

Using Logistics Release Point Meetings to Mitigate Persistent Friction Points in Cavalry Squadron Operations

by CPT Blake Niewenhuis

You're the squadron executive officer. It is Training Day 6 during your decisive-action rotation at the National Training Center (NTC) and nothing seems to be going smoothly:

- Four tanks that were task-organized to Comanche Troop are down for fire-resistant hydraulic fluid that has been sitting in the brigade-support area (BSA) for the last three days because the distribution-platoon leader doesn't know someone needs it.
- The logistic-status reports (logstats) your S-4 has been receiving are indecipherable wish lists.
- Apache Troop's died-of-wounds rate is at 100 percent because they are evacuating casualties 20 kilometers to the squadron aid station even though an adjacent combined-arms battalion's Role I is only six kilometers behind their troop trains.
- The S-1 hasn't received a single personnel-status report (perstat) the entire rotation and you don't know you have 60 personnel at the BSA sitting on deadlined vehicles with long lead-time parts.
- And you just found out that the Joint Battle Command Platform (JBC-P) has been jammed so the S-3 is now trying to call back troop commanders to the squadron's main command post (CP) to share graphics for some last-minute changes.

These are all actual scenarios observed by the Cobra Team's cavalry-squadron trainers from Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 into FY18 at NTC. Units eventually overcome these challenges – sometimes through face-to-face maintenance meetings at the maintenance collection point; at logistics synchronizations (logsynchs) at the squadron main CP; or with brute force on the part of individual leaders at echelon – but units that consistently put out the fires before they happen use the logistics release point (LRP) meeting. The LRP meeting is already happening in some form every 24-72 hours. When planned and executed deliberately with the right leaders, it can be used to both report and receive information and to synchronize resources for the squadron.

Persistent problems

Cavalry squadrons suffer from consistent problems in combat service support (CSS). Some are common to the other maneuver task forces, and some are unique to the squadron. Squadrons routinely suffer from inconsistent inputs and planning failures in sustainment. Logstats are submitted in some form, though timeliness and accuracy are usually an issue. Perstats are sometimes never turned in during a rotation. The effectiveness of S-4s is hit or miss, with many not being engaged in planning sustainment for the squadron, leaving planning and executing on the forward-support company (FSC) commander, who does not have the visibility of current and future operations the S-4 has as a member of the staff at the combat-trains CP (CTCP). This often has the effect of desynchronized support like setting LRP times to close to or after the line of departure. Form DA 5988e flow habitually is poor for the cavalry squadron when compared to the other maneuver task forces, partly because troops are not doctrinally allowed to consolidate into assembly areas.

Squadrons also experience problems in CSS in regard to execution. Distribution platoons are often late to the LRP without their squadron being notified, and in turn troops are late to return the logistics package (logpac) with no consequence. Troops routinely do not receive what they ask for in terms of Class IX and Class III packaged petroleum, oils and lubricants, even if it was annotated in the logstat because logpacs are being built with historical data only.

Squadrons often have difficulties with sustainment with respect to the communications primary-alternate-contingency-emergency plan and the logistics common operating picture (COP). When a squadron does have a refined logistics COP, it is often not disseminated or understood by the line troops. Troop first sergeants are not made aware of adjacent unit aid stations. Often a squadron does not have the ability to retransmit on an administration and logistics net, causing an overreliance on Joint Capabilities Release (JCR)/JBC-P for all

sustainment traffic to the CTCP or field-trains CP (FTCP), which can become a single-point-of-failure in a cyber-electromagnetic activities (CEMA)-denied environment.

All these problems are exacerbated by the disparate nature of cavalry operations. Scouts are always out, but we need to get together at some point to identify and correct a lot of easy fixes that often only require a little sunlight and command emphasis.

LRP and logpac lifecycles

The creation of a troop logpac begins with the submission of a timely and accurate troop logstat to the squadron S-4. The S-4 then identifies the requirement that the FSC and troop supply sergeants in the FTCP need to fulfill. Ideally, some form of logsynch meeting occurs via frequency modulation, JBC-P/JCR chatroom or LRP meeting to validate these requirements and forecast others in the long term, which is generally within the next 72 hours in a cavalry squadron. The S-4 now begins to plan and develop the logpac with the FSC commander's input. He/she will address priorities as well as identify shortfalls and possible LRP locations based off an understanding of the squadron's current and future operations.

Later, the plan is refined, and the load plans for the logpac are finalized. FSC personnel or the S-4 noncommissioned officer in charge (NCOIC) check each supply sergeant's "shopping list" to verify if he or she has picked up all commodities to be issued, while the distribution platoon leader/platoon sergeant does the same for FSC loads. The S-4, with FSC input, finalizes the LRP location(s) and routes and notifies all subordinate units through the CTCP of the planned linkup points and times.

This cycle culminates with the execution of the LRP according to the unit's tactical standard operating procedure (tacSOP). Typically the distribution platoon meets troop first sergeants and a representative from the CTCP (S-4, S-4 NCOIC, battalion/squadron command sergeant major) at the LRP, and troop first sergeants escort their logpac break back to their troop trains. The tacSOP or S-4 dictates the return time for logpac to the LRP site. Units often have difficulty returning logpac in under four hours at NTC due to the distance cavalry troops are spread across the forward-line-of-troops. The four-hour turnaround time is reasonable and feasible, however, and any longer can disrupt the FSC's ability to receive resupply from the brigade-support battalion (BSB) in time for the next logpac cycle.

The logpacs are then escorted back to the LRP, where the distribution-platoon leader consolidates them and moves back to the FTCP. The consequence for troops who don't make the link-up time usually involves the supported troop escorting logpac back to the FTCP. Units that do not enforce a turnaround time – i.e., the distribution platoon waits at the LRP indefinitely for late logpac – will suffer from desynchronized resupply from the BSB, resulting in emergency resupply or shortfalls that will eventually effect the troops.

LRP meeting

The squadron is spread out across a distance and depth of tens of kilometers. Its communications framework may not support the amount of traffic to address multiple sustainment and support problems simultaneously. This can all be mitigated through the deliberate planning, rehearsing and executing squadron LRP meetings.

The LRP meeting is not a new concept. The following excerpt from *ARMOR*'s September-October 2003 edition describes an armor task force conducting an LRP meeting at the then-named Combat Maneuver Training Center in 2003: "About 30 minutes before the scheduled arrival of logpac (4 p.m.), the company first sergeants arrived for the LRP meeting. ...The battalion command sergeant major, Hurricane 6 (headquarters and headquarters company [HHC] commander) and Hurricane 7 (HHC first sergeant) were discussing the upcoming mission while their drivers pulled security with M-4s. ... At the LRP meeting, Hurricane 7 discussed the location of the return LRP, the return time and the make-up of the incoming logpac (order of movement). He then reminded them to collect the 5988Es, Equipment Inspection and Maintenance Worksheets, from their company crews and send them back with their company supply sergeants. The battalion command sergeant major's policy was clear: no crew made it to the company chow line without first turning in completed (dirty) 5988Es to the company maintenance team chief. Company first sergeants would supervise each crew going through their maintenance sections to turn in 5988Es, refuel, then to chow. Just like the old cavalry, the horses had to be taken care of first." (CPT Mike Sullivan and MSG Tom Pailliotet, "Field Trains and [Logistics Packages] in an Armor Task Force.")

An LRP meeting should begin 30-60 minutes before the arrival of the distribution platoon to minimize the large footprint they bring. Attendees should be at a minimum the squadron command sergeant major, S-4 and troop first sergeants, but this can be tailored to address current problems. For example, if there is an issue with perstats, units can bring the S-1. If there are problems with casualty evacuation (casevac), the medical officer (MEDO) can come, and the command sergeant major could even conduct an expedient medical evacuation (medevac)/casevac rehearsal for future operations. And so on.

- (1) CSS overlay (ensure everyone has one or issue updated via analog graphics)
- (2) Next logpac location and time
- (3) Exchange logistics reports (analog logstat/perstat)
- (4) Verify requests on logistics reports with first sergeants
- (5) Verify/update headcount (ensure first sergeants know/include attachments)
- (6) Discuss any class-of-supply problems
- (7) Verify turnaround time (four-hour standard)
- (8) Verify personnel status
- (9) Discuss troop maintenance posture; ensure Equipment Status Report reflects this
- (10) Quality assure/quality control 5988es before consolidation by the distribution-platoon leader
- (11) Verify with first sergeants that they are receiving Class IX items and evacuating repairable Class IX items
- (12) Ask if any religious support is needed within the next 24 hours
- (13) Address any specific medical problems that occur in the troop; review medevac/casevac plan
- (14) If combat operation is to occur, conduct rehearsal of the CSS portion of the operation
- (15) Discuss any other logistical issues (S-1, MEDO, squadron maintenance officers)

Table 1. Example LRP meeting agenda units can use that was inspired by a 1997 edition of 4-7 Cavalry Squadron’s tacSOP.

Table 1’s example LRP meeting agenda is not an authoritative list, and additions and omissions should be made based on unit needs or time available, but some form of agenda is essential in the squadron’s tacSOP. Also, this meeting doesn’t have to be CSS-restricted. If the opportunity arises, the S-3 could share products (graphics, fragmentary orders) through the CTCF to get to troops without calling them back to the main CP.

Distro platoon leader can’t do it alone

A common error cavalry squadrons commit is not conducting any kind of LRP meeting and sending no one from squadron to oversee the operation. This leaves the distribution-platoon leader as the only face-to-face interaction that troop first sergeants have with squadron sustainment leaders, and this only makes it back to the FSC commander bypassing the S-4. Often the distro-platoon leader is a second lieutenant who is having enough trouble executing his or her own troop-leading procedures to make start-point times while trying to collate stacks of loose 5988es and doesn’t normally have the capital to dictate terms to experienced troop first sergeants. Even after the coming change of the FSC distribution-platoon leader authorization to a “senior” maneuver lieutenant in armored brigade combat teams (ABCTs), the job of the LRP meeting will not be reliably completed without senior squadron leader involvement on the ground.

Conclusion

At the Cobra Team, we have observed units struggling with sustainment make immediate and significant improvements in distribution as well as maintenance reporting when they deliberately execute an LRP meeting

lead by or under the supervision of the command sergeant major. This has become a standard coaching point from Cobra Team during training rotations and Leader's Training Program briefings.

In a time where cavalry squadrons are making strides to go back to the basics in the face of a near-peer enemy in a CEMA-denied environment, the touchpoint of a regular and deliberate LRP meeting can synchronize sustainment operations and consistently stop CSS problems before they happen. Squadrons should include a LRP meeting format in their tacSOP and codify the importance of the squadron, troops and the FSC adhering to a standard when executing logpac. Key-leader involvement is critical in the execution of sustainment. Squadron command sergeants major are uniquely experienced in CSS and can have an immense impact on the squadron if they take the lead in this process.

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Acronym Quick-Scan

ABCT – armored brigade combat team

BSA – brigade-support area

BSB – brigade-support battalion

Casevac – casualty evacuation

CEMA – cyber-electromagnetic activities

COP – common operating picture

CP – command post

CSS – combat service support

CTCP – combat-trains command post

DA 5988e – Equipment Maintenance and Inspection Worksheet

FSC – forward-support company

FTCP – field-trains command post

FY – fiscal year

HHC – headquarters and headquarters company

JCR – Joint Capabilities Release

JBC-P – Joint Battle Command Platform

Logpac – logistics package

Logstat – logistics status

Logsync – logistics synchronization

LRP – logistics release point

Medevac – medical evacuation

MEDO – medical officer (battalion/squadron)

NCOIC – noncommissioned officer in charge

NTC – National Training Center

Perstat – personnel status

TacSOP – tactical standard operating procedure



Figure1. D FSC of 4-10 Cavalry conducts a convoy through the Goat Trail at NTC in September 2016.



Figure 2. D FSC, 4-10 Cavalry, and B Troop, 5-7 Cavalry, make link-up at the LRP south of Hill 760 in February 2017.