Commander's Primer to Combat-Trains Command Post

by CPT Evan Ringel

The combat trains and combat-trains command post (CTCP) are the least understood elements within the battalion. However, they provide the functions critical to ensuring the unit is combat ready. The CTCP is often disappointingly underused, and the personnel are undertrained for the mission.

The CTCP can provide tremendous redundancy for current operations, communications flexibility and adaptability based on the threat environment. These capabilities provide battalion commanders options that often they don't know they have. An empowered CTCP will find the gaps and seams in the unit's readiness and be postured to solve them before they impact the rest of the unit. The better prepared the combat trains and CTCP are for multidomain operations, the better the unit will perform at combat-training centers (CTCs) and during deployments.

What is the CTCP?

The combat trains are the maneuver battalion or Cavalry squadrons' primary node for logistics support on the battlefield. Their function is to generate combat power for the battalion and coordinate maintenance, medical and supply functions for every company within the battalion. The CTCP manages the combat trains.

The unit maintenance-collection point (UMCP) and battalion aid station (BAS), usually with Role I capabilities, are either co-located or within supporting distance of the combat trains. Mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops and support available, time available and civil considerations (informational considerations), or METT-TC(i), considerations will help leaders decide to combine or separate the command post (CP) and each of these functions into their node. However, the responsibilities, functions and support the CTCP, MCP and BAS will not change based on geographic dispersion of the combat trains.

The Center for Lessons-Learned pamphlet ***Combining Arms in the Close Fight*** details the small and agile nature of the CTCP and its critical purpose in generating combat power. This contrasts with the field trains and field-trains command post (FTCP), which receives, configures, and delivers all classes of supply by its connection and location within or close to the brigade-support area (BSA).[1]

This article matches closely with the intent and function of the CTCP from that publication but is specific to CTCP users within the battalion.

Challenges of CTCP and combat trains

Well-run combat trains and a CTCP can be challenging for several reasons. First, with headquarters and headquarters company (HHC) and forward-support company (FSC) elements, as well as crews, Soldiers and equipment from other companies within the battalion, it can take a lot of work to have unity of command. Even if a centralized approach is used, communication among the shop office, aid station, CTCP, distribution platoon and FSC CP (if present and separate) can be incomplete and untimely.

Finally, the combat trains, with all its parts, become the most extensive single collection of equipment and communications in the battalion, making security, masking and discipline very challenging.

The keys to overcoming these challenges are humility and practice. HHC and FSC commanders, first sergeants, executive officers and other key personnel such as battalion maintenance technicians (BMTs) and medical officers need to develop clear responsibilities and processes with egos aside to ensure they provide first-rate support to the battalion.

Second, practice exposes flaws in the plan and the execution to rectify for the next iteration. Establishing the CTCP and combat trains at a CTC is not enough. Situational-training exercises and crew, platoon and company live-fire improve armor and infantry proficiency and skill. Similarly, a CTCP must be trained and practiced to codify best practices, reduce the time needed to establish and increase the bandwidth for support.

Roles and responsibilities at combat trains

- **HHC commander:** Usually the most senior commander operating in the CTCP. Exercises command authority over elements at the combat trains and implements the battalion commander's guidance. [2] Clearly defines, understands and solves problems through his/her perspective and experience to provide time and focus for the other CPs and companies.
- **HHC first sergeant:** Enforcer of discipline and standards within the combat trains with the FSC first sergeant. Ensures security and other priorities of work are clearly established and followed. Responsible for ensuring medical, maintenance and logistics support for HHC scout and mortar platoons. May also be responsible for support for the main CP or tactical CP (TAC).[3]
- **HHC executive officer:** Can be located where they best resolve problems for HHC and the battalion. This may be providing direct support to the main CP or TAC, or with the MCP to ensure rigor and adherence to maintenance priorities.
- **Battalion chaplain:** Ensures religious support to the battalion from anywhere on the battlefield. Plans and conducts mortuary affairs for the battalion.[4]
- **FSC commander:** Primary logistics executor for the battalion. Can be located at either the combat trains or FTCP to best facilitate support for the organization. The primary focus is on the movement of classes of supply, recovery assets and maintenance around the battlefield. Either the FSC or HHC commander can act as the direct liaison to the brigade-support battalion (BSB) to ensure support to the combined-arms battalion.[2]
- **FSC first sergeant:** Enforcer of discipline and standards within the combat trains with the HHC first sergeant or can be located at the FTCP. Usually responsible for logistics support to the combat trains and MCP but can also support the main CP and TAC CP, depending on the ability of the HHC first sergeant to do so.
- **FSC executive officer:** Can be located where they best solve problems for the FSC. The best location may be at the BSA, FTCP, CTCP or forward with a forward-logistics element. Tracks and supports all FSC operations from their location and provides relevant reports to the BSB.
- **Distribution-platoon leader/platoon sergeant:** Officer-in-charge (OIC) or noncommissioned-officer-in-charge of logistics packages (LOGPACs) from the BSA forward to the logistics-release point. Ensures LOGPAC has appropriate supplies, methods of marking, communications and understanding of each mission. Must enforce the battalion standing operation procedures (SOPs) for LOGPAC duration and plan for subsequent draw of Classes I, III, IV, V and IX.
- **Battalion maintenance tech:** Maintenance subject-matter expert within the MCP or at the FTCP. Along with the battalion executive officer and battalion maintenance officer (BMO), sets maintenance priorities for the battalion and facilitates parts flow.
- **Battalion motor sergeant:** Manages placement and operation of FSC elements with the CTCP, including the unit maintenance-collection point, recovery section and field-maintenance teams (FMTs). Helps manage non-mission-capable vehicle placement, distro-platoon assets and overall traffic flow within the CTCP.
- **BMO:** Primary liaison between the battalion S-4 and the FSC maintenance elements wherever they might be located.[1] With the BMT and battalion executive officer, establishes and enforces maintenance priorities and facilitates parts flow from the Supply-Support Activity (SSA). Can be the release authority for recovery and maintenance missions.
- **Battalion S-4:** Primary logistics planner for the battalion and usually the CTCP OIC.[5] Primary focus is generating combat power for the battalion through maintenance, medical, supply and personnel replacement. Inherent in that focus is understanding the current and projected status of each and advising the battalion commander, executive officer and S-3 on the mission readiness of the formation.
- **Battalion S-1:** Force manager for the battalion and alternate CTCP OIC. The S-1's primary focus is personnel tracking and requesting replacements to maintain combat power.

- **BMO:** Medical planner for the battalion.[6] Tracks patients across the battlefield from program of instruction to Role III as necessary. The medical officer directs the setup and break down of the BAS and any attachments and ensures rigorous reporting to the battalion S-1 and brigade medical officer.
- **Battalion medical-platoon leader:** Manages the operations of the battalion Role I and treatment of patients.

Functions

The general functions of the CTCP are the same as any CP:[7]

- Conducting knowledge management and information management;
- Building and maintaining situational understanding;
- Maintaining running estimates in support of the commander's decision-making;
- Controlling operations;
- Assessing operations;
- Coordinating with internal and external organizations; and
- Performing CP administration.

The functions specific to the CTCP that enable it to support the battalion are: [8]

- Monitors current operations and prepares to assume the functions of the main CP;
- Provides sustainment representation to the main CP for planning and integration;
- Net-control station for the administrative and logistics net;
- Monitors main and alternate supply routes and controls sustainment traffic within the battalion's area of operations;
- Coordinates evacuation of casualties, equipment and detainees;
- Plans, coordinates and controls sustainment for tactical operations;
- Prepares to shift support if the main effort changes;
- Maintains personnel status and logistics status (LOGSTAT) reports on all organic and attached units;
- Establishes the MCP;
- Ensures personnel accountability of all assigned or attached battalion personnel; and
- Provides essential personnel services.

While some of these functions are inherent in daily operations, most are outside the scope of normal duties for Soldiers in the CTCP. S-1, S-4, Supply and FSC personnel are not usually familiar with CP operations that enable situational awareness and decision-making at the same level of proficiency as the main CP. Shifts in duties from administrative or garrison operations to tactical operations must be specified and practiced well in advance.

Figures 1 and 2 are products that can be used to facilitate shared understanding and fuel decision-making within the CTCP.

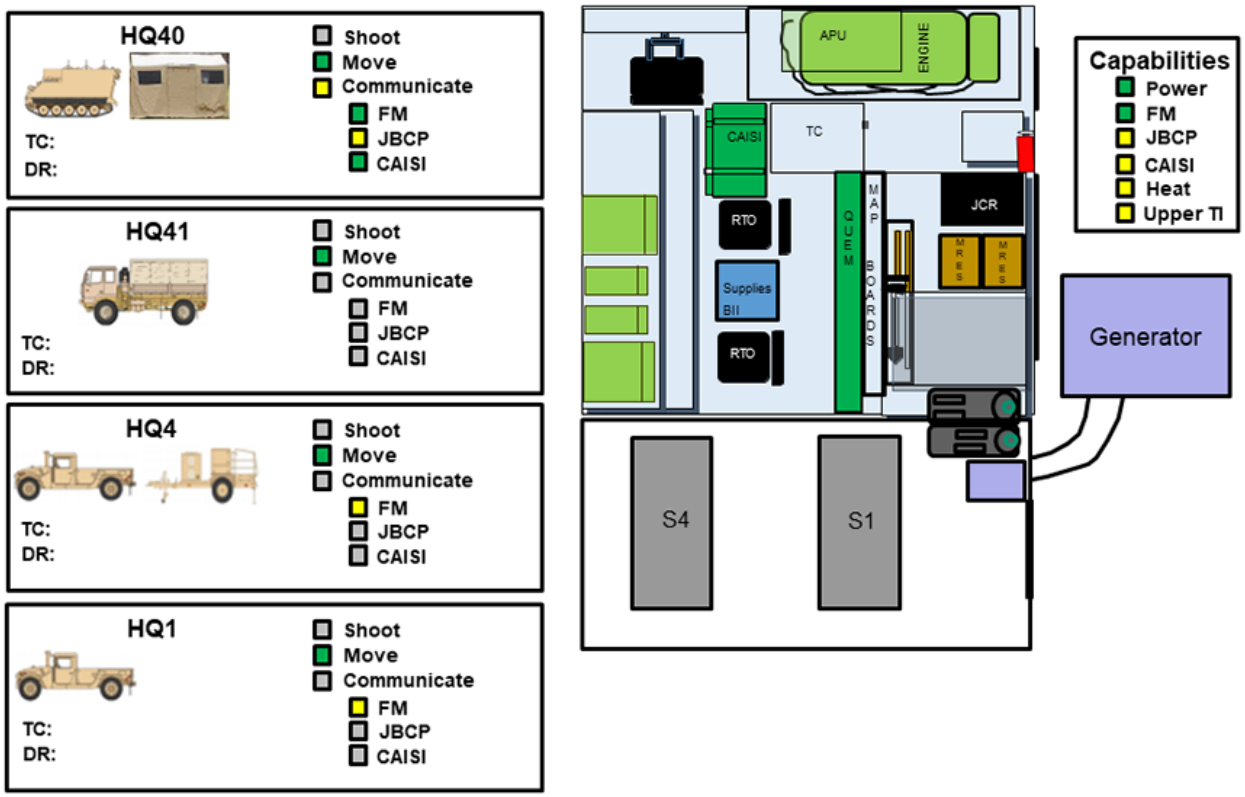

Figure 1. CTCP layout and load plan.

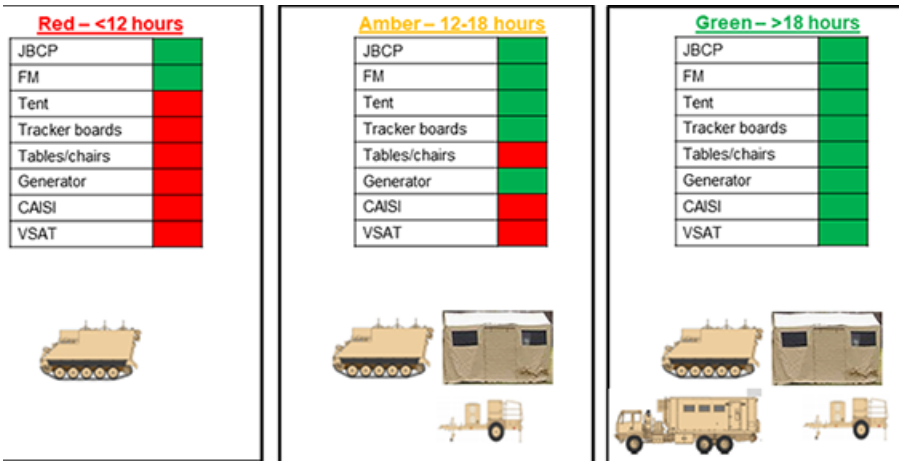

Figure 2. CTCP operational capacity.

Figure 1 provides an example CTCP layout and load plan using a M1068 platform with Modular Command-Post System tent. Figure 2 is an operational-capacity example that shows how the CTCP can be configured based on METT-TC(i) considerations.

Table 1a. CTCP mission tracker.) [Word or PSD, 43 picas, 300 dpi]
(Table 1b. CTCP mission in/out tracker.) [Word or PSD, 43 picas, 300 dpi]

(Table 2. Combat-slant tracker.) [Word or PSD, 43 picas, 300 dpi]

Tables 1a and 1b are mission trackers that synchronize understanding of assets in and out of the CTCP. Table 2 is a combat-slant tracker to help understand current combat power across the battalion.

(Table 3. Recovery-mission tracker.) [Word or PSD, 43 picas, 300 dpi)]

(Table 4. Maintenance-fault tracker.) [Word or PSD, 43 picas, 300 dpi]

Table 3 tracks recovery missions to help triage missions and allocate the recovery section or specify if an FMT needs to recover the vehicle to a maintenance exchange point. Table 4 tracks maintenance faults by bumper number to enhance understanding and help the BMO, BMT and battalion S-4 project readiness and provide estimates for upcoming missions.

(Figure 3. Personnel tracker.) [PNG, 43 picas, 200 dpi]

(Figure 4. LOGSTAT example.) [PNG, 43 picas, 200 dpi]

Figure 3 is an example personnel tracker that helps S-1 track personnel status (PERSTAT) and casualties through treatment roles. Figure 4 is a basic logistics status (LOGSTAT) that enables the S-4 and FSC project requirements for the next 72 hours. The FSC should use this information to create its logistics-synchronization (LOGSYNC) matrix to align inflow and outflow of classes of supply with the higher headquarters concept of support.

(Table 5. Combat-trains task-assignment matrix.) [Word or PSD, 43 picas, 300 dpi]

Table 5 provides a method for nesting battle rhythm, reports and other critical events into a cohesive timeline. This method ensures that all tasks are assigned to a specific lead, have a specified audience and are deconflicted with other key events. By creating this product with all stakeholders, leaders can generate buy-in and can ensure task completion.

Physical design

The physical design of the combat trains and CTCP are METT-TC(i) dependent. CTCPs will function like a large patrol base or company assembly area and use the same site-selection criteria. However, CTCP elements must be able to conduct their mission while maintaining communications, security and protection considerations while belonging to different companies.

Also, as the largest collection of equipment and personnel in the battalion, inflow and outflow from each of the subordinate elements is critical. For example, a clear entrance and separate exit route to and from the aid station that facilitates patient drop off and pick up is crucial to ensuring timely treatment of injuries. Space must be allocated to each of the FMTs to ensure that they can troubleshoot faults and make repairs while maintaining reasonable distancing of vehicles.

Security considerations are as critical as functional considerations. Using a triangle method for security, like a patrol base, can ensure three well-prepared apexes with effective fires around the combat trains. Make use of combat platforms in the combat trains for repairs by integrating them into the security plan. A successful standard practice is to always maintain the most devastating vehicle with functional fire-control systems at the entrances to the combat trains.

The following are some considerations for the site, layout and security of the combat trains:

- Pick terrain that masks the combat trains from likely enemy positions and away from high-speed avenues of approach. Valleys or depressions work well if the surrounding terrain allows establishment of security positions with good observation and fields of fire.
- Do not have an entrance or exit immediately off an avenue of approach. Dirt tracks must not seem to lead right to the combat trains. By taking a route with several turns to get to a concealed combat train, the risk of compromise will be decreased.
- Allow minimum 50 meters spacing between vehicles, even with an influx of vehicles for maintenance. Vehicles should be concealed to the best of Soldiers' ability and pre-marked with pickets during establishment.

- Apexes or other security positions should be covered and concealed, and constantly improved. Integrated mounted and dismounted positions are preferable.
- Antennas should be kept to as few as possible and as low as functional. By placing the CTCP close to the shop office with very-small-aperture terminal (VSAT) / inflatable satellite antenna (ISA), there is no need for a Combat Service Support Automated Information System Interface (CAISI) between the two positions. Similarly, not every element of the combat trains needs to monitor every net, which reduces the number of antennas up and emitting.
- Field-feeding and ammo sections can be located within the combat trains but will require more space and element-specific requirements for their operations. Flat racks, pallets, concertina wire and fire extinguishers must be considered for ammo operations. Gray water, meals-ready-to-eat pallet space and thermal masking must be considered for field feeding.
- Light and sound considerations during daylight and nighttime must be considered. Use reconnaissance and security (R&S) patrols for more security and to observe the outside of the combat trains.

(Figure 5. Combat-trains layout example.) [PNG, 43 picas, 200 dpi]

Figure 5 shows an example of a triangle-style combat trains that uses machinegun and combat vehicles for security at the apexes. The example shows traffic control through the 6 o'clock position, establishing clear lines of sight to vehicles entering and exiting the combat trains. Using this layout aids in effective communication between the entry-control point and the CTCP.

CTCP and combat-trains training

Training the CTCP and the combat trains can be challenging. Deploying all the assets within the combat trains will almost certainly disrupt daily operations and have impacts on other battalion training and events. Much more emphasis is put on training the battalion staff in the military decision-making process and current operations through CP exercises and other training events. An efficient and progressive method for training the combat trains and CTCP must consider the time and impact of deploying while meeting CP training objectives.

The CTCP needs multiple iterations to refine products and processes. There are no standard products that must be used. Using resources on-installation such as Defense Logistics Agency's Printing and Training-Aid Support Center / Training Support Center can help provide products or training and full-scale operations. Building the team, structure and products for use early and often helps shorten the learning curve for an effective CTCP.

Finally, leaders must be cognizant of the impact of placing key administrative functions like S-1 and S-4 into a potentially austere training environment. Also, Soldier burnout can lead to diminishing returns on training time.

Table 6 is an example of a crawl-walk-run progression that could be used to structure a training plan. Fortunately for HHC and FSC commanders, CTCP and combat-trains operations tie directly to two of the three mission-essential tasks (METs) for an HHC and five of six METs for an FSC. They are also high-payoff tasks.

(Table 6. CTCP training progression.) [Word or PSD, 43 picas, 300 dpi]

Conclusion

The combat trains and CTCP provide unrivaled impact on battalion readiness. Seamless operation due to targeted and effective training ensures that the battalion generates and maintains combat power and extends operational reach.

The CTCP's nature allows commanders to identify the most effective staff to generate return for the battalion. Commanders often want maximum staff participation at all events in the main CP. This is not always feasible and often not recommended in this age of pervasive surveillance and precision-strike capabilities.

Task, purpose and trust must be given to the right people at the CTCP to facilitate the battalion's readiness. This relationship and decentralized decision-making must be practiced often during home-station training.

With the right trust, people and training, the combat trains and CTCP are combat-multipliers to the formation and will facilitate unfettered operations, enabling success on the battlefield.

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Notes

[1] Center for Army Lessons-Learned; ***Combining Arms in the Close Fight***; Nov. 4, 2022.
[2] Army Technical Publication (ATP) 3-90.5; ***Combined Arms Battalion***; July 2021.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] ATP 6-0.5; ***Command Post Organization and Operations***; March 2017.
[8] ATP 3-90.5.

Acronym Quick-Scan

AHA – ammunition holding area
ATHP – ammunition transfer holding point
ATP – Army technical publication
BAS – battalion aid station
BCT – brigade combat team
BFiST – Bradley fire-support team
BMO – battalion maintenance officer
BMT – battalion maintenance technician
BSA – brigade-support area
BSB – brigade-support battalion
CAISI – Combat Service Support Automated Information System Interface
CBRNE – chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosives
CK – containerized kitchen
CP – command post
CTC – combat-training center
CTCP – combat-trains command post
CUOPS – current operations
DR – driver
ESR – equipment-status report
FM – frequency modulation
FMC – fully mission capable
FMT – field-maintenance team
FRH – fire-resistant hydraulic fluid
FSC – forward-support company
FTCP – field-trains command post
GAA – grease, automotive and artillery
HHC – headquarters and headquarters company
ISA – inflatable satellite antenna
JBC-P – Joint Battle Command-Platform
LOGPAC – logistics package

LOGSTAT – logistics status
LOGSYNC – logistics synchronization
LRP – logistics-release point
MCP – maintenance-collection point
MET – mission-essential task
METT-TC(i) – mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops and support available, time available and civil considerations (informational considerations)
MTRCS – Multi-Temperature Refrigerated Container System
NCO – noncommissioned officer
OH – on-hand
OIC – officer in charge
PAX – personnel
PERSTAT – personnel status
POL – petroleum, oil and lubricants
QTY – quantity
R&S – reconnaissance and security
SoG – sergeant of the guard
SOP – standard operating procedures
SPO – support-operations office(r)
SSA – Supply-Support Activity
STT – Satellite Transportable Terminal
TAC – tactical command post
TC – tank commander
Upper TI – Upper Tactical Internet
UMCP – unit maintenance-collection point
UOM – unit of measure
VIC – vehicles
VSAT – very-small-aperture terminal