

A Road to War for Reconnaissance Squadron Forward Support Companies

BY CAPTAIN JEREMY P. BROWN

Every 4 to 6 weeks, a forward support company (FSC) attached to a reconnaissance or cavalry squadron goes to the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, California, to validate its past 12 to 16 months of training in preparation for a deployment. Unfortunately, the FSC arrives with the mindset that sustainment operations should be centered on the forward operating base (FOB). Because of that mindset, the Soldiers miss opportunities to learn what requirements are needed for the Army's "next" mission.

That next mission is about to come to fruition. We combat trainers at NTC are currently focusing on how we migrate to hybrid threat rotations. The scenario will not only incorporate the traditional force-on-force scenario similar to pre-2003 training events, but it will also blend in the elements from counterinsurgency (COIN) operations.

The return to the force-on-force portion of the scenario is the main concern. Are logisticians prepared for this? Have we been too focused on contracting, FOB to FOB logistics, and other "current fight," COIN-centric logistics operations? Have we missed the core competencies that have sustained our Soldiers for over 100 years? Why do many of the logisticians who rotate through NTC not fully understand the doctrinal missions of the reconnaissance and cavalry squadrons? Should we change our curriculum to match this transition?

Logistics Command Relationships

We logisticians must first understand exactly who we support. One of the greatest challenges to this understanding is the problem of doctrinal task organization between the FSC and the brigade support battalion (BSB). According to Field Manual (FM) 4-90, The Brigade Support Battalion, the FSC is organic to the BSB and may be attached to or operationally controlled by one of the maneuver battalions for direct support. Each command relationship has inherent challenges that must be addressed through mission analysis. That relationship is a seam that can be exploited, just as the enemy likes to exploit seams between units on the ground.

The relationship between the FSC and the BSB is tenuous at times. The FSC commander should be considered similar to a liaison officer (LNO) from the BSB. He is the eyes and ears of the support operations officer (SPO) and the maneuver battalion commander. His ability to tie the SPO's concept of support into the squadron's scheme of

maneuver is critical. The FSC commander, however, must absolutely know how his supported unit maneuvers and how the brigade sustainment plan ties into it. This understanding allows for a plan that is tied to the principles of sustainment.

The squadron S-4 should work hand in hand with the FSC commander to plan sustainment for the squadron. The S-4 is charged with developing the plan, but the FSC commander should be heavily involved to ensure adherence to the principles of sustainment.

Supporting Reconnaissance Squadrons

A reconnaissance or cavalry squadron is an evolving entity. [Reconnaissance squadrons are found in brigade combat teams and battlefield surveillance brigades, and cavalry squadrons are found in armored cavalry regiments, but they serve similar functions.] It has a very crucial doctrinal mission. FM 3-20.96, Reconnaissance and Cavalry Squadron, describes the squadron in this way:

Within the complex, dynamic conditions and threat profiles of future OEs [operational environments], the squadron is essential to successful Army and joint operations in several ways:

- ❑ It provides a significant dismounted or mounted reconnaissance force.
- ❑ It enables the higher commander to decisively employ his maneuver battalions and joint fires and to choose times and places for engagement to his advantage.
- ❑ It maximizes security of the higher headquarters by providing timely, accurate, and relevant combat information. It helps the higher commander achieve advantages over an enemy or adversary in terms of the ability to collect, process, and disseminate information.

So how do we logisticians frame our mission analysis and support planning into these broad operational brush strokes? How do we plan for class III (petroleum, oils, and lubricants) and class V (ammunition) to move forward with the potentially rapid advance of the brigade's reconnaissance assets?

The answer is simple. We are directly tied into the military decisionmaking process (MDMP) at the squadron level and essentially become the cavalrymen we support. We do not focus solely on getting the supplies to the unit. We accept that resupply operations are a no-fail mission, but we need to understand and feel the operational envi-

ronment throughout our planning process.

Looking at the doctrinal fundamentals of reconnaissance paints a very clear picture of why understanding what the reconnaissance and cavalry squadron does is so critical. FM 3-90, Tactics, states—

The seven fundamentals of successful reconnaissance operations are as follows:

- ❑ Ensure continuous reconnaissance.
- ❑ Do not keep reconnaissance assets in reserve.
- ❑ Orient on the reconnaissance objective.
- ❑ Report all information rapidly and accurately.
- ❑ Retain freedom of maneuver.
- ❑ Gain and maintain enemy contact with the smallest element possible.
- ❑ Develop the situation.

How do we maintain our supply lines as they perform operations to apply these fundamentals? Are logisticians used as the enabler that we are, or are FSCs not given the priority as that enabler? Too often during NTC rotations, an FSC is given the base defense operations center mission and mayoral responsibilities that cripple its ability to perform its wartime mission. Because of that, the FSC is rarely in a position to be proactive in resupply and struggles with reactive sustainment. These are a few of the considerations that the FSC commander and squadron S-4 need to address before the MDMP begins.

The squadron commander and S-3 are concerned with the scheme of maneuver. Terms such as reconnaissance push, reconnaissance pull, zone recon, area recon, and route recon are ingrained into their psyche. Security operations are critical as well. Likewise, screen, guard, cover, and area security are significant to the squadron and, more importantly, the adjacent units and any maneuver attachments to the squadron. Typically, these operations are the main effort or the decisive operation for the brigade mission. How are FSC capabilities affected by each one of these operations? Are we planning for them? Do we even know how they are tactically performed?

When the training at NTC goes into the hybrid rotational scenario, numerous challenges face the squadron and its sustainment assets. Keep in mind that as NTC ramps up the hybrid rotations, the combat power shortages inherent in the reconnaissance squadron's table of organization and equipment will become painfully apparent. At that point, brigade commanders will compensate by task-organizing tanks and other assets to the squadron so that its mission set will expand. How will we plan for these changes to ensure that the sustainment needs are met? This is where the FSC commander's understanding of the squadron's mission set is critical.

Reconnaissance Squadron FSCs

The reconnaissance and cavalry squadron FSCs are the tip of the sustainment spear. FM 4-0, Sustainment, lays out the following principles of logistics:

- ❑ "Integration is the most critical principle. Integration is

joining all the elements of sustainment (tasks, functions, systems, processes, and organizations) to operations assuring unity of purpose and effort."

- ❑ "Anticipation is the ability to foresee events and requirements and initiate necessary actions that most appropriately satisfy a response."
- ❑ "Responsiveness is the ability to meet changing requirements on short notice and to rapidly sustain efforts to meet changing circumstances over time."
- ❑ "Simplicity fosters efficiency throughout the operations process and allows for more effective control of sustainment. Clarity of tasks, standardized and interoperable procedures, and clearly defined command relationships contribute to simplicity."
- ❑ "Improvisation is the ability to adapt sustainment operations to unexpected situations or circumstances affecting a mission."
- ❑ "Economy means providing sustainment resources in an efficient manner to enable a commander to employ all assets to generate the greatest effect possible."
- ❑ "Survivability is the ability to protect personnel, information, infrastructure, and assets from destruction or degradation."
- ❑ "Continuity is the uninterrupted provision of sustainment across all levels of war."
- ❑ "Improvisation is the ability to adapt sustainment operations to unexpected situations or circumstances affecting a mission."

They are all priorities. So which one has priority over the other? How are they applied? The FSC commander and squadron S-4, in synchronization with the SPO, have to tailor their support plan to each of these principles, but the scheme of maneuver ultimately dictates the way forward.

During the Combined Logistics Captains Career Course, company commanders learn the art, not the science, of contiguous battlefield sustainment. The course curriculum, culminating with the tactical logistics exercise, touches on exactly the things that most sustainers do not remember about contiguous battlefield sustainment. One of the benefits of the tactical logistics exercise is the ability to understand each of the missions of the reconnaissance squadron and how we conceptualize sustainment as it fights.

It is imperative that logisticians understand how reconnaissance assets move across the battlefield in order to fully support them. How long is a screen, and what distances does it involve? How are the sustainment assets moving to support it? These questions can and should be asked during the MDMP.

Observations and Lessons Learned at NTC

One of the unique opportunities of a combat trainer at NTC is the ability to watch, and sometimes learn from, each unit that crosses the light line on Main Supply Route Bull Run. Higher echelons than the operations group

combat trainer have dictated the operating tempo of each unit in the Army. However, the Army Force Generation process and other constraints placed on unit commanders have not taken away the inherent responsibility of commanders to train their troops. Commanders must train their formations to be not only technically proficient but also tactically proficient.

The single most important sustainment observation witnessed at NTC is the overall lack of knowledge of contiguous sustainment operations and supply chains ending at the FSC level. This knowledge is critical as we transition from the COIN-centric fight and prepare for the hybrid environment. During each rotation, the reconnaissance or cavalry squadron participates in a named operation and the brigade-level “attack/defend during full-spectrum operations.” This mission dictates some type of sustainment planning concerning combat trains, field trains, and logistics release points.

What combat trainers are seeing, however, is an inability to know or understand that methodology when planning. Most logisticians at the FSC level have either not experienced or do not remember what a contiguous battlefield looks like and how sustainment operations are conducted on it. Who is responsible for the combat trains? Who is responsible for the security of those trains? What are the major criteria for site selection? Where is the FSC commander located during all of this?

As the Army transitions to hybrid operations, that tactical knowledge becomes the single most important factor for logisticians. If we logisticians cannot secure or understand our place in the lines of the operation, how can we get the right stuff to the right places at the right time? Numerous questions—besides anything having to do with classes of supply—need to be asked and integrated into the plan.

The next observation concerns logistics synchronization among the brigade S-4, BSB SPO, FSC commander, and squadron executive officer and S-4. The ability to synchronize the sustainment mission to the current operation plan alleviates many of the hurdles that the FSC commander would face. That ability hinges on whether or not he understands what exactly the squadron is doing. What are the triggers for our logistics packages (LOGPACs) to move? When, exactly, is the line troop going to need to be topped off with fuel? How and where do we set logistics release points? What is the squadron’s operational reach, and where and when is the culminating point during the operation?

The Army Training and Doctrine Command needs to consider updating the Soldier training publication tasks for sustainers. Most of them have not been updated in several years. This new hybrid focus may require sustainers to switch from outdated training that is based on Army Training Evaluation Program publications and Soldier training publications to training based on Army- or theater-mandated mission essential task lists.

To prepare for the Army’s next mission, FSC commanders’ first step is to read doctrine relating to the unit they support. FM 4-90 reintroduces the sustainment principles for supporting maneuver units through contiguous scenarios and COIN-centric theaters. Training Circular 7-100, Hybrid Threat, also offers a guide for many hybrid scenarios. Only when we understand the operational missions, constraints, and limitations of each will we understand where the “beans and bullets” considerations fit.

We must fully feel like we are that troop, company, or battery commander, or troop platoon leader, or even that fire team leader and understand the decision points and triggers that they consider in their mission planning. We must plan for and adjust our external support from higher units. Our planning is only as good as our operational reach. If we are not fully synchronized with our higher support echelons, we will not be able to maintain our support.

We must train our Soldiers in their craft, but more importantly, train them in the critical areas that they need to survive on tomorrow’s battlefield. We need to be creative in our training at home station. Resupply operations at home station can be conducted under any conditions that the command can create or replicate. For example, “Maintenance Monday” may be the main task, but it can be executed under simulated combat conditions. LOGPAC and recovery battle drills can be rehearsed by tasking a patrol to recover a vehicle somewhere on post.

We can maximize range time by making Soldiers shoot under stressful conditions. How will they react to a complex attack with an improvised explosive device or vehicle-borne improvised explosive device, followed by a rocket-propelled grenade attack and small-arms fire? We should replicate at the ranges as best we can. The situational training exercise lanes at NTC can be replicated at any home-station field training exercise. Role players can be identified and integrated, and most battlefield effects simulators used at NTC are in the Army supply system. We should not wait until the NTC rotation to start from scratch on tactical standard operating procedures and LOGPAC battle drills.

Effective sustainment operations are a no-fail mission in the Army. Efficient sustainment operations are our goal. We can achieve our goal by truly knowing and understanding who we support, taking care of the Soldiers who execute that support, and accomplishing our mission to provide support.

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