

Combat Trains Command Post (CTCP) Operations

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Support for reconnaissance operations is the inherent responsibility of the combat trains command post (CTCP). The CTCP is charged with maintaining the momentum of the operation through supporting the maneuver plan. The squadron's success is contingent on a CTCP's ability to resource and maintain the squadron's three reconnaissance troops through a task organization inclusive of logistical, administrative, and maintenance functions.

The squadron's ability to conduct sustained reconnaissance and security operations was heavily reliant on the ability for the tactical logistics execution to adequately support the maneuver plan.



Figure 1-1, Elements of HHT completing break down of CTCP at Fort McCoy, WI

During 5th Squadron 4th Cavalry's most recent rotational experience at the National Training Center (NTC), it experienced widespread success through the implementation of a sound reconnaissance and surveillance (R&S) plan supported by a thorough sustainment plan. The link between the execution of the sustainment by the forward support company (FSC) and the maneuver troops was the CTCP led by the headquarters and headquarters troop (HHT) commander with support from the squadron's logistics and personnel officers. This article will

provide a way to approach the preparation of a CTCP to include training, manning and equipping to enable the squadron to have depth in mission command, maximize the logistical common operating picture and sustain operations.

The most critical aspect of the preparation of the CTCP was the identification of the routine operations required to successfully employ the CTCP and execute sustainment operations. The squadron was offered a fantastic opportunity to identify the routine with a training density occurring in the summer of 2014. Prior to 5-4 CAV's deployment to NTC 15-06, the squadron deployed to Fort McCoy, WI in support of the Exportable Combat Training Capability (XCTC) rotation. The mission allowed the squadron to train all aspects of the armored reconnaissance fight, to include implementing the CTCP in support of the unit's sustainment operations. During this exercise, the CTCP included the squadron S-1 and S-4 sections, the HHT headquarters section, and elements of the FSC maintenance platoon. The CTCP was controlled by the HHT commander in conjunction with the S-1 and S-4. The following is the task organization of the combat trains:

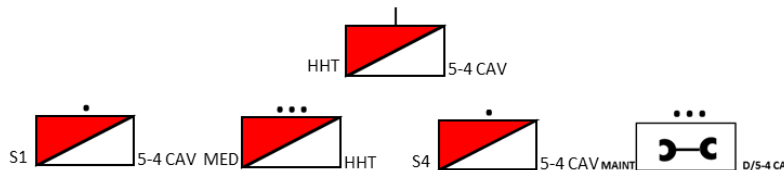


Figure 1-2, Task Organization of the Combat Trains

To ensure that the combat trains would be capable of supporting the squadron, intensive rehearsal of the battle drills was conducted and that became the main focus of the troop. The longest and most complex drill that required multiple rehearsals was displacement of the CTCP. This drill consisted of tearing down the Standardized Integrated Command Post System (SICPS) and preparing the command track (M1068) for movement while simultaneously maintaining communication with squadron HQs and receiving reports from the troops. The most important lesson from conducting multiple iterations was that tear down and set up of the OE-254 antenna significantly slowed down movement. Without losing capability, the CTCP modified its communication design to where the Quick Erect Antenna Mast System (QEAMS) was used for the brigade administrative/logistics (A/L) net since this frequency needed to reach the furthest (was not used at XCTC) and a COM201 was emplaced on top of the M1068 for talking to the forward troops. Other key battle drills rehearsed included battle tracking, owning the fight when the command post (CP) met its displacement criteria, and receiving and transmitting combat reports via frequency modulation (FM) and Joint Capabilities Release (JCR).

The preparation of the CTCP continued when the squadron redeployed to Fort Riley. The CTCP was able to maintain tempo in its development through the execution of several validation exercises leading up to the NTC rotation. The squadron utilized home station training opportunities at both the unit level and installation schools to enhance the capability of the CTCP. Entering into this training density, there was a clear focus on digital reporting which helped shape the training regimen. The focus would later pay significant dividends during the training rotation due to the depth of knowledge amongst the Troopers in both the CP and the CTCP. The NTC offered the squadron an opportunity to put stress on systems, validate training focuses, and prepare for future operations.

A pivotal component of the CTCP was the ability to receive, process and act on information which was reported by the troops. The emphasis on digital systems and long range communications prior to the deployment enabled the CTCP to be successful.

During the execution of operations, the squadron would leverage the JCR system, specifically, the chat feature, to assist in the execution of logistics synchronization (LOGSYNC) meetings with the troops during operations. The JCR log provides a window for an open dialogue over JCR or a chat room to aid in reporting and cut down on flash, immediate, priority, routine (FIPR) backlog; preventing reports from being lost. Rapid and accurate reporting endured during the mission as a result of employment of this system. Additionally, the S1 section would focus heavily on the employment of "open office" within JCR to provide the troops a standardized and accurate reporting tool for statuses (STATs) throughout operations. This technique would pay dividends during sustained operations over stretched lines of communications. Furthermore, the S1 was able to use the Microsoft Excel and Word features on JCR log for reporting of personnel statuses (PERSTATs) and tracking of casualties and equipment. The troop ISGs reported their daily losses from the previous day's battle period to maximize situational awareness for the squadron headquarters and would allow for more responsive soldier regeneration. The chat room created shared understanding for all troops during critical battle rhythm events. JCR quickly

became the primary means of communication due to the distances troops were located from the CTCP and CP throughout the operation.

In terms of providing depth of mission command nodes for the squadron, the CTCP stood prepared to assume control of the fight throughout the battle. This was completed largely in part due to adhering to doctrine and understanding of communication platforms. The combat trains attempted to replicate all the systems, digital and analog, to provide the squadron with an alternate and sometimes a tertiary command post.

The CTCP was able to do this by maintaining doctrinal distance to the CP of 1-4 kilometers (KM) to ensure that it was not removed from the fight. Due to the squadron's integration of high frequency (HF) radios and JCR, it was able to maintain communication via multiple platforms during operations stretched over 30KM.

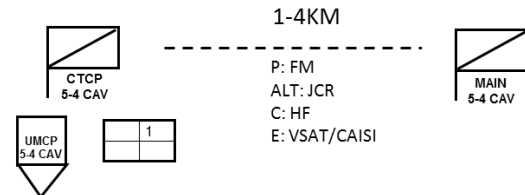


Figure 1-3, Doctrinal Distance between CTCP and SQDN Command Post

The squadron's depth in communication platforms and thorough primary, alternate, contingency, emergency (PACE) plan made it so that the distance maintained between the CTCP and CP was not a major factor for mission command purpose, but it did allow for a mutually supportive relationship between the two nodes. The distance of the CTCP in relation to the CP became increasingly important as vehicles at the CP experienced mechanical problems as well as improper forecasting for fuel where the distance allowed for rapid response to the CP from the CTCP.

Since the CTCP included the unit maintenance collection point (UMCP) during the rotation, it was difficult to displace and the command team had to tie into the micro-terrain to ensure survivability during the mission. The lack of ideal terrain to house an element ranging from 20-30 vehicles made finding suitable positions within doctrinal distance difficult and proved to be a daunting challenge

While it was a challenge (RECON) ahead of CTCP, it was not elements of the CTCP responsibilities, the focus on security and CTCP during there were instances taken and security was intelligence) to allow



Figure 1-4, M88 Conducting recovery operations during NTC rotation 15-06

throughout the rotation. to conduct reconnaissance displacement and secure the impossible. Since all were aware of delineated command team was able to reconnaissance for the operations. However, when prudent risk was reduced (based on for the headquarters

elements to conduct movement preparations. Much of the focus for the troop commander was on conducting both map/mounted reconnaissance ahead of displacement. This meant that the command team, which accounted for 50% of the organic combat power, were away from the

CTCP during reconnaissance. During the initial phases of the operation, the site location RECONs for the CTCP were not conducted effectively and lacked key personnel to ensure feasibility of a location. Therefore, it became a tactic, technique, and procedure (TTP) for site location RECONs to include the commander, squadron maintenance sergeant or squadron maintenance technician, squadron medical officer and an element from the S-1 section. The need to balance security and mission accomplishment, specifically maintenance was delicate as the CTCP had to be positioned on terrain suitable to employ the Forward Repair System (FRS) and the boom on M88 for vehicle maintenance. Many times the location of the CTCP was not ideal in terms of defense, but prudent risk was assumed to ensure that doctrinal distance was maintained and that maintenance could be conducted.

Additionally, protecting the trains was a continually evolving problem as the troop 1SG had the responsibility to tie in all disabled vehicles awaiting parts into the security plan. The crews of those vehicles were also integrated into the security plan not only from their mounted platforms, but also to conduct disruption patrols and set observation points to detect any threats. Prior to the deployment to the NTC, the squadron integrated vehicle crews from the forward support company into Table (TBL) VI gunnery to provide qualified crews. Having additional combat power assisted in the security of the CTCP.

A planning oversight and poor forecasting by the troop commander for Class IV materials contributed to reduced security at the CTCP. The Class IV package which was fielded to the CTCP was not sufficient, and the commander and 1SG had to conduct engagement area development with a less than ideal amount of concertina wire and sand bags. Once the task organization with inclusion of the UMCP was finalized, a standard Class IV package needed to be identified prior to line of departure (LD) and use of these materials tied into the rehearsals conducted. Failure to do so put the security of the command node in jeopardy. However, the command team followed standard engagement area (EA) development procedure by “red teaming” their position through rehearsals and reconnaissance from likely enemy avenues of approach. Doing so, enabled the most efficient use of a reduced supply for turning and fixing obstacles.

Furthermore, displacement inside of the CTCP was a challenge due to the terrain and the robust size of the element. Thus, there were many times when vehicles were too close together and were at risk to catastrophic damage and degradation of capability in the event of indirect fire (IDF).

The security of the CTCP waned as vehicles came and went through the UMCP. At one point the combat power was reduced to only three combat platforms. This proved to be problematic when vehicles were pulled to support casualty evacuation (CASEVAC) from the main aid station (MAS) as security had to be reduced to ensure Soldiers did not die of wounds, thus, degrading combat effectiveness of the line troops. Therefore, the command team assumed risk during the execution of CASEVAC operations at the CTCP.

With respect to the chemical threat, the CTCP employed radiac sets and M8 paper to detect possible chemical attacks. The CTCP was successful at preparing for attacks across all of the

forms of contact and it spent much of the rotation avoiding becoming a soft target. Emblematic of this was the fact that only one successful IDF attack occurred throughout the 16 day rotation. Overall, security at the CTCP proved to be the most daunting task and one which required more deliberate planning and resourcing during both the train up and the rehearsal phase.

A critical lesson learned during the rotation at the NTC was to task organize for mission early in the training cycle. During the reception, staging, onward movement and integration (RSOI) week, a lot of time and energy was spent integrating the different elements which would serve in the CTCP, many of which were not organic to HHT. The problems were not insurmountable, but the cohesion and fluidity of operations would have been enhanced if during the train up for NTC, the CTCP had conducted operations as it had at NTC. Additionally, depth of knowledge in critical equipment would have assisted the CTCP [i.e. only one operator for the Combat-Service-Support Automated Information Systems Interface (CAISI) and only two personnel proficient on HF radios. Both pieces of equipment were available at home station and not given enough of a focus prior to the rotation.

This article has provided a way to approach the preparation of a CTCP for the decisive action training environment in the areas of training, manning and equipping to enable the squadron to have depth in mission command, maximize the logistical common operating picture and sustain operations. Key lessons identified include task organize for your mission early, train multiple personnel on low density equipment for redundancy, conduct homestation training on assuming control of the fight from the main CP, and finally, plan and rehearse security of the CTCP using all available assets. These techniques and lessons are applicable to all maneuver formations (Armored, Infantry, and Stryker BCTs) that utilize CTCPs.