

## The Top 10 Things I Learned as a Battalion Logistics Officer at the National Training Center



by Trae Wolfe

*Editor's Note: Throughout this week, we have been running a series of articles from 4-70 AR on their lessons learned at the National Training Center (NTC). Each article is unique in that it presents a different perspective from the organization's key staff members. Our hope is that these articles will help prepare you for success in your current or future roles in your organization.*

The sustainment warfighting function is a difficult warfighting function to fully train during home station training. As the S4 for a Combined Arms Battalion (A) (CAB A), I learned that this greatly affects our ability to support the maneuver warfighting function. For a unit to succeed at sustainment operations at a combat training center (CTC), especially with a large scale combat operations (LSCO) focus, there must be well-rehearsed battle drills grounded in battle rhythm actions, clear and regular communication, and a healthy ability to be flexible in rapidly changing situations.

**1. CTCs Heavily Tax S4s for CUOPs and FUOPs:** The S4 job is a high-demand role

from the moment the Resource Conference with your CTC is held until all equipment is returned to home station upon mission completion. The S4s of our brigade quickly became the deployment operations subject matter experts. Everything from ensuring our companies had properly trained personnel, to ensuring all necessary equipment was resourced, and ensuring proper supplies are ordered to execute deployment operations became our initial critical tasks for successful execution of deployment operations. However, as our CTC rotation approached we had to begin ensuring we had a sound understanding of the tactical requirements of the S4 for mission planning and executing of sustainment operations. This was incredibly difficult to balance, but was not as difficult as executing tactical tasks during our rotation while also beginning the process of setting the conditions to redeploy the unit immediately after completing the training portion of our rotation. The understanding is that you will have both current operations and future operations aspects that will require consistent attention to ensure your unit is able to deploy, train, and redeploy in an efficient manner. Critical to success is forecasting and regularly communicating in all directions your concerns and needs to ensure overall mission accomplishment.

2. **Container Preparation:** If not prioritized, container inspection and preparation can become a major frustration during the conduct of deployment operations. My unit fortunately has a healthy population of senior leaders familiar with this common friction point so it became one of the first key tasks to ensure we could set conditions to deploy. Critical tasks included:

- Ensure Command Deployment Discipline Program (CDDP) representatives are trained and conduct regular equipment inspections and documentation
- Ensure subordinate units align containers both to their local and physical DODAACs in Joint Container Management System, least the containers actually belong to other garrison units
- Understand the lift and transportation capabilities of your Forward Support Company's (FSC) equipment for container movement

3. **Equipment Configuration Planning:** Properly aligning prime movers, non-prime

movers, and secondary loads is critical to ensuring units can rapidly download and begin initiating mission preparation. We found that some equipment that we had not deliberately aligned against proper platforms ended up being intermingled amongst other battalions' equipment at the railheads. Even at the publication of this article, there are still pieces that units are still realigning to the proper motor pools almost two months after having returned from our CTC. These points below better demonstrate the necessity:

- Having assets moved by other units can cause major issues with rapidly downloading and consolidating equipment to prepare to execute follow-on operations
  - Failure to ensure there are enough trailers and cargo space will greatly limit the troop and supply movement capabilities of the unit, especially as unforecasted backhaul and troop replacement requirements arise
  - Ideally the unit builds this plan within TC-AIMS to ensure equipment is properly tracked and moved between locations during deployment operations
4. **S4 and SPO Relationship:** The S4 must understand the capabilities, limits, and timelines required for the requisition and utilization of Support Operations Cell (SPO)-managed assets as well as sister battalions and their FSCs. I had a general understanding six months into the job on what SPO could do for me, but my fellow S4s and I quickly found out that we could do quite a bit more if we shared an understanding on what our units could offer each other. Failure to understand SPO limits the unit to the use of organic assets and denies your unit the enablers that could otherwise greatly increase the operational reach of the unit. One of our biggest struggles was learning how to execute ammunition requests since we had no Master Gunner and we had not exercised ammunition requests in a tactical sense beforehand. Below are some recommended focuses for understanding the S4/SPO knowledge exchange:
- Understand requirements for utilization of Heavy Equipment Transport Systems.

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- Understand requirements for utilization of Aerial Mission Requests.
  - Understand requirements for emergency CLIII(B) and CLV resupply. In an Armored Brigade Combat Team, the Forward Support Companies (FSCs) of non-maneuver units have different lift and transport capabilities than a CAB.
5. **LOGSTAT and LOGPAC Importance:** If subordinate elements fail to accurately report expenditures and forecast their future needs via the logistics status report (LOGSTAT), then it becomes the responsibility of the S4 to anticipate expenditures and future needs without having valuable bottom-up refinement. Furthermore, failing to adhere to the FSC's logistics package (LOGPAC) windows greatly limited our FSC's ability to not only build and load the next LOGPAC, but it also greatly limited the ability to afford our distribution and supply elements the ability to execute crew rest.
6. **S4 Battlefield Circulation:** As the S4 I struggled to maintain the means of executing battlefield circulation between critical Command and Control (C2) and Sustainment nodes. This was because a CAB S4 shop is allocated an M1068 Command Post Tracked Vehicle which serves as the C2 Node for the combat trains command post (CTCP), and a JLTV-U, though mine had to be reallocated for a critical liaison mission. As a result, I regularly had to ask other entities to borrow vehicles and crews to execute battlefield circulation. If not feasible, then the S4 requires the staffing to ensure there is a representative able to move between the main command post (MCP) and the CTCP, as well as a representative able to circulate between logistics release points (LRPs), the forward trains command post (FTCP), and brigade support area (BSA).

Working from the CTCP, the S4 must be able to communicate with the Battalion Leadership and Staff, the Brigade S4 Shop, the Brigade SPO Cell, the Brigade Support Battalion & BSA, company and above command posts within the battalion, other battalion's neighboring command posts, the battalion's master gunners, Company First Sergeants & Executive Officers.

7. **Limited FSC Communications Assets:** The FSC has very limited communications assets. Whether it is VOIP, JBC-P, or FM Communications, it is very critical that the FSC is able to communicate with forward elements. If the S4 and the FSC cannot

communicate then it becomes incredibly difficult for each element to exchange information and collaborate for planning and execution of sustainment operations in support of the unit's overarching mission. My greatest worry on a day to day basis was whether or not the FTCP had received and fully understood information I sent in their direction since I could not establish VOIP or FM Communications with their C2 Node.

8. **CTCP as a Hybrid MCP & FTCP:** A robust CTCP with junior members representing each warfighting function and CLI capabilities forward with S4 representation at the FTCP can simultaneously control the fight and execute sustainment operations during blackout periods for the MCP and FTCP. My headquarters and headquarters company (HHC) had a very strong group of clerks in their headquarters section who greatly augmented my own shop's ability to run the C2 Node from my M1068. Combined with my HHC commander's experience along with our S1 and MEDO we were able to maintain a very accurate common operating picture.
  - By ensuring there is a representative able to generate proficient running estimates for each warfighting function, the CTCP can ably execute MCP functions with their existing communications structure. If not feasible, then giving baseline training to HHC headquarters soldiers can suffice.
  - By prepositioning CLI, CLIII(B), and CLV assets forward, the CTCP can operate during blackout periods for the BSA and FTCP. However, if the FTCP was to move the field feeding team forward during the early stages of the FTCP's blackout period, then the field feeding team (FFT) can ensure continued access to Hot A's. While not as critical during a CTC rotation, this will arguably be a major force multiplier during sustained ground combat operations. We found this to be the case for one of our sister battalions that had to temporarily move their FFT forward to the CTCP.
  - The S4 having a dedicated representative at the FTCP and with access to the BSA can help ensure LOGSTATS are received and disseminated to all necessary supply and distribution elements. That representative can also assist the FSC to ensure subordinate units properly build LOGPACs for rapid distribution to all forward units based upon current task organization and mission set

9. **Splitting the UMCP and CTCP:** A separate unit maintenance collection point (UMCP) from the CTCP allows both elements to reduce their signature and allows the CTCP to aggressively follow maneuver elements and facilitate extended operational reach. My HHC Commander found great success at guaranteeing our battalion had guaranteed emergency assets and the Role I during engagements. This did come at the cost of some error in communication and understanding of the current situation at our UMCP for several critical hours leading up to LOGPACs each day.
- To succeed, the UMCP must have a clear chain of command established with the necessary communications assets to continue coordination between all command posts down the company level to ensure equipment returns to the fight in a timely manner.
  - Before the split can occur, the UMCP must have a regular flow of combat platforms down for various issues but still with the means to be able to still provide the security no longer guaranteed by the CTCP's presence.
10. **Unit Backhaul Planning:** Units must have an established backhaul plan for killed in action, trash, human waste, water storage assets, and CLIX ORILs. These were all elements I was not wholly prepared to handle. We also found out that our Brigade was going to limit CLII ordering so we were unable to acquire necessary assets for helping keep the various backhaul materials easily exchangeable.
- For most of these supplies they must be transported separate from other items and can greatly hinder the ability to effectively execute LOGPAC operations.
  - Maximizing the number of used trailers and storage receptacles (EX: 50GAL trash cans) will be critical to accomplishing this mission set. Similarly, units must be prepared to send troop replacements forward via LOGPACs.
  - Casualty/water backhaul and trash/waste backhaul ought to rotate between your LOGPAC periods to ensure a continuous flow. In the interim, those killed in action ought to be consolidated in an area to give privacy for morale and dignity purposes.

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Ultimately as the S4, you are deeply involved across the spectrum of operations. It is critical that, as an S4, you not lose sight of working with the sustainers of your battalion and brigade to help extend the operational reach of the unit. Similarly, CDDP coordination most likely falls under your purview and this too feeds into ensuring your unit can execute its mission set. As an S4 you do not have to suffer in silence. Your battalion leadership and your counterparts in the brigade can help ensure you prioritize tasks to ensure mission success and similarly that you can help other units achieve success. While this job is incredibly difficult, working with a great group of counterparts has made it the most rewarding job I have done in the Army.

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