

Company/Team Command Post: The Missing Link

by Captain Dave Thompson

The ability of the armor or mechanized company/team to accomplish its myriad of tasks during preparation for combat is greatly enhanced by a functional command post (CP).

As observed during NTC rotations, the CP is often only a physical point in the assembly area where the command vehicles are located. Information flow, timeline management, and accurate tracking of the unit's status during the planning and preparation phases are lacking. That is not to say that there is no emphasis on how a CP should operate, or what it should look like, but generally, there is not an orderly, SOP-driven approach to CP operations.

Furthermore, our doctrine does not adequately address this issue for the armor or mechanized infantry company/team. While it does mention the numerous tasks that must be accomplished during planning and preparation, FM 71-1 does not include anything about the use of a command post. FM 71-123 states, "Companies have command groups rather than CP facilities. CP functions are normally conducted by the company XO from his tank." This lack of a doctrinal base, coupled with an inability to effectively manage information, result in a piecemeal effort by the company/team to accomplish all of the commander's priorities. This ultimately leaves critical tasks incomplete and important information uncommunicated to subordinate leaders.

When discussing the nature of CPs at higher levels of command, FM 101-5 states: "The commander also establishes procedures which clearly identify those CP activities and functions that must be accomplished on a routine basis...." The commander has the same responsibility at the company/team level. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the commander to develop his own techniques.

The following is a guide compiled from the suggestions of observer/controllers at the NTC. It is important to keep in mind that this guide is intended to assist company commanders in developing a command post SOP for the planning and preparation phases, while the unit is relatively static. While on the move, the company/team XO performs the necessary CP functions, and the first sergeant takes over when the XO becomes involved in the fighting (FM 71-123).

Company/Team Command Post

1. Purpose: To enable the company/team to effectively accomplish battle preparation by providing a centralized point for information gathering and dissemination, coordination, time management, and tracking of unit status (Figure 1).

2. Functions: The commander has numerous options in determining what, and who, the CP should consist of. Re-

gardless of the physical configuration, it is the *function* of the CP that is critical. Good results are obtained when an information manager is designated to operate the CP. In an armor company/team, the information manager should be an NCO from the HQ platoon, preferably the master gunner or the NBC NCO. Although duties pursuant to their primary positions will pull them away at times, more often than not they are available to perform as the commander's information managers. In a mechanized company/team the information manager should also be an NCO from the HQ platoon, preferably the master gunner or the commo chief. The requirement for additional personnel in the CP can be met by rotating soldiers from the HQs platoon. These may include available crew members from the commander's and XO's vehicles, medics, FISTV crew members, and the driver of the first sergeant's M113 in an armor company/team. The information manager utilizes these personnel to assist in accomplishing the CP tasks listed in Figure 2.

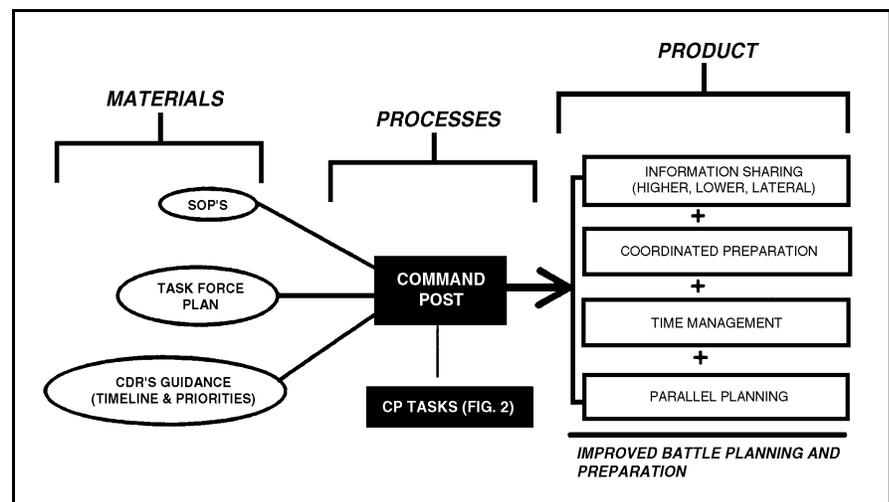


Figure 1

Among its more important tasks, the CP records incoming information (intel updates, directives from battalion, adjacent unit coordination requirements, logistical information, etc.). It also ensures that information required by the task force TOC is passed on time. Additionally, the CP is responsible for maintaining the commander's timeline. That is, it verifies that subordinate elements are accomplishing the commander's priorities and then records this information in a manner that allows the commander to get a quick, accurate status of the unit's preparation. This prevents the commander from having to individually poll each platoon.

It is important to note that, in order for the CP to be able to effectively manage the commander's timeline, the platoons must be able to update the CP at any time. Platoon leaders must *push* information, rather than wait for a query from the CP. In this manner, the commander can make rapid, informed decisions about adjusting his timeline. For example, if the platoons have accomplished all the platoon-level preparation possible, *and have duly reported that*, then it is possible for the company/team to embark on some of its collective tasks. These may include mounted drills and rehearsals. The result is that time is saved, which allows the company/team to deal effectively with unforeseen requirements (screen mission, new task organization, etc.) as well as handle setbacks such as maintenance problems — while still accomplishing those tasks that the commander has prioritized. The CP is the “enforcer” of the commander's timeline.

The CP also acts as the point of contact for attachments. For example, if an engineer platoon is attached to the company/team sometime during the plan/prep phase, the platoon leader reports to the CP to conduct coordination, instead of attempting to find the commander or someone “in charge.” At the CP, the information manager can gather critical information (headcounts, fuel and ammo status, special requirements, etc.), and the attached element can be apprised of the current situation and informed of any applicable SOPs. The platoon can then be integrated into the company assembly area. The most important advantage is that it requires no immediate personal involvement of the commander, XO, or first sergeant.

In this way, planning and preparation continues without distracting key leaders. Key leaders are often absent from the assembly area while preparing for combat operations; therefore, a well informed, capable CP is necessary in order to get attachments integrated into the team quickly.

In order to speed the dissemination of plans, the CP is where written orders are prepared and overlays reproduced. Since CPs are sheltered (section 3, Configuration), these tasks can be performed in any weather. Because there is room and a map available, the CP can also be used to deliver the operations order to subordinates. Although it is best to visualize the operations order while looking at the terrain, some circumstances, such as darkness or inclement weather, might prevent that, which makes the CP a good backup. The construction of a sand table of the area of operations is another CP responsibility. The same sand table may be used during orders for walk-through rehearsals, briefs, and subordinate planning, giving the entire team a common picture of the terrain.

All warning orders are posted in the CP as well as the current MCOO (modified combined obstacles overlay) and initial SITEMP. In this way, the CP enables the commander and platoon leaders to *plan in parallel*. With this information readily available, subordinate leaders can utilize it very early on to begin their own Troop Leading Procedures (TLP). The benefit is a time savings that is realized at the company/team operations order when platoon leaders come fully armed with a good picture of the commander's terrain analysis and enemy situation. If forced to wait until the operations order for their first look at the terrain and threat courses of action, platoon leaders

CP Task List

1. Post timeline (adjust as needed or directed)
 - This includes all of the commanders priorities: boresight, PCC, PCI, recon, TF OPORD, company/team OPORD, rehearsals, resupply, PLT OPORDS, time windows for dozers, etc.
2. Post unit status (see Figure 3, tracking charts)
3. Record and pass on information (monitor TF and company/team cmd nets)
 - a. Intel updates
 - b. Warning orders
 - c. Task organization changes
 - d. Logistics information
 - e. Any directives from TF
 - f. Required reports to TF
4. Integrate attachments
5. Post map
 - a. Current area of operations
 - b. MCOO
 - c. Situational template
 - d. Operational graphics
 - e. Logistics graphics
6. Build sand table of area of operations
7. Coordinate reproduction of overlays/orders
8. Assist first sergeant and XO in coordination for logistics support as required

Figure 2

are hard pressed to accomplish their own TLP to standard.

The CP also assists in the sustainment of the company/team by collecting logistical information with which the XO can begin to derive a plan for support. Some of the charts in Figure 3 deal directly with logistics issues. Using these charts to visualize the logistical status of the unit enables the commander, XO, and first sergeant to quickly assess potential problem areas and take necessary action. The first sergeant is also able to make use of this information in the preparation of his daily logistics report. If the information is accurate, it will reflect the on-hand quantities of critical supplies and personnel. This allows the assembly of customized LOGPACs that resupply the company/team with what it actually needs. No longer is the first sergeant the central point for logistical information collection. Instead, the CP performs that function, and as a result adds flexibility to the first sergeant's schedule.

As of: _____

CURRENT COMBAT POWER

TANKs/BRADs/INF SQDs

	Location	Weapons Systems	CLASSV Per Veh	Remarks
1st Plt				
2nd Plt				
3rd Plt				
HQ Sec				
FISTV				
Atch				

PERSONNEL STATUS

	# Auth	# curr On Hand	# on Logpac	Remarks
1st Plt				
2nd Plt				
3rd Plt				
HQ				
FIST				

ATTACHED/OPCON

	L/U Time Location	Call Sign	Internal Freq.	Remarks
Scouts				
Mortars				
ENG				
ADA				
FIST				

TIMELINE

MAINTENANCE

	FMC/NMC	Location	Co/Trm Priority	Est Repair Time
1st Plt				
2nd Plt				
3rd Plt				
HQ				
FIST				

CRITICAL SUPPLY

	III	IV	V	Remarks
1st Plt				
2nd Plt				
3rd Plt				
HQ				
FIST				

G=90% OR GREATER
A=50% TO 89%
R=49% OR LESS
B=0 BALANCE

Figure 3

3. Configuration: There are a number of good ideas on how to properly configure a company/team CP given current MTOEs. Regardless of the specific setup, a CP must be austere, which allows for rapid displacement. There exists a point of diminishing returns when a CP is outfitted with too many bells and whistles in an attempt to further enhance its function. The configuration offered here results from observations of successful techniques applied during NTC rotations.

The armor company/team is best served by utilizing the first sergeant's M113 armored personnel carrier in conjunction with a shelter as its CP. This works well as the first sergeant rarely has a need to use the M113 dur-

ing planning and preparation. Many options are available when considering which shelter to use. The canvas extension originally designed for the M577 command post vehicle can be used with the M113. Another option is to use a tent (GP small) with the radios remoted from the M113. The preferred method is command post, modular (NSN 5410-01-334-7529). It is easily set up and stored, and is waterproof. There is enough room to mount a map and required charts, as well as accommodate numerous personnel. Another technique is to use the FISTV with any of the shelters mentioned. However, the FISTV may come under the control of a higher headquarters (due to its unique capabilities) and leave the company/team. This makes the first ser-

geant's M113 the best choice since it is organic to the company/team and usually remains there.

The mechanized company/team can use a Bradley from the HQ platoon with a shelter. Keep in mind that using a combat vehicle poses some problems, due to its need to be boresighted and armed. These activities usually require the vehicle to be moved, as does participation in mounted rehearsals. Again, the FISTV is also an option.

4. Task List and Tracking Charts: Figure 2 is a listing of the minimum tasks performed by the CP in order to provide the advantages discussed previously. Additionally, in order to give the commander a clear snapshot in time of the status of his unit, the information manager can make use of easily updated charts. Figure 3 is a compilation of these charts.

With digitization on the near horizon, more battlefield information will become available at much accelerated rates. This, in turn, should allow commanders at all levels to accelerate their decision cycles. The desired result will be rapid tempo operations that allow the enemy little or no time to react. Success, in part, will depend on our ability to manage and assimilate this ever-increasing volume of information. The command post function will take on even more importance as commanders attempt to "balance the scales" between rapid action/reaction and the necessary preparation for combat (troop leading procedures and priorities of work). Better technology helps to alleviate this conflict to some degree, but the bottom line remains — less time is available to accomplish the same number of tasks. The company/team must be able to manage time, information, and resources, and the company/team CP is the tool to use to get the job done.

Captain Dave Thompson was commissioned in Armor in 1986 from Texas A&M University. He is currently serving as an armor company/team combat trainer at the National Training Center.