

The Combat Trains Desert Laager

*The right formation can provide security
And be ready to move if needed*

by Captain Gregory A. Daddis

Possibly one of the most difficult tasks in squadron-level logistics operations for the cavalry is the movement and security of the trains organizations. In desert terrain, such as the National Training Center (NTC), this potential problem becomes exacerbated. Lack of concealment, large operating distances, and numerous high speed enemy avenues of approach all impact on the service support of the unit. And more often than not, of all six of the sustainment functions, protecting the CSS system is the most overlooked and loosely planned.

One option for protecting a key logistical node, the combat trains, is the use of a 'desert laager formation.' Although the laager formation is mostly identified with line ground troops, it can be easily modified for effective use in a squadron combat trains. In a ground troop, a laager allows for quick movement with simple command and control. The troop is in a box formation, with the two scout platoons in column moving abreast and the two tank platoons following behind their sister scout platoons, also in column. The troop TOC and headquarters elements are in the center of the formation, so in essence the unit moves in three parallel lines. Gun tubes are oriented outwards for an approximate 360 degree circle of security while both moving and stationary. In a moment, we can see how this could be easily applied to a combat trains formation.

FM 17-95, *Cavalry Operations*, states that the combat trains are "normally located well forward and remain mobile." What 17-95 does not depict is a responsive layout for the trains so it can support the squadron on a fast moving battlefield, especially in a desert scenario. In the cavalry, where extended fronts and quick-paced operations are the norm, flexibility is a must for service support. Unfortunately, the very nature of a combat trains, which

can be cumbersome if linked into a unit maintenance collection point (UMCP), does not lend itself to such flexibility. Security also throws a wrench into this, for the trains have limited organic weapons for self-defense, yet maintain quite a large signature.

So, if the trains must operate well forward, remain mobile, and protect itself, it seems the only way all of this can be accomplished is through the formation that is chosen. Formations for the combat trains are somewhat enigmatic and obviously change, based on the tactical situation. Regardless, the combat trains

organization can be a large creature. The combat trains command post (CTCP) can control the squadron's aid station, maintenance collection point, squadron commo section, and unit ministry team (UMT). With medical M113s and downed vehicles in the UMCP, the combat trains can feasibly reach up to twenty vehicles or more. In this situation, the laager formation can greatly assist in mobility and security.

In this formation (see Figure 1), a trains element in the offense, supporting a zone reconnaissance or movement to contact, can move efficiently behind the forward troops. Either the

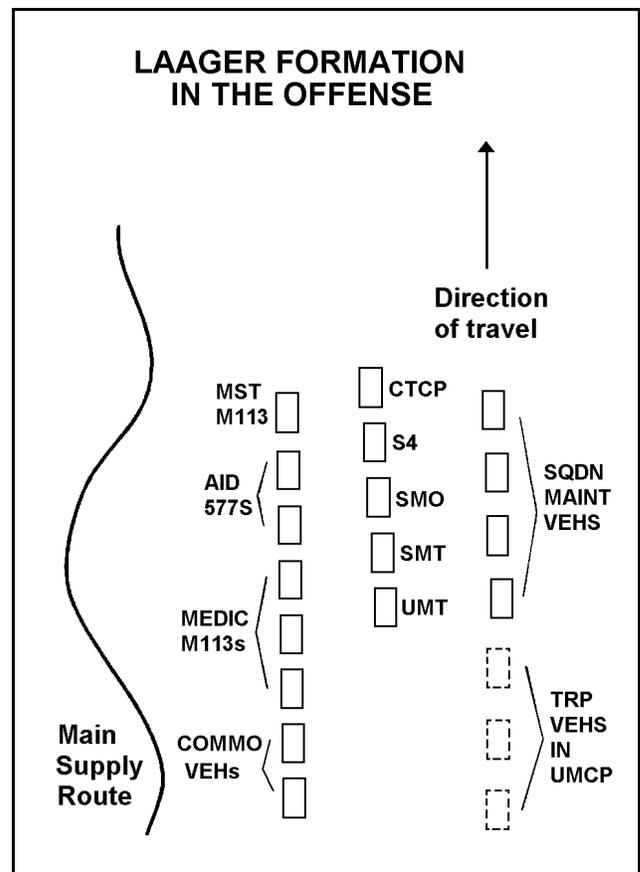


Figure 1

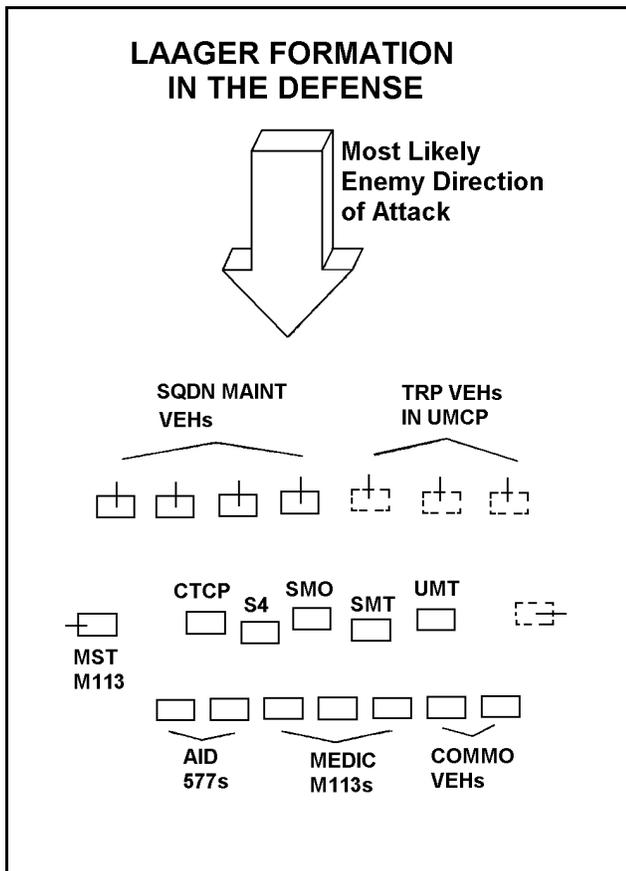


Figure 2

“By maintaining the laager formation during stationary operations, the combat trains can rapidly transition back to the offense. If attacked unexpectedly by air or artillery, the trains simply maintain formation and move out of contact...”

number of broken vehicles in maintenance, may dictate that the combat trains break away to maintain a smaller signature. Here, the laager formation can still apply. A small maintenance team can move with the trains to assist in fixing forward and can therefore maintain position in the right column. The CTCP now has a smaller signature to deal with, while preserving simple command and control.

S4 HMMWV or M577 leads the trains moving in three columns. The left column is led by the attached maintenance support team (MST) M113, followed by the squadron aid station and medic vehicles. The left column is followed up by any of the squadron’s commo section. In the center, the support HMMWVs follow behind the CTCP. This offers the SMO and SMT’s vehicles and the UMT protection inside of the lightly armored vehicles. The right column is led by the squadron’s maintenance M88s and M113s, and the rear is taken up by any recovering downed vehicles.

The squadron S4 or SMO can now quickly and easily move the combat trains through a “follow me” method. If the trains remain in this formation during short halts, momentum can easily be regained once the squadron reinitiates movement. As with a line troop’s formation, any weapon systems are pointed outwards to assist in security while moving.

In the defense or during stationary security missions, the laager can easily be maintained in a desert environment (see Figure 2). The right column faces toward the most likely enemy avenue

of approach, allowing the weapon systems on the M88s and downed vehicles to orient towards any threat. Again, all weapons are facing outwards to assist in 360-degree security. The CTCP moves to the center of the formation for command and control and protection inside the small perimeter.

By maintaining the laager formation during stationary operations, the combat trains can rapidly transition back to the offense. If attacked unexpectedly by air or artillery, the trains simply maintain formation and move out of contact. This eases the problem of linking back up with several dispersed elements that have broken from a coil formation. Command and control for the S4 or SMO becomes much easier, allowing both staff officers to remain focused on supporting the squadron.

Mobility is also simplified by using the laager. The S4, leading the trains formation, can position his organization into a hasty defense by conducting a “column left, march.” This quickly puts forward what armor is available forward while protecting the wheeled vehicles and medical assets.

There are times when the UMCP and combat trains will be separate entities. The tactical situation, or simply a large

In a desert environment, where concealment can be limited, the laager formation provides an option for security through mobility and flexibility. With a designated combat trains internal SOP, the laager formation can be used to effectively move, control, and protect a key node in the squadron’s logistical structure.

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