

Improving Company Trains

by CPT Timothy Russell and CPT Thomas Blaschke

While serving at the National Training Center (NTC), we observed that many units have little to no standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the critical sustainment actions they do every day. Battalion and company SOPs should cover a few battle drills in detail: logistics release point (LRP) operations, battalion-level resupply point procedures, logistics status (LOGSTAT) and other reports, and section/platoon sustainment actions in a tactical assembly area (TAA).

In this article, we provide some examples of battle drills, informed by observations at NTC, to incorporate into your SOP as you see fit.

'35mm cycle' battle drill

The "35mm cycle" simply means rotating your sustainment assets and Soldiers through your sections/platoons to address critical sustainment needs in an orderly manner. The cycle addresses the need to refuel (Class III), rearm (Class V), see to Soldier medical issues and maintain combat platforms and equipment.

In Figures 1 and 2, a company is established in a TAA oriented on the direction of travel, and it maintains 360-degree security. (See Army Technical Publication (ATP) 3-90.1, *Armor and Mechanized Infantry Company Team*, for more on "laagers" and general TAA organization.) This affords leaders the ability to retain 360-degree security or rapidly deploy to another location as needed. Depending on the amount of time available before the next operation, the commander can direct either a hasty, time-constrained or a deliberate cycle of resupply, and he issues an order with focus areas for each part of the cycle.

The "35mm cycle" model helps create efficiency and expedites actions in the TAA, ensuring everyone down to the Soldier level understands the priorities of work. At the first station, the company-level master gunner oversees boresight checks and weapons maintenance, and checks the status of ammunition of one of the platoons in the company. The master gunner will attempt to fix any weapons issues that exceed Level 10 and will document these malfunctions for submission to the company executive officer on Form 5988E. If fuel is available, then two vehicles, one section at a time, will move to the company trains for service-station refuel while the rest of the platoon is conducting weapon checks and ammo counts.

Simultaneously, at the second station, the maintenance contact team assigned to the organization will work with a different platoon to assess equipment faults and provide quality control on preventative-maintenance checks and services (PMCS). This ensures that maintenance subject-matter experts get an opportunity to personally assess equipment issues and faults. Once complete, the maintenance-team chief provides updated 5988E equipment inspection reports to the company executive officer.

The final station is led by the company first sergeant with the support of the company medics and the supply sergeant. They use the time allotted to validate load plans, resupply Class I and execute Soldier health checks. The company executive officer tracks the overall status of the resupply operation, controls the rotation of the three inspection teams and submits an updated LOGSTAT to battalion when complete.

LRPs

Efficient, rehearsed and organized LRPs are the cornerstone of battalion logistics. A well-executed LRP allows the battalion to resupply all its formations quickly and allows the trains to resupply themselves quickly to set conditions for maximizing the battalion's operational reach. Poorly executed LRPs cause delays to maneuver operations, expose vulnerable logistics assets to enemy contact and can disrupt the entire brigade's resupply efforts. An LRP is just a point on the ground where the battalion's dispersed elements link up with its logistics package (LOGPAC), conduct sustainment actions, receive and escort its LOGPAC to its company trains/platoon bivouac and return to the LRP when complete.

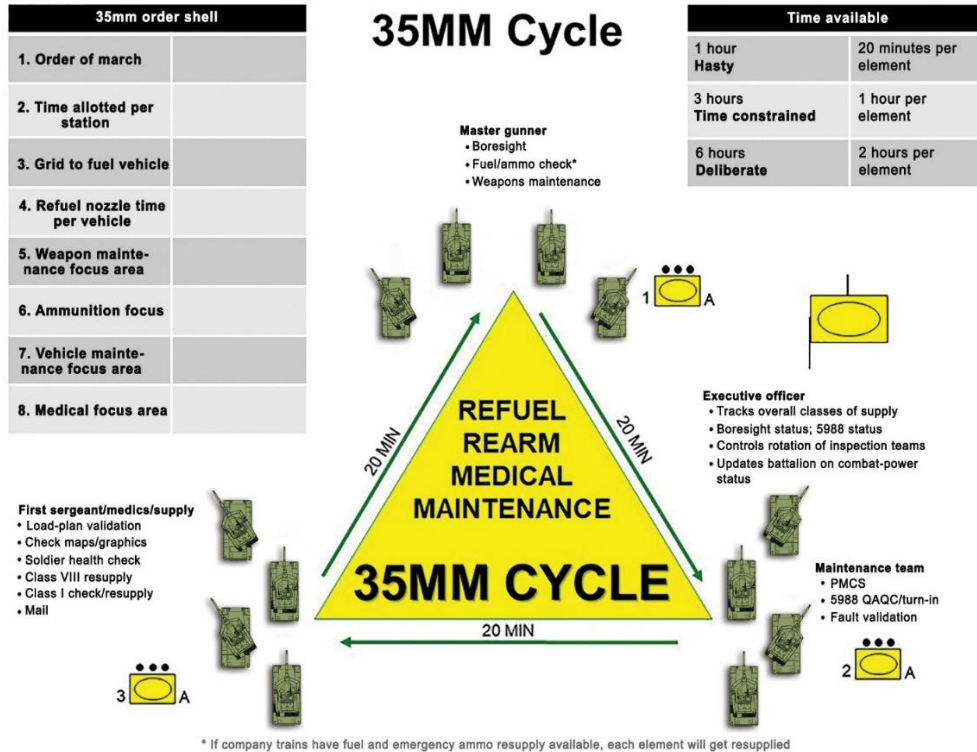


Figure 1. 35mm cycle.

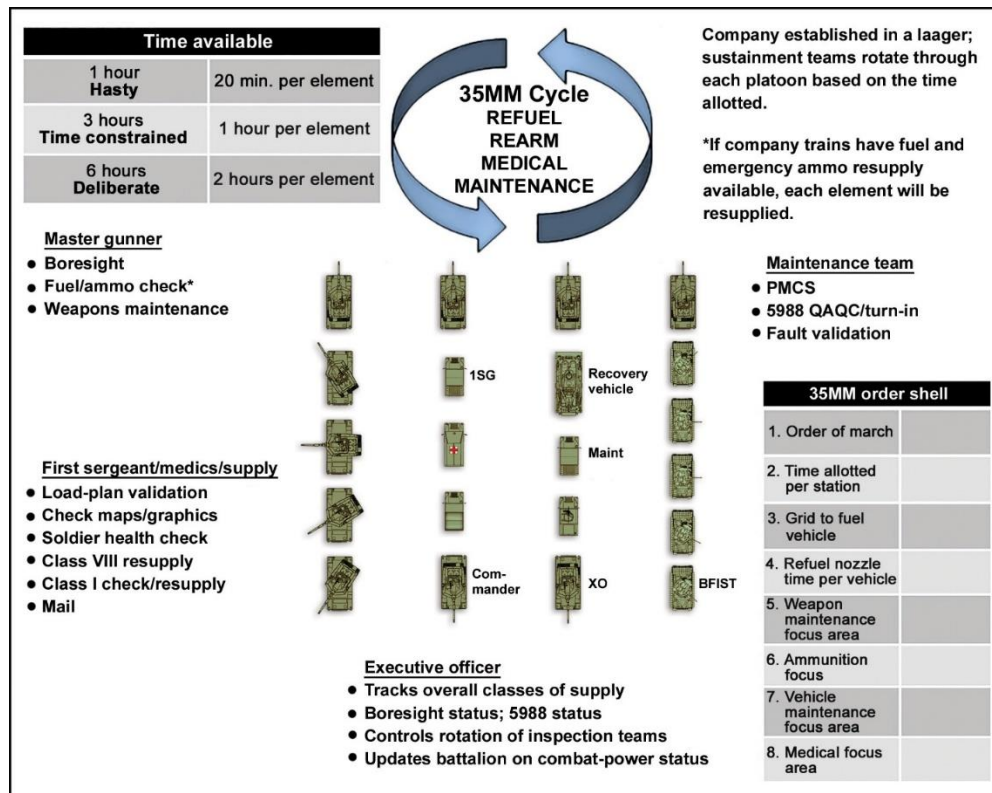


Figure 2. Tank-company laager. (Adapted from ATP 3-90.1, Figure 5-4)

At NTC we observed that LRPs are often an afterthought to the battalion's plan. It usually falls to the S-4/forward-support company (FSC) to figure out LRPs on the fly instead of as a rehearsed battalion-level operation that is

informed and planned by a deliberate military decision-making process. For example, some common problems we observed at NTC are:

- LRPs at NTC are often arrayed in a “motorpool” or “ducks in-a row” style instead of being tactically dispersed.
- Security is often minimal to non-existent.
- LRP link-ups at NTC are often confused by a lack of planning or SOPs for communications between the distribution platoon and the first sergeant/executive officer/supply sergeant, who link up at the LRP.
- The LOGPACs at the LRP aren’t marked in any way that allows vehicles to quickly identify and link in with their intended unit.
- Battalions often fail to incorporate attachments and specialty platoons (scouts/mortars) into the LRP.

The pre-LRP order is a critical step in synchronizing the battalion LRP operation. Ideally, the S-4 will receive LOGSTAT reports, analyze them and the battalion’s operational common operating picture, and then send out the pre-LRP order four to six hours before the LRP link-up time. All subordinate units and command posts in the battalion, to include any attachments, receive the order and provide acknowledgement and confirmation or any corrections as needed.

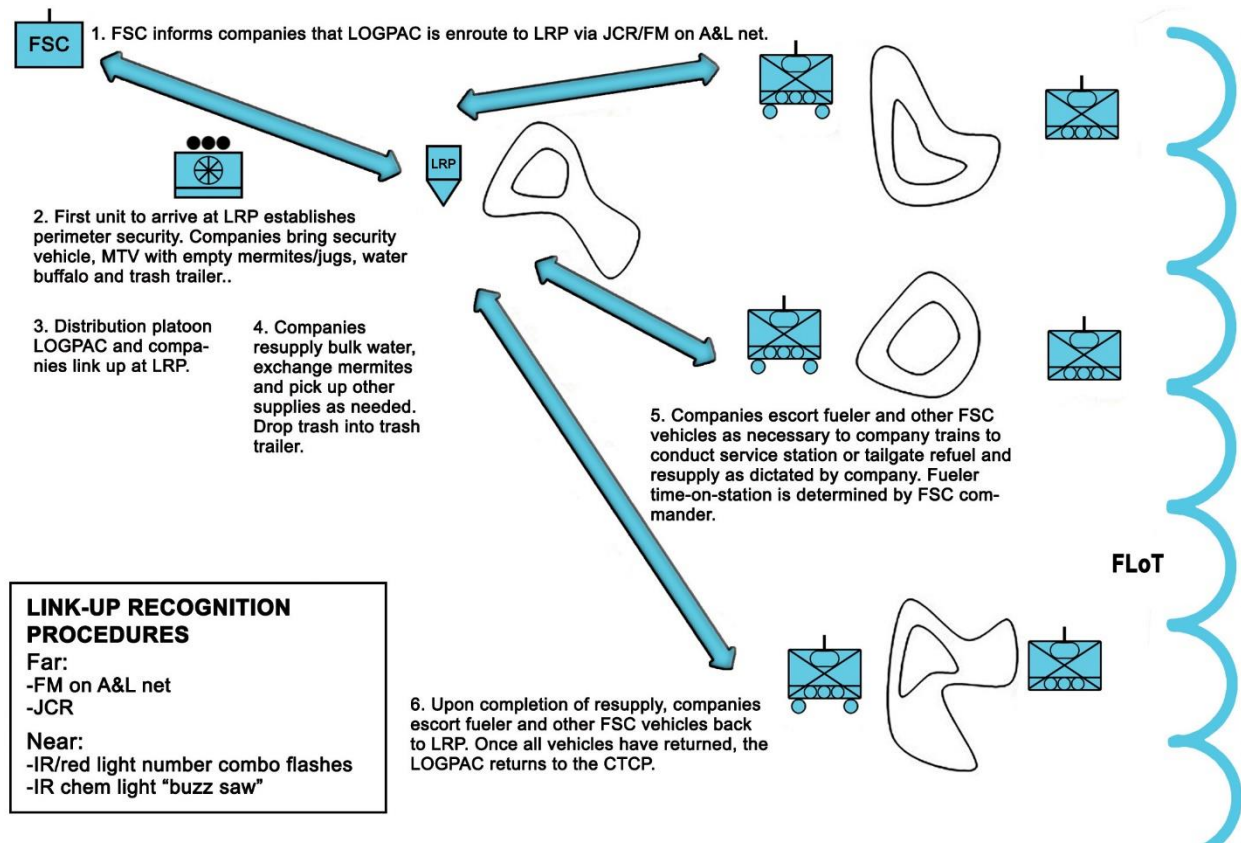


Figure 3. LRP SOP. LRP is pre-planned and centrally located behind cover/concealment. It is detailed in the battalion concept of support. Company trains are located one terrain feature from forward-line-of-troops (FLOT).

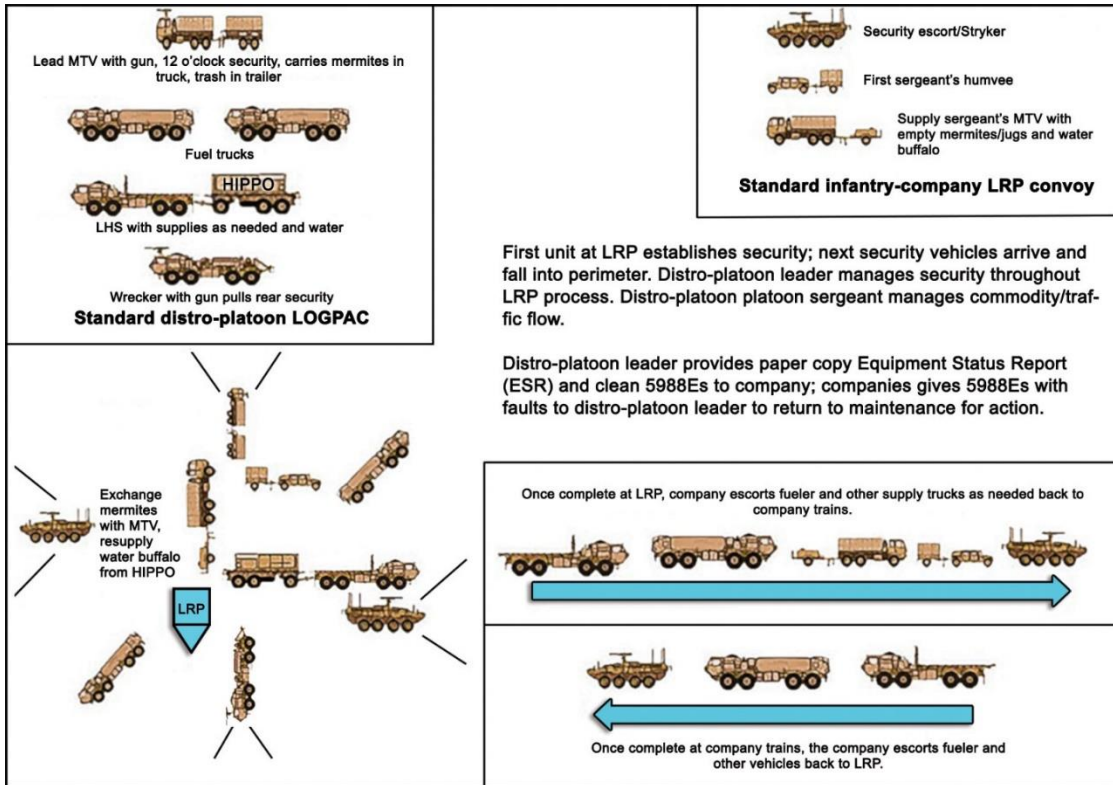


Figure 4. Stryker battalion LRP SOP and recommended LOGPAC vehicle configuration.

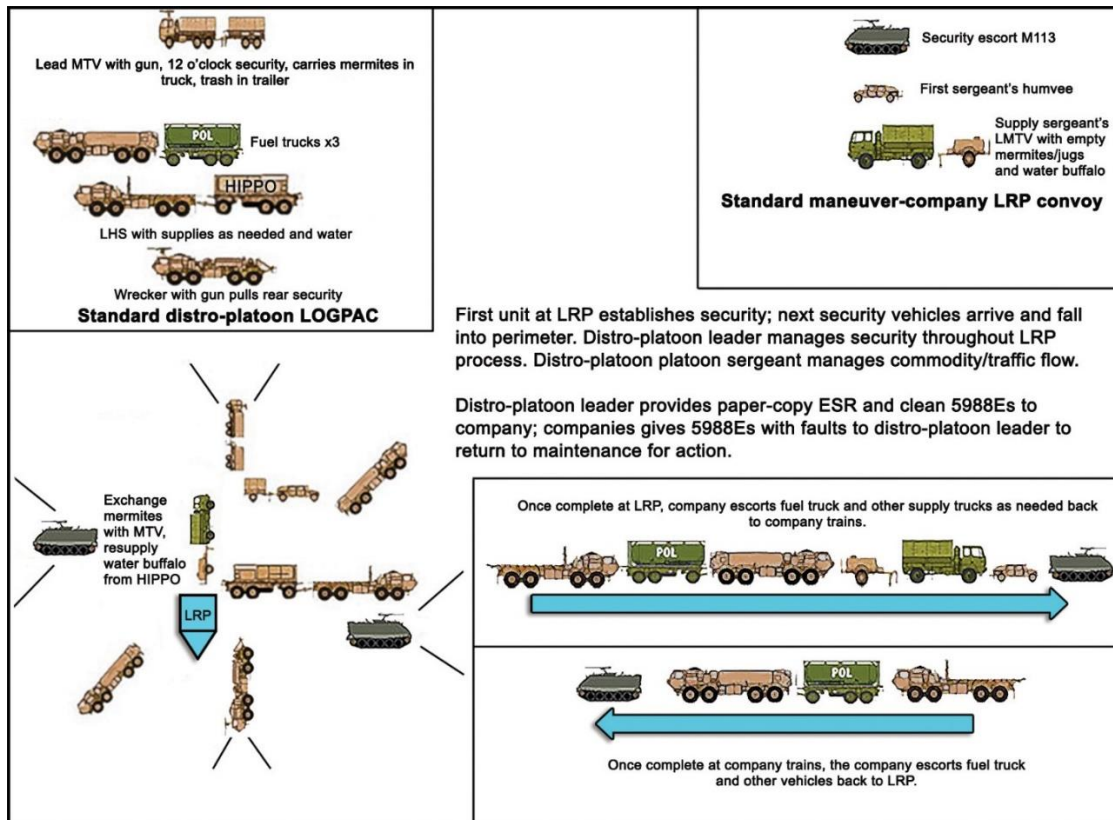


Figure 5. CAB LRP SOP and recommended LOGPAC vehicle configuration.

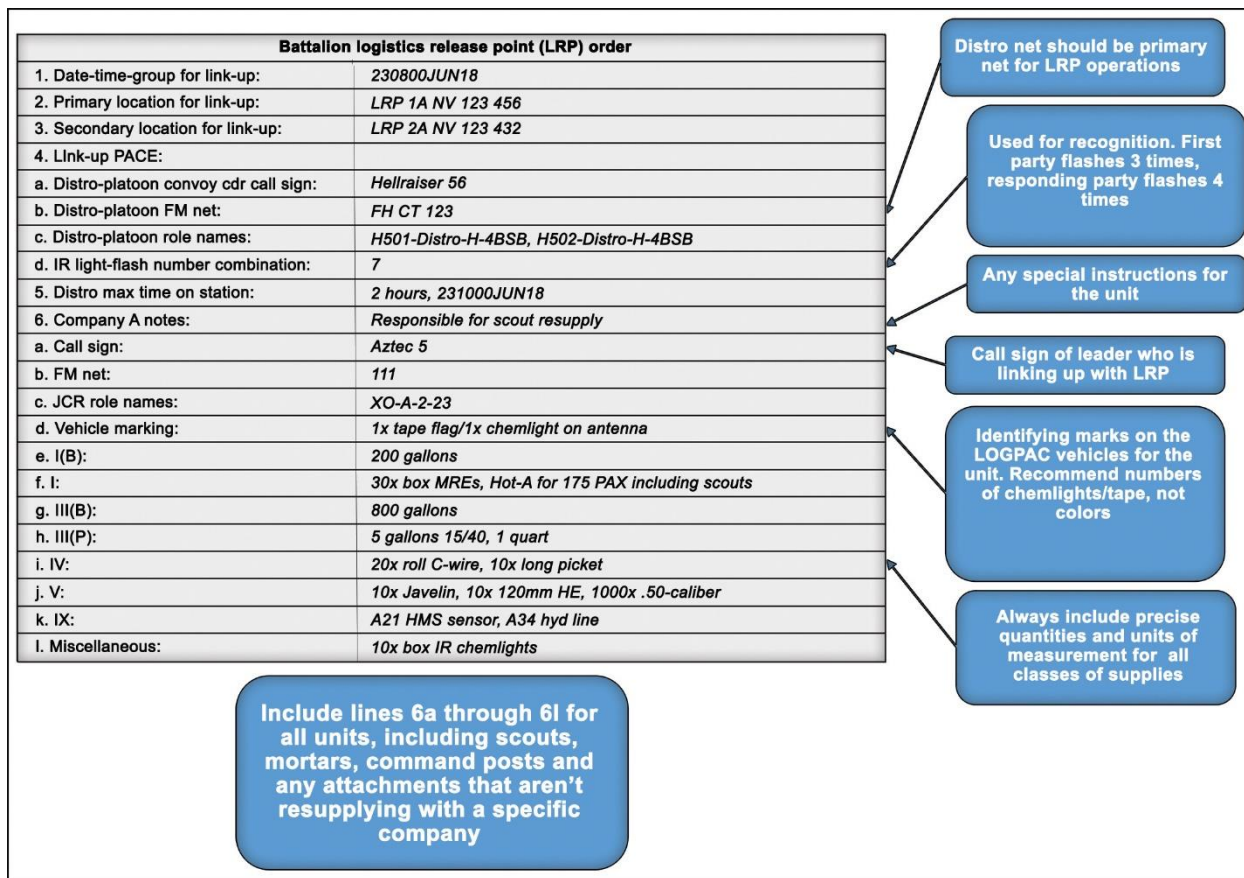


Figure 6. Battalion LRP order.

Robust company trains

Companies at NTC have been successful using a technique we call the “robust company trains” concept. The basic concept is to simply attach logistics assets directly to the company trains. For a combined-arms battalion’s (CAB) FSC, this equates to each company’s field-maintenance team, an M978 fuel truck and an assault kitchen (AK) team. The company manages its own logistics timeline in accordance with its plan instead of a resupply schedule dictated by battalion or brigade. This is especially helpful for the company when serving hot meals. Instead of racing the pickup and return of mermite (insulated meal containers prepared in the containerized kitchen by the FSC) at an LRP, with a four-hour window to consume, the company cooks prepare and allow Soldiers to eat in the company trains when convenient.

The average LRP at the NTC takes about six hours to complete if the fuel trucks have to go from an LRP to the company trains and back. We observed two CABs cut this time to less than 30 minutes by attaching fuel trucks to the company and then simply swapping an empty fuel truck for a full one at LRPs. The companies then had a much larger window to refuel themselves, and the distribution platoon had more time to cross-level fuel and move to link up with the brigade-support battalion to resupply themselves.

A common argument against attaching the logistics assets forward to the companies is the fear of exposing the fuel trucks to enemy contact. In our experience at NTC, the fuel trucks were much safer at the company trains than at the combat-trains command post (CTCP) or brigade-support area (BSA). In the two rotations we observed where fuel trucks were attached, there were zero fuel trucks destroyed by the enemy, as opposed to locating them at the BSA or CTCP, which are much larger and higher pay-off targets for enemy indirect fire and other threats.

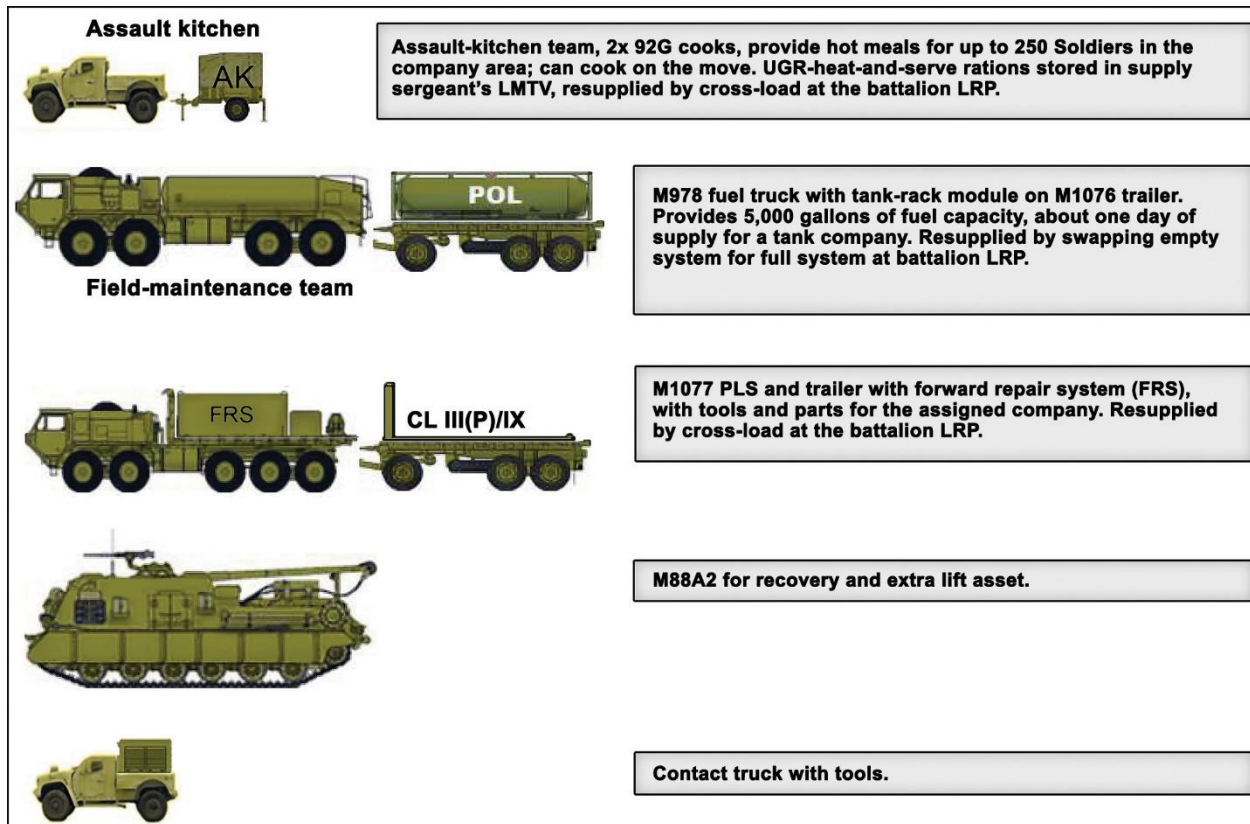


Figure 7. The 'robust' CAB company trains concept.

Battalion quick resupply

When an entire battalion needs to resupply quickly, usually during a long movement or to transition from one operation to another, a refuel-on-the-move (ROM) or battalion supply point of some type is the fastest method. Like any other military operation, a ROM requires more planning and preparation than pointing a finger at a map and saying "ROM here." Disorganized ROMs can bottleneck a battalion and have the opposite of the desired effect. ROMs at NTC are usually:

- Poorly planned, with little information provided besides a grid and a trigger to activate it;
- Lack security, local or far side;
- Have no established order of march or prioritization;
- Lack guidance on fuel-nozzle time per vehicle (how long each vehicle gets at the pump);
- Have no pre- or post-resupply assembly areas established;
- Lack tactical dispersion (fuel trucks 10 meters apart or less); and
- Have no marked lanes.

The included battalion ROM order format is a simple prompt to consider the key factors when planning a ROM and coordinating an entire battalion through it; ATP 4-43, *Petroleum Resupply Operations*, has a good short chapter on further planning considerations when executing a ROM.

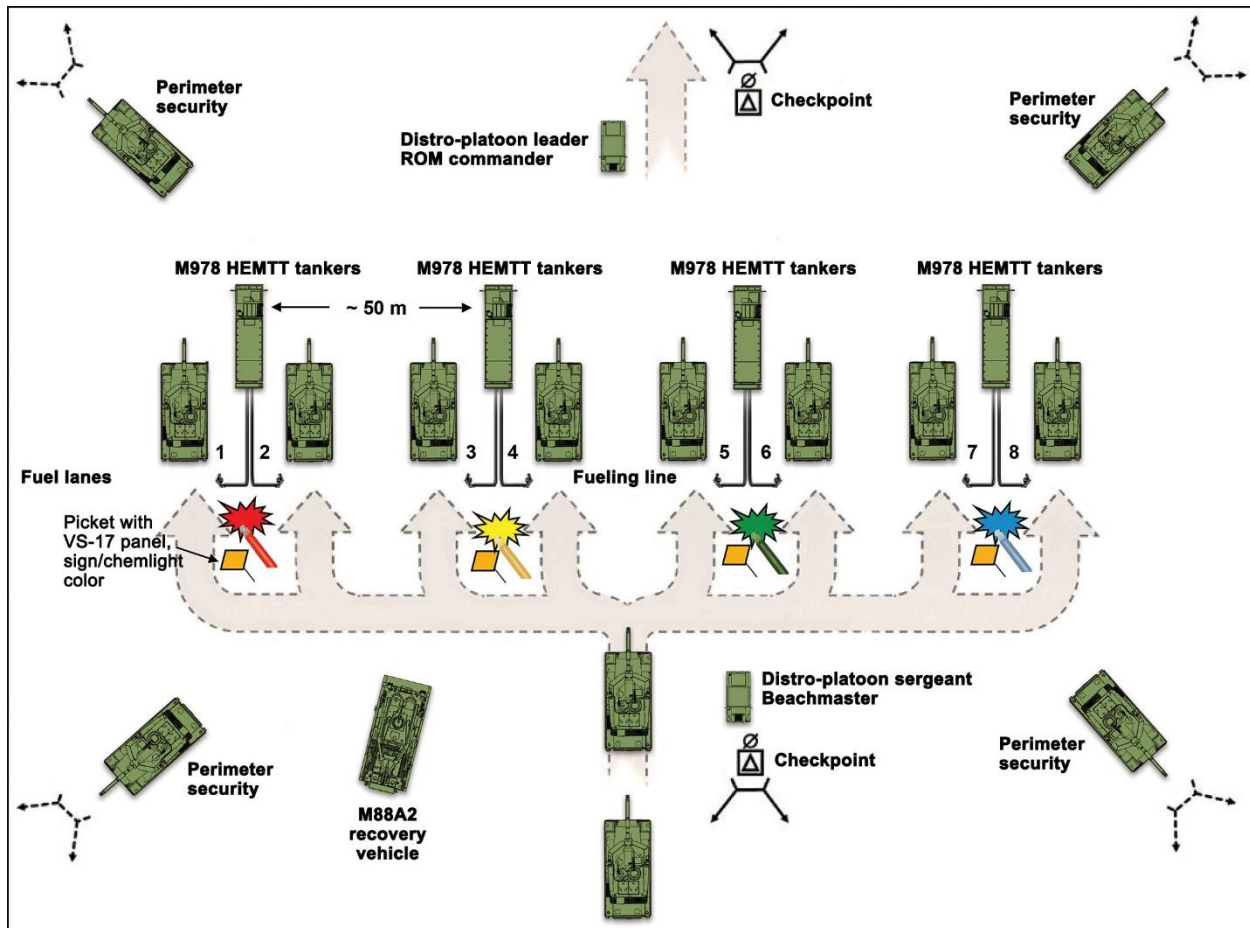


Figure 8. Battalion ROM. (Adapted from Figure 4-5 in ATP 4-43, Petroleum Resupply Operations)

1. Order of march	Scouts, Company B, Company A, Company C, mortars, tactical-operations center
2. Nozzle time per vehicle	4 minutes
3. ROM entry-point grid	NV 1234 5678
4. ROM beachmaster call sign	Hellraiser 57
5. ROM beachmaster FM net	FH CT 123
6. ROM beachmaster role name	H502-Distro-H-4BSB
7. Pre-ROM TAA instructions	Company A, NV 124 5370 Oriented NW; Company B ...
8. Post-ROM TAA instructions	Company TAA at NV 121 567, move to objective once consolidated
9. Security platoon	1/Company C until complete, then fuel and join company
10. Lane marking	Left to right, #1 - #8, picket with VS-17 panel and # of chemlights
11. Additional supplies guidance	Class V Javelin available, 200 meters past ROM lane, NV 1236 5679
12. ROM instructions	Contact beachmaster, take commands from them before entering

Table 1. Battalion ROM/supply point order.

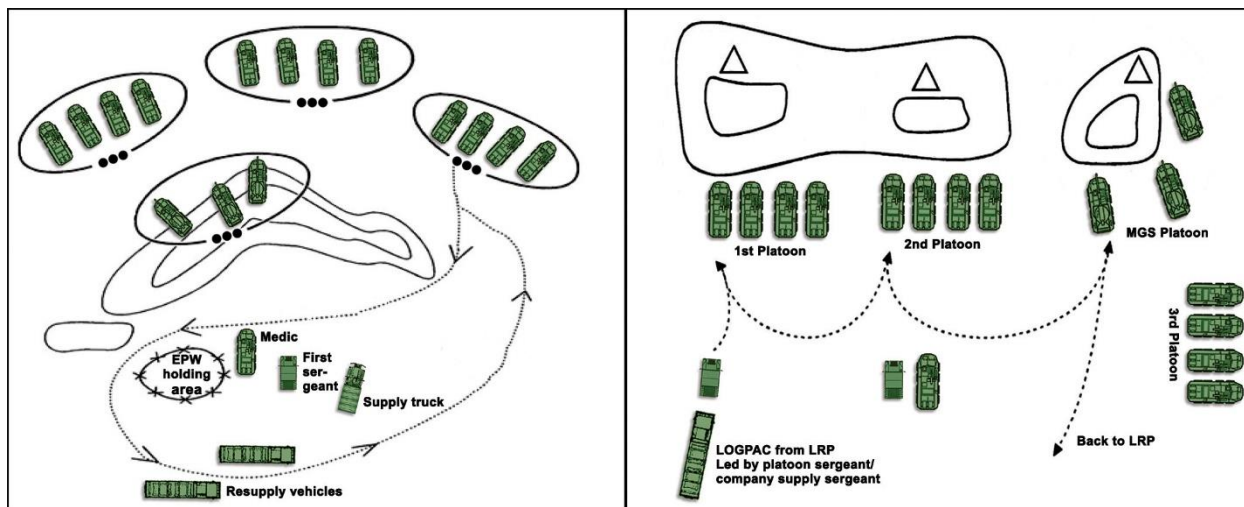


Figure 9. Three tactical methods of resupply. The method of resupply is chosen by the unit being resupplied based on the tactical situation. Shown on the left, the service-station method. Vehicles move individually or in small groups to a centrally located resupply point. Depending on the tactical situation, one vehicle or section – or even an entire platoon – moves out of its position, conducts resupply operations and then moves back into position. This process continues until the entire company has been resupplied. In using this method, platoons, sections or individual vehicles enter the resupply point following a one-way traffic flow. Advantages: it is faster and poses less risk for LOGPAC vehicles. Disadvantage: this method removes combat power from the line. Right, tailgate method. This method of resupply is normally used only in assembly areas. Vehicles remain in their vehicle positions or back out a short distance to allow trucks carrying supplies to reach them. Squads, fire teams, machinegun teams or individual vehicle crews rotate through the feeding area, pick up mail and sundries, and fill or exchange water cans. Advantages: it keeps combat power on the line. Disadvantages: it is slower and poses more risk to LOGPAC vehicles. Not shown, the modified-tailgate method. This is a combination of the service station and tailgate methods. For example, the fueler performs tailgate, and an ammo truck brings ammo to a central company issue point.

‘Parking’ fuel truck

There is one simple question we asked units before they got to NTC that told us a lot about how well its logistics operations would likely run: “When you executed your last battalion gunnery, where did you park the fuel truck?” If the answer we got was that it was parked right next to the range, where there was a company/battalion motorpool, we knew the battalion had probably not practiced LRP and decisive-action logistics as well as it could have.

With that assessment in mind, we recommend that units take every training opportunity to practice LRP and decisive-action logistics. These systems and procedures should be included as part of your training. Establish the CTCPC and field-trains command post at every training event. Execute LRP and ROMs, even if it is only for one company. Allow the sustainers to train their tactical tasks while also reinforcing the habitual support relationships with the field-maintenance teams, assault kitchens and fuel trucks with their supported companies. A few simple, well-rehearsed SOPs and battle drills for logistics will buy your formation back hours of precious planning and execution time during decisive-action operations.

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Acronym Quick-Scan

A&L – administrative and logistics

AK – assault kitchen

ATP – Army technical publication

BSA – brigade-support area

CAB – combined-arms battalion

CTCP – combat-trains command post

ESR – Equipment Status Report

FLoT – forward-line-of-troops

FM – frequency modulation

FRS – forward repair system

FSC – forward-support company

HE – high explosive

HEMTT – Heavy Expanded-Mobility Tactical Truck

HIPPO – nickname for the M105 Load Handling System-compatible water-tank rack

IR – infrared

JCR – Joint Capabilities Release

LHS – M1120 Load Handling System

LMTV – Light Medium Tactical Vehicle

LOGPAC – logistics package

LOGSTAT – logistics status

LRP – logistics release point

MRE – Meal-Ready-to-Eat

MTV – Medium Tactical Vehicle

NTC – National Training Center

PACE – primary, alternate, contingency, emergency

PAX – personnel

PLT LDR – platoon leader

PLT SGT – platoon sergeant

PLS – Palletized Loading System

PMCS – preventive-maintenance checks and services

POL – petroleum, oil and lubricants

QAQC – quality assurance/quality control

ROM – refuel-on-the-move

SBCT – Stryker brigade combat team

SOP – standard operating procedures

TAA – tactical assembly area

UGR – unitized group rations