Sustainment Considerations

by CPT Jerad N. Hoffmann and CPT James W. Turner

*(**Editor's note:** This article is a vignette based on events that occur during combined-arms battalion (CAB) rotations at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC). The Army units mentioned are not the actual units that experienced the events described. However, the organizations presented are used to describe typical logistic challenges within the maneuver battalions that train at JMRC.)*

As a junior captain fresh out of the Maneuver Captain's Career Course, I was ready to take on the world. Holding down the S-4 (logistics) shop before I got my chance at company command seemed like a pretty easy assignment. Making sure the battalion had food, water and bullets to conduct training did not seem too daunting. However, I was wrong; the learning curve was tremendous. Had I known then what I know now about logistics packages (logpacs) and logistics-resupply point (LRP) operations, and how difficult the planning process of resupply can be, I would have prepared myself a little better for our decisive-action training exercise rotation. Issues like sending accurate and specific logistic reports, logpac execution and key-leader involvement will delay – and in some cases stop – combat maneuver.

When I served as a platoon leader in my division, I spent 45 minutes a day checking and writing "no faults found" on a 5988-E maintenance checklist; that was the extent of my logistics knowledge. In a maneuver battalion, there are a lot of moving pieces, and the operational tempo is always changing. Tracking and coordinating resupply operations is exhausting. When you pile on developing concepts of support and predictive analysis to the equation, you're going to be tested as a leader.

I have since learned that logistics is a beast that constantly threatens to disrupt the fight if not kept on a leash. I never would have thought taking the time to outline critical logistics information and conduct meetings would alleviate so much frustration.

My battalion commander and command sergeant major were seasoned combat tankers who put a high priority on logistics. I used to question the process, but I started to see their logic. Before we left for the combat training center (CTC), the battalion commander told me the battalion tactical standard operating procedures (TACSOP) were severely lacking in content and that it would pay dividends to address the gaps. I looked at the TACSOP – there was a Yellow 1 report [same as logistics status (logstat)] and a couple of paragraphs talking about when reports were sent; the TACSOP seemed legitimate to me. Just to show disciplined initiative, I added a few sentences about recovery and then showed the changes to the commander. He smiled and brought in the command sergeant major to review my work. The command sergeant major smiled, too, which was very rare, and then said, "Sir, I think I will stick around the combat-trains command post (CTCP) the first few days to see this plan in action." Then the battalion commander told me to use the CTC as a learning opportunity. I was not sure what he meant at the time, but now I do.

(The following are daily excerpts from my battalion TACSOP notes.)

Day 1: movement-to-contact (MTC) issue. Senior-leader involvement. Logstat received via Joint Capabilities Release (JCR) log at 3 p.m., and LRP disseminated for 7 p.m. logpac. I did not personally go to the LRP since I figured the distribution-platoon leader could handle everything. My reasoning was "it is just logistics." What is so difficult about it? I would soon find out: everything.

7:15 p.m.: The logpac arrived 15 minutes late.

7:30 p.m.: I received message calls on the administrative/logistics (A&L) net from the company first sergeants and the distribution-platoon leader regarding fuel allocations, ration breaks, Class IV distribution, port-o-johns, etc. Everyone seemed confused and somewhat angry. Company commanders began to complain to the battalion commander that they may have to delay uncoiling their elements from the tactical-assembly area (TAA) if the resupply did not get executed soon.

8:30 p.m.: All supply elements finally pushed out with company trains to the LRP. Our battalion TACSOP holds us to 15 to 30 minutes on ground. However, our exact time was 1½ hours. This was ridiculous. It simply could not be that difficult.

9:30 p.m.: The Charlie Company commander called the battalion commander to report that his company did not receive a fueler and could not uncoil until they received fuel. The battalion executive officer verbally reprimanded me. I tried to explain that Company C did not request any fuel on their logstat, but he would not hear it. I then directed the Company C first sergeant to return to the CTCP for the emergency fueler. The Delta Company first sergeant volunteered to take his remaining fuel to Company C once he filled up his vehicles. Company C never arrived at the CTCP to grab emergency fuel.

10:30 p.m.: The Company D first sergeant arrived at Company C area. Company C refueled, but it took them three hours!

1:30 a.m.: Company C elements reconsolidated with logpac at the LRP and pushed to the field-trains command post (FTCP). Company C was two hours late uncoiling to attack position. Total logpac time was six hours. The battalion executive officer placed the blame for the LRP's failure on me; however, I didn't cause all the issues.

Recommendation: Managing and planning a CAB's internal logistics is potentially very challenging for a junior captain with very little experience outside a platoon or company. During CTC rotations at JMRC, maneuver battalions that had involved battalion senior leaders in the planning and execution of logpac operations significantly reduced time on LRPs, compared to those who did not. In addition, the battalion senior leaders involved in logpac operations are the forcing factor to ensure logistics are conducted according to the unit's internal TACSOP.

Day 2: 7 a.m. MTC issue. The logpac still took an hour to leave with company trains, and there were still inconsistencies with logstat reporting and ground truth. We received updated Yellow 1 reports at 3 a.m. The logpac arrived at the CTCP on time at 7 a.m. Then the chaos began. The logpac had all the commodities requested, but they were not organized into the convoy in any particular order. The first sergeants swarmed the distribution-platoon leader to grab their assets. The platoon leader did his best to organize the distribution; however, the first sergeants were asking for items which were not requested in their logstat. For example, the Company C first sergeant demanded that he be given two fuelers instead of the one requested in the logstat. When the distribution-platoon leader told him he would be taking another company's assets, the first sergeant became enraged. I asked why Company C needed another fueler. The distribution-platoon leader said he had a platoon which was black (empty) on fuel. The Company D first sergeant volunteered to give up one of his fuelers as long as he could get an extra one that evening, so that emergency was averted. Total logpac time was four hours. Company C was the last company to return to the LRP.

Recommendation: Battalion resupply operations at designated LRPs are not the time to work out logistical confusions from each company in the battalion. At JMRC, when battalion S-4s create an order of march by company resupply packages prior to logpac execution, there is less confusion about which logistic assets belong to which company. The best time to deconflict confusion on resupply requirements is to submit logstats before companies leave their designated TAAs. However, logstat timelines must be clearly understood and specified in the battalion TACSOP.

Day 2: 7 p.m. MTC issue. The logpac took 45 minutes to break out with the company trains. Issues concerning personnel and maintenance. After we received logstats, I disseminated over A&L that all first sergeants must meet at the LRP 20 minutes before the logpac arrived to conduct a meeting. All the first sergeants and the command sergeant major arrived at the LRP at 6:40 p.m. I started by going over the logstats with each company. Apparently, some of the companies' executive officers sent their logstat, but the first sergeant physically picked up their logpac. This is not a major issue, but it sometimes causes a discrepancy.

For example, Company B had a Macedonian platoon of dismounts attached to them that morning, so the first sergeant informed me the headcount for chow was incorrect. I happened to see the personnel-status (perstat) report that morning and realized the attached platoon was not reflected. Also, the Company D first sergeant mentioned that it would be a good idea to lean forward for Class IV since the MTC was ending and they planned to move into engagement-area (EA) development.

On a positive note, I had much needed senior-leader support from the command sergeant major when one of the companies arrived late at the LRP meeting. Once the logpac arrived, the distro-platoon leader dismounted and told us the order of march: A, B, C, D and Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC). The first sergeants then moved back to their tracks and came up to the road to receive the vehicles. It worked pretty well except that everyone was in blackout drive, so it complicated the effort's efficiency. The battalion still spent a significant amount of time on the LRP. It made me consider that this movement (logpac breaking out to company trains) should be as thoroughly planned within the TACSOP as a passage of lines would be planned for a maneuver company. Total logpac time: 3½ hours. The Company C first sergeant was last to return to the LRP – about 45 minutes after everyone else. I reported this to the command sergeant major over A&L. The command sergeant major recommended that I include a time hack for everyone to return to the LRP.

Recommendation: Almost all maneuver battalions that conduct training at JMRC have TACSOP specific to their organization. Maneuver battalions that use CTC rotations to update and fix their TACSOPs have a better chance in retaining lessons-learned from their operational experiences. Outlining information in the unit's TACSOP about logistic-resupply timelines, unit marking schemes and required meetings prior to logpac execution will reduce any confusion within the battalion for future rotations.

In addition to detailed TACSOPs, unit senior leaders – along with battalion representatives who conduct LRP meetings prior to logpac operations – have had a better experience in resupply efficiency. LRP meetings can set anticipated planning requirements for each shop in the battalion for future logpac missions.

Day 3: 7 p.m. EA development issue. Using the LRP meeting to collect data, security plan at the LRP, reducing time on the objective and establish alternative LRPs. Face-to-face interaction with the line companies at the LRPs had substantially improved my logistics common operating picture. In an effort to send key staff leaders to identify and fix systemic company administrative and maintenance issues, I brought along our S-1 representative and battalion maintenance officer (BMO). Both were surprisingly agreeable to the concept of seeing the first sergeants face-to-face; however, it turns out they had just as much trouble pulling information from JCR reporting. It is not that it's terribly inaccurate; it is just that JCR reports create follow-up questions.

For example, Company D requested 40 more sabot rounds for the evening's logpac but also reported they were 100 percent on their unit basic loads. The forward-support company (FSC) commander (who was intrigued by the meeting as well) asked the Company D first sergeant about the apparent conflict in the report. The Company D first sergeant told him that he requested the extra rounds to cache in alternate and supplementary battle positions for the defense. Just like that, the problem was solved.

The BMO had a lot of questions about maintenance. Many vehicles were going down for operator-level preventative checks. The first sergeants promised to bring their maintenance-team chiefs to the evening meeting to answer his questions. The S-1 was able to collect information on attachments, detachments and other administrative data. The logpac showed up with the markings just like the FSC commander and I discussed. The first sergeants had a much easier time identifying and accounting for their vehicles with the new system.

It was proceeding smoothly until we received indirect fire (IDF). Bravo was attempting to break contact when it was struck by three rounds, resulting in a catastrophic kill on the vehicle and crew. Chaos ensued. The logpac tried to react to IDF by moving out of the area of operations, and the remaining first sergeants directed them to get their resupply. However, no one knew their destination, so it was about an hour before we found a new site and regained control of the operation. If I had predesignated an alternate LRP, we could have avoided that confusion.

Regardless, Bravo was short a fueler, and I knew they were top priority for support during the operation's current phase. Since we were already an hour behind schedule, I made a decision on which assets to re-allocate and pulled one of Company C's fuelers since they were last in priority. After getting everything out, I called the battalion executive officer and backbriefed him on the decision since I knew the lack of fuel for Charlie could impact battalion planning. The battalion executive officer sounded legitimately pleased that someone made an informed decision based off commander intent instead of asking him to make a decision. Logpac time was four hours, largely due to IDF complications.

Recommendation: As stated before, units that update their sustainment portion of their TACSOP with very specific instructions such as meeting agendas and battalion-required talking points at the daily LRPs will make meetings

much more efficient. In addition to specific LRP meetings, TACSOPs that have detailed security plans and responsibilities that are the same for every logpac operation will increase survivability of personnel and equipment. When the battalion does not have a consolidated plan for actions at the LRP, the chance of increased casualties and equipment loss is much greater than for units that do.

Day 3: 7 p.m. EA development issue. Logistics plan in the event of communication blackout; customers refusing supplies. So, the positive items first: The LRP meeting agenda is set:

- Roll call
- Yellow 1 (detailed logstat, including headcount and breakdown of classes of supply) hard-copy turn-in (first sergeants)
- Perstat validation (battalion S-1 rep)
- 5988E turn-in and issue (BMO and first sergeants)
- Update sustainment plan/graphics (S-4)
- Logistics issues/shortages by class of supply and anticipated requirements 24, 48 and 72 hours out (S-4, first sergeants)
- FSC capabilities and plans to meet needs (FSC commander or executive officer)
- Current slants and review of combat power by company (BMO, company executive officers or first sergeants)
- Battalion top three comments (battalion commander, command sergeant major or executive officer).

The site security was much more effective. The first sergeants arrived 25 minutes early to establish 360-degree security and then moved to my vehicle for the LRP meeting. The logpac convoy commander called when he was 10 and then five minutes out to disseminate the order of march, which gave the first sergeants time to move to their vehicles. The logpac security took the place of the first-sergeant vehicles as they moved out of their positions to grab their breaks. No one was forced to dismount during the process, resulting in a 10-minute turn-around.

Along with the positives came the negatives. The JCR systems went down that day for the entire brigade. This caused considerable confusion for the FSC, who could not secure any logstat information for the customers. However, because the first sergeants had been sending us their 24-, 48- and 72-hour projected requirements at the LRP meeting, this did not cause any significant issues.

Another issue arose during the LRP meeting. The Company C first sergeant said he did not need all the barrier materials that were on the logpac. However, it was the battalion commander's priority to get blocking obstacles in overnight, and the conversation grew intense. After discussing the issue with the first sergeant and command sergeant major, the group determined it was in Company C's best interest to accept the Class IV.

The logpac time was only three hours. I provided a timeline for the companies at the LRP meeting, which said, "All first sergeants will return to the LRP in five-minute increments beginning at 9:30 p.m. Order of march A, B, C, D and HHC. Anyone who does not return in this window is responsible for escorting the log assets back to the FTCP." Everyone made it back with the exception of one company. The battalion executive officer reprimanded their first sergeant over A&L, and he endured a long movement back to the FTCP that night.

Recommendation: Communication and information flow within the battalion is always a factor for friction during logistic operations. When maneuver battalions have a clear primary-alternate-contingency-emergency plan for logistic reporting requirements, information is more successful getting to the right battalion support shop. That information is also vital to accurately push resupply in the correct quantity for each company. However, in the event that the lines of communication are severed for reporting requirements, a standard push package unique to each company should go with the battalion logpac to each LRP.

Day 4: 6:30 p.m. defense. Next, I find myself deep in the tree line at the LRP waiting for the first sergeants to arrive for the meeting. That morning the battalion commander validated the line companies' EA. Everyone except Company C met his standard. Apparently, Company C did not install enough blocking obstacles on a few avenues of approach. The Company C commander said that he did not receive enough Class IV, but the command sergeant major happened to be on ground to confirm that the first sergeant received an entire flat rack of c-wire and hedgehogs on the logpac the previous night. After further investigation, the FSC reported that the Company C flat rack was returned the previous evening with more than half the Class IV remaining.

All the first sergeants were present for the 7 p.m. meeting, as was the FSC executive officer and my CTCP team (battalion S-1 noncommissioned officer in charge and BMO). All the companies had their log reports. The BMO and S-1 validated all the personnel and equipment they were tracking for reconstitution, and the first sergeants provided them with any information they were lacking. I pushed out the primary and alternate CTCP, LRP, forward aid stations, ambulance exchange points and mortuary-affairs collection point locations, and the first sergeants provided me with the grids to their cached ammunition and recovery assets. The Company D first sergeant identified that the tanks would benefit greatly from an available emergency resupply of Class III and V if the battalion decided to conduct a counterattack after the defense. That seemed like good advice to the FSC executive officer and me, so we planned to double the CTCP emergency resupply capability just in case the counterattack occurred.

I updated the first sergeants as to the order of march for the logpac and the number of vehicles each company would receive. I then told the BMO to collect the combat power quickly so the first sergeants could move to their vehicles. After collecting the final slants, I disseminated the timeline for the return time to the LRP and turned the floor over to the battalion command sergeant major, who seemed to benefit from a daily face-to-face with the first sergeants, just as I had. The command sergeant major wrapped it up, and the first sergeants headed back to their tracks.

During my CTC rotation, I experienced valuable lessons-learned when it came to battalion-level logistics. The shortfalls and unexpected changes to mission can have a profound impact on unit resupply operations. As the battalion's logstat reports evolved into usable data, LRP meetings became more efficient. Our battalion TACSOP was updated with the most useful and productive procedures to best meet the battalion commander's intent. It is up to leaders to clearly define lessons-learned and implement change based on training experiences.

At the end of our rotation, there is no doubt that each company had a shared understanding on how battalion resupply operations are conducted.

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