



The Unit Field Ordering Officer in Iraq

by Captain Michael L. Burgoyne

Units deploying to Iraq may find a short write-up in their deployment standard operating procedures (SOP) regarding the Class A agent and the field ordering officer (FOO). These personnel receive cash funds for critical supply purchases and can be a powerful asset in supply acquisition. With limited supply and transportation available, deployed units are often forced to work with the local economy to meet their needs. However, most logistics officers (S4s) and senior supply noncommissioned officers (NCOs) have little experience or working knowledge on the common tasks, purposes, and capabilities of a Class A agent and FOO. In an underdeveloped theater, the FOO can often be the only source of supply for certain items and faces numerous challenges including bureaucracy, availability, and combat operations. His ability to overcome these obstacles can greatly aid his unit in mission accomplishment.

Bureaucracy

There are several players involved in field ordering operations, including the FOO, the Class A agent, the finance of-

fice, resource management personnel, contracting personnel, and the unit commander. Successfully navigating through a maze of personnel with diverse backgrounds and motivations is a daunting task. Patience, flexibility, and creativity are required to reach the ultimate goal — supplying soldiers with essential items.

The FOO is a soldier or Department of the Army civilian authorized to purchase items valued less than \$2,500 under the supervision of a contracting officer. This allows the unit representative to make small purchases for a deployed unit when a local merchant does not accept credit cards. Note: NIPRNET connections and DHL delivery allow units to use government purchase cards in Iraq; do not destroy government purchase cards, bring them. In essence, the FOO is an officer, usually the S4, appointed by the commander to buy critical items on the economy with cash.

The Class A agent is a sergeant first class (SFC) or higher, who maintains control of the funds authorized to the FOO. The Class A agent is responsible for

making payments and keeping track of the funds.

The finance office performs a vital role in the process — they have the money. Finance will train and appoint the Class A agent and issue him funds. Most finance offices will assist FOO teams by providing extra hours or appointment times separate from normal operating hours.

Resource management (RM) is a subunit of a division or corps G4 staff. These soldiers, warrant officers, and civilians control and manage budgeting for their organizations. The FOO submits a DA Form 3953, “Purchase Request and Commitment Form,” to the RM office, who completes the form with funding authorizations and documents expenditures after they have been spent. The RM should be treated with respect and reverence, as they determine how much cash the unit will receive.

Contracting officers, similar to purchasing officers, have two chains of command: a contracting finance chain and a tactical command chain. Contracting officers can be found at division, corps, and



“Conducting a stability and support operation/high-intensity operation is complex and requires a number of supplies not commonly found in a unit supply room or modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE). These items include: surefire lights, urban breach kits, metal detector wands, generator light sets, welding kits, helicopter landing pads, fencing, satellite phones, and detainee restraints. Although usually supplied through the U.S. Army’s supply system, the FOO can find a number of these items available for local purchase or contract.”

in some cases, at the separate brigade-sized unit level. FOOs receive training and appointment orders from the contracting office. The contractor approves or disapproves the purchases made by the FOO. In addition, contracting officers can make larger purchases for items over \$2,500, which requires the S4 to submit a DA Form 3953 to the contracting office.

The battalion commander is in charge of conducting operations in a combat environment. He, his staff, and his commanders will generate multiple requirements for supplies and services. It is the duty of the FOO to fill those requirements to the best of his ability to allow the commander to successfully complete his missions.

Becoming a functional field ordering team is a complicated and painful process. It is in the best interest of any deploying unit to accomplish as much of the paperwork and training as possible prior to reaching theater.

The FOO and Class A agent must initially be appointed in writing by the battalion commander. Once that is complete, the Class A agent can receive training from the servicing finance unit and receive appointment orders from the finance office. The FOO receives training from the contracting officer and receives a memo annotating he has completed the training. With training memos and appointment orders in hand, the field ordering team

meets with RM, who will need copies of appointment orders for the FOO and Class A agent, a signature card from the battalion commander, completion of training documentation from contracting and finance, and the DA Form 3953. Note: The field ordering team should come prepared, thus avoiding the perils of “the copy machine is not for customers” mentalities. Once RM has approved a funding limit, usually \$10,000 for a battalion, the field ordering team returns to contracting to receive orders for the FOO and get document numbers for Standard Form (SF) 44s. The SF44 works like a receipt and is used to track purchases. After receiving that document, the whole file of certifications, forms, and memos is taken to finance and the FOO team receives the cash.

Once purchases are complete, the FOO clears his purchases with contracting and receives a memo clearing the SF44s. The Class A agent clears finance and the field ordering team clears RM. Throughout the clearing process, the team replicates the initial appointment process as they reach each location. Field ordering teams should keep extra copies of all documentation in case it must be resubmitted.

This process is confusing, frustrating, and even more complicated when moving over hundreds of miles on dangerous main supply routes. Adding to the confu-

sion is the constant changeover of personnel and procedures. Over the course of a deployment, a FOO can expect to see numerous ‘correct’ methods for filling out the SF44 and DA3953. Much of the frustration can be averted through the use of digital nonsecure voice terminal (DNVT) calls and e-mail. Having a scanner and SIPRNET/NIPRNET access to send documents can limit face-to-face time and often eliminates the need for high-risk convoy operations. Prior to deployment, field ordering teams should coordinate with their supporting agencies and determine exactly how the process will be organized.

Availability

Preparing for deployment and operations is the key to success; however, even the best units are unable to predict everything they will need to accomplish the mission. S4s in Iraq face the daunting task of building up base camps, or often multiple base camps, in austere conditions. In addition, armor and other non-infantry units conduct missions not commonly trained or resourced.

Some of the most challenging types of items to acquire are technology or computer hardware items. The desert heat, sand, and general wear and tear create a high demand for computer technology. Some common requisitions include: flash drives, T-5 cable, monitors, printers, print-

er cartridges, 220-110 power converters, "A" disk drives, universal serial bus (USB) hubs, USB cables, and network hubs. The unit signal officer should be prepared to completely build a garrison-style computer network. Note: Kuwait has an excellent ready supply of technology products and general supply stores located in a lower-risk environment than that of Iraq. FOOs should make every effort to fill technology product needs during reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (RSOI).

Quality-of-life items are also critical to soldiers deployed far from home. Comfort improves performance and makes life a little more tolerable. Soldiers want beds, adequate plumbing, air conditioning, ice, chairs and tables, washers and dryers, satellite TV, satellite phones, weight sets, cleaning supplies, and video games. It is these items that bring about the FOO's biggest problems. According to regulations, field ordering teams are not authorized to purchase Class I or morale, welfare, and recreational (MWR) items — FOO funds are for emergency purchases only. At this point, the FOO is faced with a soldier's needs and a battalion commander ordering him to break a regulation.

The FOO cannot make everyone happy, which must be acknowledged. The key to getting the most for soldiers and avoiding a no-pay-due is to work with the contracting officer. By calling the contracting officer and relating the requirement, the FOO can either receive permission to purchase with his funds or submit a separate DA3953, which will be contracted by the contracting officer. The brigade or division contracting officer usually has authorization for purchases up to \$200,000. Separate MWR funds are also available. It is important to remember that the money the FOO is using is for soldiers and their mission. If the battalion commander wants money for an item, there is a way to purchase it, and between the FOO and contracting officer, they will find it.

Conducting a stability and support operation/high-intensity operation is complex and requires a number of supplies not commonly found in a unit supply room or modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE). These items include: surefire lights, urban breach kits, metal detector wands, generator light sets, welding kits, helicopter landing pads, fencing, satellite phones, and detainee restraints. Although usually supplied through the U.S. Army's supply system, the FOO can find a number of these items available for local purchase or contract. To fill vast and

diverse needs of the unit, the FOO must find reliable civilian sources for his purchases. Suppliers can be broken down into three categories; local leaders, Iraqi vendors, and contractors.

Local leaders are a ready source of supplies and may be the only available source. While they can deliver supplies, using local sheiks or community leaders as supply sources can create numerous problems. The FOO is not an operations officer and local community leaders often confuse roles and will ask FOOs to help them with operational problems. The FOO may find himself complicating relationships between the command and the civilians in the area of responsibility (AOR). The FOO's ready cash flow may tempt a railroad technician or mayor to spend all of his time finding brooms and mops instead of fixing infrastructure.

In cases where the local security situation is sketchy at best, local sheiks or community leaders may be the only people secure enough to conduct business with coalition forces without fear of death. Additionally, the FOO must coordinate with the S2 to ensure that he is not inadvertently funding personnel on the black and gray list. Local leaders can be effective, but the FOO must be wary of conflicts of interest and the mission impact his purchases will have. Iraqi street vendors, depending on location, offer a wide range of supplies. Shops and stands in

Baghdad and other large cities offer a large selection of items; however, street vendors and shops pose a great security risk to the FOO team.

The best source of supply for the FOO is the contractor or general merchant. These free-market capitalists want a piece of the rebuilding pie and have no conflict of interest. They are interested in one thing — money. The simplicity of the arrangement makes these individuals invaluable to the FOO.

Iraqi contractors may be store owners or company owners. The best way to find them is to meet with local leaders, translators, police, or any Iraqis the unit trusts and ask them about local businessmen. Fellow S4s or FOOs in other units may also have contacts with good vendors who can handle more business. The FOO must be wary of local leaders and administrators with whom he speaks. The demand for the dollar is strong and they want to act as a middleman to make money on the deal. Once a potential Iraqi contractor is identified, work a limited test deal and assess the process. The end-state of this transaction is good for all involved — money flows into the Iraqi economy and goods flow into the hands of soldiers.

The other type of contractor is the transnational company. These companies are usually built by enterprising Arabs or other foreign nationals who have been cashing in on U.S. efforts in Afghanistan and



"In cases where the local security situation is sketchy at best, local sheiks or community leaders may be the only people secure enough to conduct business with coalition forces without fear of death. Additionally, the FOO must coordinate with the S2 to ensure that he is not inadvertently funding personnel on the black and gray list. Local leaders can be effective, but the FOO must be wary of conflicts of interest and the mission impact his purchases will have."



"Buying off the street can be hazardous business. The field operating team must develop and implement detailed SOPs to execute this mission. Basic fundamentals include: maintaining 360-degree security; maintaining local security within 15 meters of vehicle; completing the deal quickly; and exiting the site using a different route."

Iraq. Without question, this is the most professional and efficient source of supplies or services. These companies and individuals can find technology items and other hard-to-find products. These personnel can be contacted by Thuraya phone and e-mail and can rapidly fill demands.

A good field ordering team will develop several relationships and use them to suit all their needs. An effective method is to use local vendors and contractors for simple, easy-to-find items and labor. The more prominent Iraqi contractors and transnational companies are used for hard-to-find items and expensive projects. By spreading out funds and providing redundancy, the FOO can help the economy and ensure a ready source of supplies. Dealing with the local population can be extremely rewarding — the FOO will sample local food, learn about local customs, and gain insight into a fascinating people.

Combat Operations

Conducting FOO missions in a sensitive combat environment offers some real challenges to the FOO and his team. Prior to deployment and operations, the FOO must create a functional team and train them on convoy operations, buying off the street, buying at a vendor's location, and buying at an agreed-on location. One major complication for the FOO is the composition of forces during missions. Often the team will change or take on additional personnel and vehicles. The FOO must ensure all personnel are trained and ready to conduct operations with maximum security.

Convoy operations are a regular part of all operations in Iraq. The FOO can expect to participate in a large number of convoys on highways, in villages, through cities, in markets, and on unimproved roads. FOOs must read and internalize the field manuals and Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) references on Iraqi convoy operations. FOO teams should follow the fundamentals listed below when conducting convoy operations:

- Maintain 360-degree security at all times — identify lead and rear gun trucks, minimum of two.
- Stay alert.
- Limit movement to mission-critical only — limit movement of critical assets, such as water and fuel trucks, to smallest number required and limit all night movement to mission-critical.
- Speed is security — do not stop or slow convoy; the more time spent in one place, the more time the enemy has to organize an attack.
- Overwhelming violence of action — all enemy contact should be met with uncompromising, accurate, and relentless firepower.

Buying off the street can be hazardous business. The field operating team must develop and implement detailed SOPs to execute this mission. Basic fundamentals include: maintaining 360-degree security; maintaining local security within 15 meters of vehicle; completing the deal quickly; and exiting the site using a different route.

The basic steps of the operation are similar to a cordon and search operation. The unit moves to the block where the shop is located and creates a perimeter in which the field ordering team operates. The cordon does not isolate the shop, but offers security and can immediately offer 360-degree fires. Gunners and riflemen must identify sectors of fire and ensure all avenues of approach are covered. Elements conducting perimeter security must also provide local security around vehicles due to handheld explosive or grenade threats. When the FOO determines outside security has been met, he will begin shopping. Because the cordon is not an isolating action, and because the FOO will be concealed from perimeter forces inside a shop, he must also be protected. A personal security detachment, made up of one or two personnel, must accompany the FOO (this can be the Class A agent, but preferably a separate individual). When conducting an exchange, the FOO and Class A agent will be focused on the vendor and *must* be covered by another soldier. The threat to the team is the concealed knife, pistol, or the hidden mujhad in the back room. The Class A agent should not make it known that he has the money until the deal is complete. Separating the FOO and the money makes it more difficult for insurgents to identify the man holding the cash. The deal should be completed in less than 15 minutes and the team out of the area as quickly as possible. The longer the team is on site, the longer insurgent forces have to create an ambush. A simple intelligence preparation of the battlefield will tell any FOO that insurgents need funds and a \$10,000-\$20,000 payday makes the team a high payoff target.

Making a street-vendor purchase at a vendor's house poses similar security risks. Arab custom forbids a host from harming a guest; however, security measures remain the same. Several additional complications occur when working out of a vendor's house — the vendor is immediately identified by his neighbors as a supporter of coalition forces. A time must be set for the meeting, which leaves the team open to ambush en route or on site. When inside a shop or house, the personal security detachment may be tempted to let their guard down and be part of the process, which must be discouraged. If at all possible, meeting at a vendor's house should be avoided. Having the vendor meet the FOO at an established base camp is the safest method for

Continued on Page 45

Field Ordering Officer continued from Page 40

the FOO team. However, the vendor again becomes vulnerable to observation by insurgents. Using a vendor who lives outside of the city or neighborhood in which the FOO operates can alleviate the problem. Using periods of darkness or early morning hours can also limit observation. Every effort must be made with the unit guarding the gate to conceal the vendor and rapidly move him inside the compound.

An agreed-on location is another excellent form of meeting. The vendor may be wary of meeting the FOO at his base camp but amenable to meeting at another camp. The vendor may desire a roadside meeting. By coordinating with combat forces, the FOO can conduct a meeting at a checkpoint under the ruse of a vehicle inspection. The same dangers exist as the house meet. The vendor's awareness of the team's location and movement time leave the team vulnerable to ambush or improvised explosive device (IED) attack. During all FOO operations, maintaining a level of unpredictability is key to avoiding deliberate ambushes.

Some other methods for conducting purchases involve a number of unforeseen facets. Iraqis have been businessmen and traders since the Silk Road. Bartering is part of every deal and everything is negotiable. Expect vendors who have an established relationship with a FOO to offer gifts and money as a "cut" of the deal. This is customary in Iraqi business and should not be seen as a blight on the character of the vendor. The FOO must make it clear from the beginning that he is not permitted to accept gifts and money. Do not use the Iraqi dinar; if vendors want to make money, they will find a way to work in U.S. dollars. The speed and stress level under which transactions are completed can lead to confusing math and tracking problems. A system for managing the money must be used. A check-book-style ledger or money management software program is a crucial asset for a FOO team.

The FOO is a powerful tool for a battalion operating in Iraq. With limited supply lines open, the FOO often is the only supply source. Effective planning and train-

ing prior to deployment pays big dividends to a FOO team. An effective FOO can boost morale, improve quality of life, improve the Iraqi economy, build positive working relationships with Iraqis, and provide the supplies necessary for conducting operations. By manipulating the staggeringly complex bureaucracy, finding the supplies, and safely conducting combat operations, the FOO can be a powerful combat multiplier.



Captain Michael Burgoyne is currently serving as commander, C Troop, 3d Squadron, 7th U.S. Cavalry (3-7 Cav), 3d Infantry Division, Baghdad, Iraq. He received a B.A. from the University of Arizona. His military education includes the Armor Officers Basic Course, Armor Captains Career Course, Combined Arms and Services Staff School, Scout Platoon Leaders Course, Cavalry Leaders Course, Airborne School, and Air Assault School. He has served in various command and staff positions, to include assistant S3, 3-7 Cav, Fort Stewart, GA; S4, 1st Squadron, 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment (1/3 ACR), Al Anbar, Iraq; tank platoon leader, scout platoon leader, and troop XO, A Troop, 1/3 ACR, Fort Carson, CO.