. Using the OPSKED enabled the DCS to anticipate RS needs across the depth of the division battlespace based on each unit's mission.

The DCS focused on the air tasking orders for 48 to 120 hours out, which helped determine how RS could help the sustainment warfighting function prolong the division's endurance. The section could contribute input to fragmentary orders (FRAGORDs) if the RS plan no longer supported the tactical plan.

The daily concept of operations was another product the G35 published to facilitate shared understanding. This product depicted the task and purpose of each unit for the next 24 hours of operations. The use of this product from an RS perspective was that it helped leaders anticipate RS needs in the next 48 hours. Though there was little that the DCS could influence in the 0-to-24-hour timeline, understanding what the units were doing during this time was critical in anticipating which units might take the most casualties or which might be out of contact, facilitating the ability for spiritual refit.

The daily FRAGORD was another critical product. The updated task organization (Annex A) of the daily FRAGORD helped the DCS visualize where subordinate UMTs were on the battlefield, which headquarters had control of those assets, and how many UMTs the division had available.

3ID has 25 organic UMTs, plus the DCS. During WFX 23-02, the division grew to 61 UMTs, a 144 percent increase in UMT strength. Additional units task organized to the division, increased the division's span of control. Separate battalions, such as the engineers or civil affairs, detached their companies to support maneuver units. Their UMTs could potentially provide area support in vital areas, especially in the division's rear area.

LSCOs are dynamic, especially in transitioning from competition to conflict. Chaplain corps leaders coordinating RS operations in LSCO must know the products their units use to synchronize the fight to facilitate comprehensive RS across the division's battlespace. These products also enable shared understanding with subordinate brigade (BDE) and separate battalion UMTs.

Chaplain sections should use their division's staff products as a basis for developing the DCS's common operating picture (COP). The 3ID DCS COP spanned from the previous 24 hours out to 72 hours. The MCP DCS sent the COP to the BDE UMTs and the corps chaplain section daily. The DCS also sent the division Annex A and daily concept of operations (CONOP) to help facilitate their ability to receive and hand off battalion UMTs.

In LSCO, the division chaplain section must synchronize division-level RS plans for the division with the corp.⁵ This task is demanding, with only four people spread over two command posts; however, the chaplain section can synchronize RS operations with the tactical plan when they understand how the other staff sections plan and fight. Integrating different staff sections' products and processes facilitates synergy.

Division Chaplain Section Rear Command Post Operations in LSCO

During 3ID's WFX 23-02, the DCS maintained a presence at the MCP and RCP. DCS personnel at the RCP integrated with command and other staff elements to maintain awareness of current and future operations in an ever-changing LSCO environment.⁶

One of the tasks the division chaplain assigned to the RCP UMT was to track the number and location of the subordinate UMTs task organized to 3ID. This objective was initially daunting, given the increasing number of casualties, the constant movement of subordinate units, and the shifting of elements at every echelon to provide mission support to various commands. In addition, the pace of operations at the RCP provided a challenge in keeping information up to date because the team's manning did not support 24-hour operations. The team has a chaplain and an RA-NCO, and two people are not optimal for 24-hour shifts.

Chaplain sections and UMTs must implement procedures to maintain situational awareness and to stay synchronized with the other staff sections. The RCP DCS developed a Command Post Computing Environment (CPCE) COP daily. This action required familiarity and training with the CPCE system, RCP staff integration, and ongoing guidance from the MCP DCS. The COP enabled the RCP DCS to anticipate RS needs 96 hours out, per the division commander's sustainment requirement.

Another training objective was being able to compile the COP without reliance on reports from subordinate UMTs. These UMTs did not have the same communications platforms or access that the division chaplain section had in the MCP and RCP; therefore, the division chaplain directed the RCP team to update the COP based on unit reporting through other staff sections, such as the G1 and the division surgeon section. Using multiple sources of information to build the COP allowed the team to maintain situational understanding at the same level as the rest of the staff, even if the subordinate UMTs were out of contact.

Maintaining situational awareness of anticipated casualties required staff integration with the G1 and division surgeon (DIVSURG). This integration proved crucial in enabling the DCS at the MCP to project where UMTs would need to be to provide RS for casualties and caregivers. While the G1 provided casualty projections by phase and sub-phase, the DIVSURG offered real-time casualty information by unit, military occupational specialty (MOS), and location of theater-level medical support units. The G1 also provided the DCS information on chaplain (56A) and religious affairs specialist (56M) casualties, which helped the division request personnel backfills and ensured UMT coverage.

The RCP division chaplain section is indispensable in synchronizing RS with the broader unit operations. They are the chaplain section's link between the sustainment enterprise and UMTs accomplishing RS as far forward as possible. They enable all the division's UMTs to anticipate RS needs at echelon.

Below is a list of products used to produce the RS COP:

- Combined Sustainment COP
- CPCE locations of lower echelon UMTs
- Daily FRAGORD
- DCS tactical standard operating procedures (TACSOPs)
- DCS Tab D to Annex F, RS priority of effort/unit by phase
- DIVSURG casualty estimates by phase
- G1 12-hour casualty reports
- G1 Daily Annex A
- OPSKED
- Staffing integration for information confirmation and changes to mission

Division Support Area Religious Support in LSCO

High tempo, high resource consumption, high casualty rates, and the commitment of large forces characterize LSCOs.⁷ These factors stretched the sustainment enterprise and affected the DSA. Three aspects of the DSA in a LSCO environment presented new challenges and opportunities for the DSB UMT. Identifying these factors and adjusting to them allowed the DSB UMT to plan for comprehensive RS in the DSA and facilitated the division chaplain section's ability to synchronize RS operations throughout the depth of the battlefield.

First, the DSA's size increased during LSCO. As stated above, the division needed the sustainment enterprise to provide more support rapidly in an increasingly lethal environment. These factors led to the DSA being larger in people and equipment and with more dispersion for survivability. The increased size and complexity of the DSA during WFX 23-02 made it more difficult for the DSA UMTs to keep up with the division's spiritual and religious demands.

Supervisory chaplain sections should designate lead UMTs at critical nodes along the unit's assigned area of operations. One strategy the DSB UMT implemented in conjunction with the DCS was designating the DSB UMT as the lead RS integrator in the DSA and throughout the broader rear area. The DSB UMT synchronized RS of the DSA, the maneuver enhancement brigade (MEB), and medical brigade UMTs in the rear area. This decision allowed the DCS to work through a single point of contact to understand rear and DSA operations. It also facilitated a supervisory relationship between the many separate battalion UMTs the division received through task organization and the DSM UMT.

Second, the DSB UMT ensured the division maintained UMT assets at critical locations throughout the fight. As stated above, the DSB UMT was the lead RS integrator in the DSA and the rear area. During the exercise, they coordinated with the corps for assets to reinforce the field hospital during the DSA's displacement. During the displacement planning process, the DSB UMT recognized a gap in RS coverage that would result because the DSA would jump without the field hospital due to the amount of time it would take the hospital to break down and begin its move. The single UMT in the field hospital could not provide the scope of casualty support needed in the LSCO environment.

The lead UMTs in the deep, close, and rear area units must assess the situation and request additional support if needed. The DSB UMT sent a request for forces through the division chaplain section to the corps chaplain section for the right personnel, equipment, and supplies to ensure the field hospital had adequate UMT coverage. This decision allowed hospital RS providers to remain operational and prepared to support potential medical emergencies during the transition.

Third, the DSB UMT's role in advising the commander on spiritual readiness in the DSA was imperative. FM 7-22, *Holistic Health and Fitness*, emphasizes the importance of developing strong spiritual values to achieve maximum performance and resilience during times of difficulty. Spiritual readiness is vital to the DSB commander's mission.⁸

The dynamics associated with supporting the division during the LSCO operation stressed the sustainment team during WFX 23.02, making it clear that this task will be indispensable in a fight. For the DSB to facilitate the division's freedom of action, operational reach, and endurance, its Soldiers must be able to do those same things on the individual and small-unit levels. The DSB commander is responsible for ensuring that the Soldiers are spiritually fit and ready to meet the demands of their jobs. The UMT is a primary capability in enabling the commander to ensure comprehensive readiness for the unit.

The BDE UMT must advise the commander on emerging trends and how to best meet readiness needs. The DSB UMT planned to use spiritual and morale tools to help the battalion UMTs assess their units' overall readiness. These tools, purposeful presence, and UMT experience help the teams advise the command on the formation's moral, and ethical and spiritual climate.⁹

The DSM UMT worked closely with the other units in the DSA and the rear area to coordinate their efforts and ensure the efficient use of RS assets. The goal was to provide quality care to those who needed it most. The team committed to delivering flexible care for the field hospital's patients and staff during a critical transition. Their willingness to embrace their role as the RS integrator for the DSA and rear area, and the initiative they exercised greatly benefited the entire division.

Division Sustainment Brigade Religious Affairs NCO Operations in LSCO

RA-NCOs play a vital role in the operations process as it relates to RS. To that end, the following section captures some first-person thoughts from the DSB RA-NCO about his experience during his first WFX. In each paragraph, he explains an initial assumption he held and the reality he experienced during the exercise. His thoughts can be a helpful starting place for individual RA-NCOs to prepare for operations and for identifying possible areas for home station UMT training.

"As part of the DSB UMT, the RA-NCO is responsible for battle tracking and advising the command and staff during update briefs and other opportunities. This exercise was my first time serving as the brigade RA-NCO in a WFX; I learned many lessons during WFX 23-02 that I think are important to share.

First, I will share my observations regarding brigade internal UMT processes. I assumed battle tracking would be a convoluted web of constantly tracking UMTs travelling across a wide battlespace to provide ministry to multiple divisions. The reality was that in LSCO operations, the DSA was a transition point for every Soldier in the theater. This reality made the DSA an excellent focal point and a good place to co-locate all our UMTs.

Tracking the combat, replacement, and casualty operations across the battlespace allowed our team to have UMTs in a position to maximize the opportunities to minister to Soldiers. I also believed that one of my highest priorities would be providing religious items resupply as the sustainment brigade UMT. As the exercise developed, it seemed that our primary efforts should be providing UMTs for casualty and reception operations.

Second, operations outside the UMT defied some of my other assumptions. I learned that the task organization is constantly changing in a LSCO environment. It turned out that manning was one of the more interesting problems of the WFX, with entire companies or even battalions getting wiped out or significant changes to the BDE and division task organization daily. Keeping track of the DSA units was another relevant and challenging task, given the fluidity of the fight.

I expected that no one outside of the UMT would be interested in what we were doing day-to-day. It turned out that a sizeable portion of the staff and the command team recognized and emphasized the importance of spiritual resiliency and the UMT's role in LSCO, where our forces could suffer thousands of casualties in a few days. Our team became a focal point in our WFX, even though there was no data specifically related to morale, welfare, and ethical conduct generated by the simulation.

One of the more significant lessons I learned was how lucky I was to have a seasoned staff officer take a minute to walk me through the WFX plan before the exercise started. I could assist or advise peers or senior leaders on what we were doing because I understood the division tactical and sustainment plans. I now intend to actively seek such an exchange before each critical training exercise to reproduce that effect.

Sustainment units differ from anything I have experienced; each culture has its own language and terminology. I spent a great deal of time learning the terms and practices specific to my organization. I do not think a religious affairs specialist needs to strive to know everything about other people's jobs; however, we should have a base level of knowledge about how our teams should synchronize with and complement the supported unit."

Conclusion

Horizontal and vertical staff integration is essential to providing comprehensive RS during LSCO. LSCO is the Army's readiness focus, and chaplain sections and UMTs have critical roles in sustaining their unit's fighting ability.

Simulation exercises such as WFXs provide an excellent opportunity to think through the complexities involved in a LSCO environment. Because chaplain sections and UMTs do not usually have the manning or equipment available to other staff sections, integration is crucial. UMTs can economize their efforts by knowing which staff products they can use to build situational understanding and anticipate RS needs.

Chaplain sections and UMTs must embrace their role as sustainers and use the fundamentals of sustainment to increase their ability to provide RS advice to their commands during the dynamic LSCO fight. RS leaders must leverage every opportunity available to participate in unit collective training.

Chaplain Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) John Scott is the division chaplain for the 3rd Infantry Division. Chaplain Scott was originally commissioned as an Armor officer (1997 to 2006) and completed various assignments including cavalry troop command and civil affairs team leader. His previous chaplain assignments include Garrison Chaplain, Fort Bliss, Texas; Deputy Division Chaplain, 1st Armored Division; Regimental Chaplain, 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment "The Old Guard"; and various assignments at the captain (CPT) level. He is a graduate of the University of Cincinnati with a Bachelor of Science degree in criminal justice; Liberty Baptist University with a Master of Arts in religion; a Master of Religious Education; a Master of Divinity; the U.S. Army Command and General Staff college with a Master of Military Arts and Science; and Wesley Theological Seminary with a Doctor of Ministry.

Chaplain Major (MAJ) John Fimple is the deputy division chaplain for the 3rd Infantry Division (3ID). His previous assignments include serving as a strategic action officer for the Chief of Chaplain's Initiatives Group, Brigade Chaplain, and various battalion assignments at the CPT level. He is a graduate of Ouachita Baptist University with a double major in history and biblical studies with languages; Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary with a Master of Divinity; Phillips Theological Seminary with a Master of Theological Studies; Saint Paul School of Theology with a Doctor of Ministry; and the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College.

Chaplain (CPT) Barton Eskind is the brigade chaplain for the 3ID sustainment brigade. His previous assignments include command chaplain with Special Operations Command, Pacific; squadron chaplain with 3-71 Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 10 Mountain Division (Light Infantry); and multiple assignments over 15 years in the Louisiana, Tennessee; and New York National Guard. He is a graduate of Louisiana State University with a Bachelor of Science in construction management; Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary with a Master of Divinity; and the U.S. Army Chaplain Captain's Career Course. He is currently pursuing a Doctorate in Strategic Leadership through Liberty University.

Staff Sergeant (SSG) Zachary Scahill is the brigade religious affairs NCO for the 3ID sustainment brigade. His previous assignments include training room NCO and Ammunition Section Chief with Alpha Battery, 3-6 Field Artillery Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 10 Mountain Division (Light Infantry); Ammunition Section Chief with Charlie Battery, 2-3 Field Artillery Battalion, 1st Armored Division Artillery. He is a graduate of the Advanced Leader Course.

End Notes

¹ FM 3-0, *Operations* (Department of the Army, Government Printing Office, 1 October 2022, 1-10.)

² FM 4-0, *Sustainment Operations* (Department of the Army, Government Printing Office, 31 July 2019, 1-1.)

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ FM 1-05, *Religious Support* (Department of the Army Government Printing Office, 21 January 2019, 3-3.)

⁶ FM 6-0, *Commander and Staff Organization and Operations* (Department of the Army, Government Printing Office, 16 May 2022, 1-4.)

⁷ FM 3-0, *Operations* (Department of the Army, Government Printing Office, 1 October 2022, 6-1.)

⁸ FM 7-22, *Holistic Health and Fitness* (Government Printing Office, October 2020.)

⁹ FM 1-05, *Religious Support* (Department of the Army Government Printing Office, 21 January 2019, 1-3.)

