The Combat-Trains Command Post in the Stryker Brigade Combat Team's Cavalry Squadron

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While Field Manual (FM) 3-20.96, *The Reconnaissance and Cavalry Squadron*, serves as the basic guideline for the organization and employment of the combat-trains command post (CTCP), it fails to account for the unique limitations and requirements of a Cavalry squadron in a Stryker brigade combat team (SBCT).

These unique requirements drive the necessity for a hybrid of doctrine and innovation for the organization and composition of the CTCP. Current doctrine does an excellent job describing the functions of the CTCP. This focus, paired with our organization's[1] tactical standard operating procedures, allowed our squadron to develop a functional and combat-effective CTCP that was able to anticipate and adapt in an ambiguous National Training Center (NTC) decisive-action (DA) training environment rotation.

CTCP, FTCP

Current Army doctrine provides the following framework for the CTCP. The CTCP plans and coordinates sustainment for tactical operations and may serve as an alternate for the main command post (CP). It usually is comprised of elements of the fire-support team, squadron S-1 and squadron S-4. Most of the time, the S-4 is the officer-in-charge (OIC) of the CTCP.

Situations that may dictate the need for a CTCP include:

- Fast-moving, fluid operations;
- Brigade-support battalion forward-logistics element operations; and
- Reception, staging, onward movement and integration (RSOI) operations.[2]

Figure 1. The RSOI squadron staff issues the operation order to troop leadership in the rotational-unit bivouac area at Fort Irwin, CA.

The unit-maintenance collection point (UMCP), squadron aid station (SAS) and forward-support company (FSC) forward cell will typically co-locate with the CTCP. The S-4 works closely with the supporting-unit counterparts to coordinate sustainment for the squadron. The CTCP serves the following functions:

- Track the current battle;
- Control sustainment of the current operation;
- Provide sustainment representation to the main CP for planning and integration;
- Forecast and coordinate future requirements;
- Monitor main supply routes and control sustainment traffic; and
- Coordinate the evacuation of casualties, equipment, flat-racks and detainees.[3]

Figure 2. The squadron issues the orders.

The squadron's field-trains CP (FTCP) is the primary direct coordination element between the squadron and the brigade-support area (BSA). When established, the FTCP usually consists of the elements of the FSC, squadron S-1, squadron S-4 and headquarters and headquarters troop (HHT) personnel, including the HHT commander, executive officer, first sergeant, chemical/biological/radiological/nuclear noncommissioned officer (NCO) and supply sergeant. Generally, the HHT commander is the FTCP's OIC.[4]

Other doctrinal influences

FM 3-20.96 does not account for the FSC headquarters in a SBCT. Doctrine prescribes that the squadron S-4 serves as the CTCP's OIC and the squadron maintenance officer (SMO) is the UMCP's OIC. This command relationship presents two distinct problems: unity of command and local security. Effectively, it places no one in charge of this critical logistics node. The S-4 and SMO are generally unified in effort by virtue of the military decision-making process (MDMP) and the squadron executive officer's serving as the "chief of staff." However, with the distance created by battlefield dispersion required by tactical threat, this relationship is impossible to maintain.

Also, the current modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) does not provide either unit with the resources to adequately secure themselves in a fixed site and still have the assets necessary to execute logistics-package operations or other battlefield circulation requirements. Moreover, the distances covered by the lines of communication for a Cavalry squadron in an SBCT operating in DA operations are significantly larger than any other unit on the battlefield. Such distances necessitate the echeloning of mission-command nodes – including the tactical-actions center (TAC), tactical-operations center (TOC), CTCP and FTCP – to provide appropriate dispersion and coverage for the squadron.

Personnel roles

To gain efficiency and to create unified effort at the CTCP/UMCP, our squadron placed the headquarters troop command team in charge of the CTCP/UMCP. The HHT commander, first sergeant and executive officer provided the backbone for this combined effort.

The HHT commander is a second-time troop commander and the most experienced captain in the squadron. By virtue of his experience, he fully understands the squadron's technical and tactical requirements and can serve as the unit's logistics troubleshooter, providing the senior-leader check for the S-4's, SMO's, medical officer's (MEDO) and S-1's efforts. Doctrine places him in the FTCP, where he is now redundant with the creation of the FSC commander.

The HHT first sergeant is also in at least his second iteration as the senior NCO in a troop and is the most experienced first sergeant in the squadron. His almost two decades of experience make him the most qualified person to plan and supervise fixed-site security and to provide more experiential knowledge for the company-grade officers planning the squadron's logistics operations.

The HHT executive officer is ideally the most senior lieutenant and by the nature of his position is generally the savviest executive officer in the realm of logistics. He is used as the CP's OIC.

Organizational roles

The HHT command group's organization allows two functions: It can actively track the battle to facilitate the CTCP rapidly assuming the role as the squadron's primary CP, and it can monitor the logistical needs of the two other squadron command nodes.

Establishing this mission-command architecture allowed the S-4, S-1, SMO and MEDO to complete their functions as needed and provided some freedom of maneuver for the primary staff officers to move back and forth between the squadron TOC and the combat trains while conducting their staff responsibilities. Because the CTCP/UMCP receives a prepositioned resupply and rearmament section from the squadron distribution platoon, the squadron is capable of providing emergency resupply with a greatly shortened response time. This package includes a Palletized Load System – including a flat rack pre-loaded with mission-dictated ammunition – and an M978A4 Heavy Expanded Mobility Tactical Truck fuel-servicing truck. Furthermore, squadron prepositions the main aid station (MAS) and forward aid station (FAS) between the forward-line-of-own-troops and itself, dramatically reducing the distance between casualties and Role I care.

In addition to improved logistics and mission-command capabilities, the CTCP created and preserved options for the squadron and troop commanders to securely store Strykers when they were not needed for a specific mission. This allowed the freedom to either insert Cavalrymen by air or merely carry more scouts per vehicle when the mission required more dismounted observation posts. Cavalry troop commanders also had the option to co-locate a portion of their trains (including their attached maintenance assets from the FSC and other unnecessary portions of its organic troop trains) to the CTCP to allow greater freedom of maneuver or to reduce the troop's signature during reconnaissance or security operations. Although mission conditions may require leaving the CTCP/UMCP in battle configuration without the medical platoon, the addition of a section from the distribution platoon and attachments from the troop trains always allowed for adequate security. Finally, any Strykers that were in the UMCP for maintenance were placed on the perimeter and were used either for its weapon system or optics – or simply as a deterrent to create a hard target.

Figure 3. SGT Joseph A. Gaddison from Apache Troop, 2-1 Cavalry, establishes an observation post overwatching a named area of interest during 1ˢᵗ SBCT's NTC Rotation 15-10.

Our squadron was best able to handle its logistical requirements by consolidating both the CTCP and the UMCP under the HHT guidon at a single location. This singular node facilitates mission command of the squadron's sustainment efforts in a manner that is fully nested with the maneuver plan. Furthermore, this effort is replicated during the planning, execution and recovery phases of the operation by creating a one-stop shop for sustainment requirements.

Consistent with the concept of using the CTCP as a consolidated sustainment node, the unit ministry team (UMT) was initially based at the CTCP. In a combat environment, the UMT mission priority is to care for the wounded and minister to the squadron's Soldiers via battlefield circulation. Basing the UMT at the CTCP helped facilitate these priorities. As long as the SAS was co-located with the CTCP, the UMT was ideally located to minister to casualties. In addition, by staging the UMT at the CTCP, it was able to accompany logpac convoys to forward-deployed units, extending religious-support operations to Soldiers who would otherwise be unsupported. In contrast, the greatest challenge presented by basing the UMT at the CTCP resulted in only minimal participation in the squadron's MDMP due to a lack of mobile security to safely transport the UMT to the squadron TOC. Also, the separation of the FAS from the MAS necessitated relocation from the CTCP to the aid station that was most likely to treat the most casualties.

Needed improvements

While the shifting of personnel allowed the squadron a great deal of success, there was plenty of room for improvement. As it currently stands by MTOE, even with combined efforts, the CTCP/UMCP possess zero organic ability to operate on a secret Internet protocol router (SIPR). The CTCP achieves connectivity via unsecured Internet through the Combat Service Support Automated Information Systems Interface bridge with the UMCP's organic Very Small Aperture Terminal. However, the HHT headquarters, S-1, S-4 and unit-maintenance personnel require SIPR connectivity to use Battle Command and Sustainment Support System, Command Post of the Future or any other Army Battle Command System (ABCS) system. The only secure connectivity these nodes possess is Joint Capability Release Version 6 (JCR-6) and frequency-hop cypher-text frequency-modulation (FM) radio communications.

This created a stovepipe of information that is separate from the rest of the SBCT's communications systems. The administrative and logistics (A/L) FM net-control station is the CTCP and is designed to limit traffic on the command nets. However, because it is a lower priority net than command and fires, it is rarely, if ever, re-transmitted. This imposes a severe limitation on the effectiveness of A/L. Our experience at NTC showed that A/L was marginally effective internally at the squadron level and a complete non-factor on a BCT level due to the wide dispersion of units. This forced the CTCP almost exclusively to communicate on the squadron command net to relay time-sensitive information which would often collide with maneuver traffic.

Also, the JCR provides a less-than-ideal format for transmitting logistics information and, even under ideal conditions, the CTCP/UMCP is limited to only two JCR systems. Worse, the UMCP only had unsecured JCR-LOG, which created a constant need to relay traffic from the squadron TOC or maneuver units to the UMCP as it was received over JCR-6, creating a bottleneck at the terminal as the HHT command team, S-1, S-6 and Maintenance Control all worked to track and transmit across these limited platforms.

Figure 4. The squadron retransmission team set up at NTC.

The addition of a SIPR/Nonsecure Internet Protocol Router (NIPR) Access Point (SNAP) is critical for the CTCP/UMCP to operate on the upper tier of the tactical Internet (colloquially known as Upper TI). Units may receive a SNAP during RSOI draw and while forward-deployed to support Operation Spartan Shield or Operation Enduring Freedom through theater-provided equipment. To ensure this system is used properly, the squadron would require the augmentation at least one 25B (information-technology specialist) Soldier, sourced through internal displacement from the squadron signal section or cross-training another Soldier to operate the system. This system would greatly increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the CTCP/UMCP by allowing the full use of all ABCS systems and the flexibility provided by Voice-over-Internet-Protocol (VOIP) phones. With the current configuration of brigade-level nodes, both the TOC and BSA are heavily reliant on secure VOIP and ABCS for efforts across all warfighting functions.

Also, because no SBCT in the U.S. Army has the appropriate number of high-frequency (HF) radios to fill their MTOE requirement, the cavalry squadron's CTCP is the last priority to receive one. This creates a gap in information communicated over HF. We attempted to institute a stop-gap measure by requesting the squadron TOC radiotelephone operator (RTO) to relay HF traffic through JCR chat to the CTCP; however, during peak operations, the RTO could not keep up with the high volume of traffic, resulting in a significant loss of information.

Although our recommended changes will require more costs to units, as the U.S. Army continues to reduce its global footprint, it must reallocate these assets to the Cavalry squadron's CTCP for it to fully accomplish its mission. Until the CTCP/UMCP can move freely on the battlefield and communicate on the Upper TI, it will never meet the requirement to operate as an alternate CP. Currently, the CTCP cannot talk to brigade on the upper tier, which limits its effectiveness with logistics, and if the squadron TOC or TAC were removed from the fight, it would be impossible to provide real-time reporting in either direction. While our squadron's allocation of personnel and the MTOE shortages we identified answer many of the questions, many are left unanswered by existing doctrine. Flexibility will continue to be the key to success in the modern operating environment.

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Notes

[1] 2nd Squadron, 1st U.S. Cavalry, 1st SBCT, 4th Infantry Division.
[2] FM 3-20.96, Section 10-69.
[3] FM 3-20.96, Section 10-70.
[4] FM 3-20.96, Section 10-74.