The Role of the CTCP in a LSCO Environment

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ccording to Army Techniques Publication 6-0.5, *Command Post [CP] Organization and Operations*, the combat trains command post (CTCP) "controls and coordinates administrative and logistical support. It consists of members from the S-1 (battalion or brigade personnel staff officer) and S-4 staff sections. The battalion S-4 leads this CP [command post]. The battalion's field support company normally co-locates with the CTCP."¹ The CTCP's tasks include monitoring current operations and preparing to assume the functions of the main CP; coordinating sustainment for the battalion; providing sustainment representation to the main CP for planning and integration; monitoring main supply routes and controlling sustainment traffic within the battalion's area of operations; and coordinating the evacuation of casualties, equipment, and detainees.

As doctrine provides the framework for everything we do in the Army, this publication serves as the basis for all Army CP operations. During National Training Center (NTC) Rotation 24-04, the 1st Battalion, 36th Infantry Regiment, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, achieved success in the logistics fight because our Forward Support Company (FSC) seamlessly integrated the CTCP into the planning process, providing the battalion with both a logistics center and backup CP. This article shares some of the lessons we learned during this rotation.

While the ATP states that the S-1 and S-4 are required at the CTCP, additional resources are needed for this important node to fill the role as the battalion's backup CP in a large-scale combat operations (LSCO) environment. To fill all the required roles, 1-36 IN's CTCP standard operating procedure

(SOP) varied a bit from doctrine, but the base points remained the same. Our SOP stated, "The CTCP is the coordination center for sustainment of the combat aviation brigade (CAB). Usually, the Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC) commander is responsible for operations, movement, and security of the CTCP and the combat trains. Often, the FSC has a representative, such as the executive officer [XO], at the CTCP. The CTCP also monitors the current tactical situation on the command net to assume its function as the alternate main CP."

Having the HHC commander run the node is one of the main ways our SOP differed from doctrine. Our CTCP's layout had been largely modeled for a stationary fight with the CTCP, Role 1, and unit

maintenance collection point (UMCP) all co-located within the CTCP footprint with the HHC commander specifically maintaining overall command of the node. While a stationary CTCP with all three nodes co-located may have made sense in a counterinsurgency fight, the doctrine is highly contradictive in a LSCO fight. The Role 1 should be located 5-7 kilometers from the forward line of own troops (FLOT) for expedited care.² However, the maintenance enterprise needs to be static to be able to conduct maintenance, and it also requires more time to complete a move. Both nodes are included with the CTCP by doctrine, but we ultimately found it best to have the three elements disperse and become their own independent nodes. Although this dispersion came with increased risk due to security vulnerabilities, it also meant we would produce a lower electromagnetic signature for enemy recon assets to detect.

Communication issues proved to be the greatest challenge we faced during NTC Rotation 24-04. The CTCP had the majority of the node's communication assets (we only used lower tactical internet during the rotation). We primarily used the Joint Battle Command-Platform (JBC-P), but the UMCP did not have that asset organically. It did have FM radios to communicate with the CTCP, which then used JBC-P messages to help amplify and reach a further audience. When vehicles were waiting for repairs, the UMCP would be able to use the JBC-Ps in those systems, but only if these systems were not also in need of maintenance. This was one of the driving factors in the placement of the main CTCP node: It had to be close enough to the main CP to serve its role as the backup CP yet far enough away from the FLOT to keep communication with the UMCP. After the first couple of days





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in the box, we decided to operate the Role 1 independently, as it had all necessary communication platforms, and the CTCP would remain close enough to the UMCP to maintain communication.

The CTCP's lack of high frequency (HF) radios hindered our ability to operate as the backup CP for the battalion. At the start the rotation, we were fighting through the Alpine Pass and unable to get many of the frequency modulation (FM) transmissions through to other parts of the pass, let alone back to a higher headquarters that was outside of the pass. The primary method for communicating with dismounted units was through HF rather than JBC-P. The scout platoon and the snipers that were attached to the British First Fusiliers both had positive HF communication with the main CP and were able to talk freely in the pass. We would have had an issue though if the main CP had gone down and the CTCP needed to take the fight for an extended period. We would not have been able to control any of the fighting due to the difficulty communicating with our subordinate units.

Going back to the placement and layout of the nodes within the CTCP, it was also early in the rotation that we quickly learned our original SOP could not be sustained during operations. Having a light infantry background, the FSC XO's and my instinctive reaction to indirect fire anywhere close to our area meant picking up and moving the entire CTCP. Our maintenance chief, however, quickly informed me that the UMCP needed to stay in place for at least 48 hours if we wanted things to get fixed. We made the decision to accept the risk and have the UMCP also operate independently and secure itself. The UMCP was far enough away from the FLOT that it had no real issues. Additionally, having Abrams tanks and Bradley Fighting Vehicles with working turrets helped increase its security.

The security of the Role 1 presented the bigger risk. At that time, the modified table of organization and equipment limited the medics to only small arms (M4s and M17s). Rather than take combat power out of the fight, we allowed them to continually move, making them a smaller target for the opposing forces (OPFOR). (After we returned from NTC, the modified table of organization and equipment changed, adding M249 Squad Automatic Weapons to better secure the Role 1 and manned ambulance exchange points).

As for the CTCP itself, the prepositioned stock we pulled at NTC greatly impaired our security. Due to a miscommunication, we could not use all our crew-served weapons. Both of our S-1's and S-4's Light Medium Tactical Vehicles (LMTVs) at home station have ring mounts, allowing them to mount these weapons and provide security for the node; the prepositioned NTC vehicles, however, did not have this feature. We did not communicate clearly enough or have enough tripods ready to employ the MK19 and M2 machine guns, which would have greatly improved our security. Our ability to camouflage ourselves though did help with this.

The CTCP's main node boiled down to the S-4's M1068 and the HHC commander's Joint Light Tactical Vehicle (JLTV)

which both had JBC-P capabilities to talk across the battlefield. After the CTCP jumped locations, all other vehicles had the ability to spread out, tuck into the terrain, and put up camo nets. This meant only two vehicles had to be hidden while maintaining the ability to communicate. The rest of the vehicles just had to hide in whatever terrain best suited the vehicles. We only used one OE-254 and the quick erect antenna mast (QEAM) mounted on the back of the M1068, which greatly reduced our aerial signature. This technique proved effective, and the CTCP only received contact once in the form of indirect fire. Based on the amount of munitions sent to our position, however, it is likely that the OPFOR mistook our CP for a battalion or brigade tactical command post (TAC) element. Although this was not good for us, it ensured that the battalion or brigade TAC did not receive those fires.

Our experiences at NTC were a start, but to maintain an advantage the Army must adapt to the reality of the LSCO environment; this starts at the command post. One rotation is not going to solve all the issues with our CPs, but if we learn from our failures and success, as well as share our experiences so others can learn, we can slowly start to change the way we operate. Our overall takeaways include that CTCPs need to be a small element, have internal security, and have the ability to communicate up and down the chain of command across the battlefield on multiple platforms. Something that I think we need to get away from is the idea that we are going to have multiple nodes of command in one footprint. Every time we had all the nodes in close location during our rotation, we became a large, easily identifiable target and were constantly being probed or under some type of surveillance. When the CTCP was a small package by itself, we were almost never attacked (except for our one indirect fire incident where we had very little terrain to tuck into at that point).

Overall, the lessons we learned at NTC are not for us to keep to ourselves; they should be shared throughout the force so we as an Army can improve before we are involved in the next conflict. We don't want to have to learn these lessons again like we did in Operation Torch in North Africa. For those current or future HHC commanders, S-1s, or S-4s, I hope you can learn from both our successes and failures. Make yourself a small target but don't compromise your ability to be the command post that your battalion or squadron may need.

Notes

¹ Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 6-0.5, *Command Post Organization and Operations*, March 2017, 1-7.

² ATP 4-02.4, Medical Platoon, May 2021, 1-9.

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