Controlling Chaos: The Cavalry Troop Command Post

by CPT Ryan F. McGovern

"The battlefield is a scene of constant chaos. The winner will be the one who controls that chaos, both his own and the enemy's." – Napoleon Bonaparte

As the brigade combat team's (BCT) reconnaissance and security force, cavalry troops operate at the transition between the brigade's deep and close fights. Cavalry troops must gain contact with enemy forces and develop the situation rapidly in a dynamic environment far forward from BCT fires and sustainment nodes. In this environment, the cavalry troop command post (CP) fulfills an essential role facilitating early and accurate reporting, controlling maneuver, and enabling the troop commander to identify and execute decision points.

This article examines the role of the armored brigade combat team (ABCT) cavalry troop command post in enabling successful reconnaissance and security operations through effective command, control, and sustainment functions. Using CP doctrine as a starting point to discuss CP functions, and drawing on lessons learned during Troop B, 1st Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team's National Training Center (NTC) Rotation 22-10, it identifies central considerations and recommends tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) for the effective employment of troop CPs. The discussion concludes with recommendations for training proficient CP teams at home station.

Doctrine and capabilities

Given the decentralized nature of reconnaissance and security operations, the demand for continuous synchronization of information collection efforts, and the requirement to provide timely, accurate reporting, cavalry troops are the only company-sized combat arms unit within a BCT authorized a command post.[1] According to Field Manual 6-0, *Commander and Staff Organization and Operations*, a command post "is a headquarters, or a portion thereof, organized for the exercise of command and control (C2)."[2] At the troop level, essential personnel who operate within and from the CP include the troop executive officer, troop first sergeant, operations NCO, communications NCO, the chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and (high-yield) explosives (CBRNE) NCO, medics, and the combat repair team.[3] Although Army Techniques Publication 3-20.97, *Cavalry Troop*, outlines the roles and responsibilities of these personnel within the CP, it does not prescribe how a troop CP operates or specify functions unique to a troop-level CP. There are no unique factors which suggest the basic functions of a troop CP should differ from those of Army CPs in general. The functions of a command post are:

1. Building and maintaining situational understanding,

2. Controlling operations,

3. Assessing operations,

4. Coordinating with internal and external organizations,

5. Performing CP administration, and

6. Conducting knowledge management, information management, and foreign disclosure.[4]

The capabilities of an armored cavalry troop CP enable it to fulfill these functions, albeit with limited redundancy and overall capacity. The M1068A3 Standard Integrated Command Post System, currently being replaced by the Armored Multipurpose Vehicle, is the primary platform for the troop CP. The vehicle provides protection from indirect fires, multi-frequency communications, and power generation, in addition to supporting both digital and analog battle tracking. The platform supports the monitoring and power-amplified transmission of messages on four frequency modulation (FM) radio nets, enabling the command post to operate on both troop and squadron command nets, as well as the squadron fires and operations and intelligence (O&I) nets. In addition to the digital battle tracking and long-range communications provided by the Joint Battle Command-Platform (JBCP), the AN/VRC-104 vehicle-mounted high frequency (HF) radio set enables the troop CP to communicate beyond the range of FM systems.

While the M1068A3 platform and CP personnel provide significant capabilities to enable effective C2, CP assets offer limited protection from enemy direct and indirect fires. Troop CPs lack the personnel or equipment to establish robust local security, as they are not equipped with machine guns, anti-armor weapons, or sufficient personnel to establish long-duration observation posts (OPs). To decrease CP vulnerability, troops can exploit the small footprint of CP assets to conceal their locations using a combination of terrain and camouflage, as well as noise, light, and electromagnetic signature discipline. Scout platoons can assist the commander in refining CP locations by confirming the suitability of planned locations during reconnaissance operations. The troop operations NCO can incorporate security patrols, displacement drills, and crew served weapons from the unit first sergeant (M113A3) and maintenance platforms (M88A2), when available, to improve CP survivability. To prevent the loss of the critical capabilities the CP provides, troop commanders must consider CP survivability and protection when planning command post locations and displacement triggers.

C2 in maneuver fight

The CP is not the only element within a troop responsible for effective C2, but it is the troop commander's primary asset for controlling the fight. Commanders may exercise command, the authoritative act of making decisions and ordering action, separate from their command posts to apply their personal

leadership at locations where they can best overcome friction in an operation. Troop CPs, which maintain a continuous common operating picture (COP) and synchronize sustainment operations, provide control, the regulation of forces and warfighting functions to accomplish the mission in accordance with the commander's intent.[5] Building and maintaining situational understanding, controlling operations, and assessing operations are the three command post functions critical to controlling the fight.

Situational understanding

Command posts build and maintain situational understanding for the troop by aggregating reporting from within the troop and consolidating information provided by adjacent units and higher headquarters to support the troop's maneuver. The troop CP directly integrates on the squadron and brigade intelligence nets by queuing troop collection assets to indicators observed by brigade assets, such as the Shadow Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) and electronics intelligence (ELINT) collections. Troops collect indicators to answer the brigade commander's priority intelligence requirements (PIR), and to incorporate troop CPs into brigade O&I nets, which facilitates timely reporting and provides redundancy in the event the squadron CP is unable to consolidate and forward such reports (the squadron CP is also included in the brigade O&I message room and thus it maintains visibility on troop reports submitted directly to brigade O&I). In addition, troop CPs reporting on the brigade JBCP O&I net can assist with mitigating friction in operations involving multiple battalion or squadron headquarters, such as the execution of a forward or rearward passage of lines, especially if the troop is the stationary unit. To support this TTP, troop CP personnel must understand the information collection plan and have the training to recognize and report priority indicators.

Effective, routine reporting from the troop CP to squadron and, as needed, brigade CPs on indicators and the status of friendly forces builds situational understanding for higher headquarters, while freeing the troop commander to

adjust the troop's scheme of maneuver and execute decision points.

Perhaps the most important way the troop CP controls operations is by maintaining an accurate COP of troop and adjacent unit operations. This can have a direct impact on the troop's lethality and ability to generate tempo. Therefore, troop CPs must not only track troop and adjacent unit locations, but also the direct and indirect fire control measures in effect. Scout platoons support the CP's role in enabling timely fires by providing routine, time or trigger-based reports on the location of their forces and the fire control measures on which they are oriented. Troop commanders clear ground for the employment of troop mortars within permissive indirect fire control measures, and, often operating at the brigade's line of contact, must be able to confirm clearance for squadron and brigade indirect fires targets and attack aviation. If confident in the COP maintained by the CP, the troop fire support officer (FSO) and commander can rapidly confirm clearance of indirect fires to suppress enemy positions, while minimizing the risk of fratricide.

Maintaining continuous communications with higher headquarters and adjacent units is essential for the CP to effectively battle-track operations and sustain an accurate COP. The executive officer, who serves as the CP officer in charge, and the commander should consider mission requirements to coordinate with adjacent units (such as for a passage of lines or planned maneuver through another troop's area of operations), as well as the communications (primary, alternate, contingency, and emergency) PACE plan, when planning CP locations.

Shared understanding

Through effective battle tracking, the CP enhances shared understanding, and it increases the troop's tempo by supporting rapid direct and indirect fires engagement decisions. In addition, battle-tracking reports of enemy activity and other indicators in space, within or relative to named areas of interest, facilitates rapid and accurate reporting to answer higher headquarters' PIR and inform commanders' assessments.

At the troop level, the CP assesses operations by consolidating information on the friendly and enemy situations to support assessments by key leaders within the troop, including the commander, executive officer, first sergeant, and platoon leaders. Battle tracking and situational understanding, as discussed above, support accurate assessment. In addition, the troop CP should aggregate battle damage assessment (BDA) reports from scout platoons and the troop fire integration support team (FIST) by time, element, and location. In maneuvers against live opposing forces (OPFOR), as well as live fire training, it is common for platoons to overestimate their BDAs. Well-trained CP personnel will engage platoon leadership to verify the accuracy of BDA reports for engagements occurring along section and platoon boundaries to confirm whether duplicate reporting resulted in inflated BDAs. By confirming his BDA with the troop CP, the troop commander can provide an updated assessment of the enemy situation to the squadron headquarters and determine whether the troop has observed indicators sufficient to answer PIR.

Located at the CP, the executive officer prepares assessments of the friendly situation to support decision making and the execution of sustainment operations. Informed by routine and post-engagement logistics status reporting, the executive officer should maintain an accurate estimate of the supply status of friendly forces and attachments. Beyond understanding on-hand quantities, the executive officer should update the commander on consumption rates and the duration the troop can continue to fight without conducting resupply. Against a mechanized, peer enemy, accurately tracking and forecasting the troop's consumption of ammunition (especially tube-launched optically tracked wire-guided (TOW) and Javelin missiles, and 120mm mortar rounds), fuel and water is essential.

Therefore, the executive officer should establish the metric he/she will use to forecast consumption rates during troop leading procedures "Step 6: Complete the Plan," using the enemy situation template to anticipate ammunition

expenditure and develop triggers for resupply. Such planning, followed by accurate battle tracking, equips the executive officer to have a dialogue with the commander on how the sustainment status of friendly forces impacts troop decision points, risk and opportunities. In parallel with the troop CP and mortar section, the troop FSO must maintain an accurate count of the troop's 120mm mortar ammunition to make recommendations on fire mission prioritization and approval as the troop depletes its mortar ammunition during enemy contact.

Building sustainment initiative

In addition to informing tactical decision making, the armored cavalry troop CP can be employed to build initiative in the sustainment warfighting function through managing the operations of the troop trains. Current cavalry squadron doctrine empowers commanders to determine the composition of the troop trains.[6] Rather than establishing a fixed composition for the troop trains, troops should develop a flexible standing operating procedure which prescribes adjustments to the composition of the troop trains based on the tactical situation. Leaders should primarily consider the threat situation and friendly force maintenance demand, as well as the disposition of squadron maintenance nodes, when determining the composition of the troop trains.

To reduce the time required to assess and repair equipment, as well as the demand for recovery assets, troops should maximize their capability to conduct assessment and repair as far forward as possible. A TTP in which the troop establishes a combat repair team co-located with the CP increases the responsiveness of maintenance support to the platoons and provides greater C2 of maintenance operations.

In most tactical situations, co-locating the field maintenance team (FMT) contact truck and M88 recovery vehicle with the troop CP can be achieved with low risk to the maintenance assets. Locating the shop van at the CP when the risk of direct and indirect fire is low, and there is a greater demand for

maintenance support forward than at the unit maintenance collection point, increases the mechanics and parts available to conduct forward repairs. The FMT chief, who has the most experience to make recommendations on maintenance and recovery decisions, should be located forward at the CP. By locating the combat repair team at the CP, the executive officer can provide clear guidance for dispatching a recovery mission, and platoons can rotate vehicles to the vicinity of the CP for fault validation and Form 5988-E Equipment Maintenance Worksheet submission. To streamline fault validation and identify National Stock Numbers for parts ordering, the combat repair team should be equipped with maintenance support device computers. This enables the CP to submit requests via JBCP or HF directly to the maintenance control section for priority parts ordering on a faster timeline than the return of paper copy Form 5988s. For weapons maintenance, the troop master gunner should maintain a stock of M242 repair parts with him at the CP. Posturing maintenance assets forward at the CP improves the flexibility of maintenance operations by providing troop leadership with options to deploy the combat repair team forward to assess damage, validate faults, and conduct repair or recovery operations, while also providing greater visibility on the status and impact of maintenance faults on combat platforms.

Effective coordination with internal and external organizations, the fourth function of a command post, is essential for conducting effective casualty evacuation (CASEVAC) operations and integrating enablers. To support the CASEVAC plan, the CP must track and communicate the status of troop casualty collection points (CCPs), while also refining prospective CCP locations based on the terrain, enemy and friendly situations with the assistance of the platoon sergeants. The medical NCO and first sergeant should use the CP's access to multiple FM nets and the brigade's digital JBCP COP to identify and coordinate casualty evacuation to adjacent unit aid stations, as necessary, given the squadron aid station may not be the closest option for casualty treatment.[7]

The executive officer, equipped with the communications capabilities resident in the command post, is responsible for coordinating the integration of combat enabling units.[8] Essential details the executive officer must coordinate with higher and adjacent unit headquarters include linkup times and locations, as well as responsibilities for sustainment. Often, the CP or a nearby area serve as suitable locations for the troop to conduct enabler linkup and integration. Pending the enabler unit understanding of the current fight, directing the enabler unit leadership to linkup at the CP for an orientation to the tactical situation and mission briefing can decrease the friction inherent in enabler integration.

Troop CP lessons from NTC

There are a variety of approaches and TTPs which support effective troop CP operations. The essential role of Troop B, 1st Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment's CP in enabling an effective zone reconnaissance mission in vicinity of School Bus Wadi during NTC Rotation 22-10 provides examples to illustrate several of the TTPs discussed above.

To confirm suitable approaches for 2/1 AD to maneuver into the central corridor after occupying terrain north of the Whale Gap, Troop B executed a zone reconnaissance from south to north through a zone including the School Bus Wadi and adjacent terrain.

The other cavalry troops, Troop A and Troop C conducted zone reconnaissance operations in parallel with Troop B to the west and east, respectively. Crossing the line of departure at 9 p.m., Troop B neutralized OPFOR within the security zone in vicinity of School Bus Wadi and maneuvered to observe Hill 720 and the Snow Cone, key terrain which could influence 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division's maneuver into the Central Corridor.

With effective communications and battle tracking, the troop CP can clear ground for indirect fires, including across unit boundaries. While maneuvering through School Bus Wadi under limited visibility, 2nd Platoon dismounts identified what appeared to be an OPFOR

OP approximately 500 meters into the Troop C zone in vicinity of the Porta Potti Wadi. Positioned on the east side of the troop's zone and able to maintain consistent FM communications with the Troop C CP and commander, the Troop B CP confirmed the OP was enemy OPFOR and obtained approval for a cross-boundary mortar fire mission within 20 minutes, enabling Troop B to successfully engage the stationary OP. The CP's situational understanding, battle tracking, and close coordination with the adjacent troop CP and the Troop B FSO were essential in delivering timely fires.

Troop CP integration into BCT O&I nets supports timely reconnaissance management decisions. Once 1st Platoon reached the northern end of School Bus Wadi, the BCT intelligence section broadcast ELINT and Shadow UAS indicators with associated Military Grid Reference System locations on the BCT O&I JBCP message room.

After plotting these locations with the troop commander, the CP confirmed 1st Platoon, Troop B was in the best position to collect on the disposition of the OPFOR combat trains and a T-90 platoon identified by BCT collections. After queuing Raven UAS and M2 Bradley capabilities to observe these locations, the troop was able to provide additional, continuous reporting on these OPFOR elements to the BCT.

Continuous monitoring of the squadron fires net (FM and JBCP) enables the CP to facilitate the delivery of fires from artillery and attack aviation. As 1st platoon confirmed a platoon of OPFOR T-90s moving slowly from west to east, south of Hill 720, the CP received an update on the squadron fires FM net that a section of AH-64 Apache helicopters had checked on station to support the squadron's maneuver. Battle tracking the reports from 1st platoon and equipped with the artillery and aviation attack guidance matrices, the executive officer contacted the squadron fires cell and the attack aviation section to report the location of the enemy T-90 platoon. He then facilitated FM linkup between the attack aviation section and the troop FSO, enabling the destruction of the OPFOR platoon.

The troop must maintain both primary and alternate means of communication with the squadron CP while the troop CP is displacing. As the Troop B commander and scout platoons maneuvered into School Bus Wadi, they lost FM communications with the squadron CP, which remained established in vicinity of the Whale Gap. The Troop CP set up its Quick Erect Antenna Mast (QEAM) system while stationary, enabling it to relay FM communications between the troop commander and squadron CP. When the troop CP collapsed the QEAM antennas to displace north, the troop lost FM communications with the squadron CP, leaving JBCP communications as the only functional element of its communications PACE plan.

Troops should ensure they maintain a primary and alternate means of communicating with the squadron CP while the troop CP displaces to minimize the risk of a communications gap. In subsequent missions, the troop commander and FSO used tactical satellite (TACSAT) communications to maintain voice communications with the squadron CP while operating beyond FM or HF radio range.[9] Troops also have sufficient OE-254 antenna mast systems for the FSO and commander to maintain a system on each of their tracks.

Troop CPs must track current airspace control measures to facilitate timely establishment of restricted operating zones (ROZ) for troop UAS. After confirming the location of OPFOR combat trains southwest of Hill 720, 1st Platoon was unable to maneuver M2 Bradleys to gain better observation of the trains without risking decisive engagement from the T-90 platoon nearby. The platoon leader prepared to launch the Raven UAV and requested the establishment of the ROZ in vicinity of Hill 720. The CP attempted to activate the associated keypad ROZ but did not have the current digital and analog airspace control measure overlays for the current mission. Although the commander and CP worked with the squadron CP to establish a ROZ, it required additional time and transmissions, delaying the establishment of a ROZ by two hours.

Training command post proficiency

Proficient CP personnel exercising disciplined initiative and generating shared understanding through established systems are the foundation of an effective troop CP. Troops must plan to train headquarters section junior-enlisted Soldiers and NCOs who are serving their first assignment in a cavalry organization, as they receive little to no training on CP operations during advanced individual training and the NCO basic leader course. In addition to the duties of command post personnel outlined in ATP 3-20.97, Cavalry Troop (Appendix C), troops must ensure command post NCOs and Soldiers serving as radiotelephone operators (RTOs) understand how to consolidate and organize reporting based on the information collection plan, graphic control measures, and the troop's task organization. Integrating CP NCOs into tactical rehearsals, as well as troop-level recovery and CASEVAC battle drills, validates the readiness of the CP.

The operations NCO should ensure all personnel in the CP are proficient in operating CP communications and battle tracking systems, as low-density military occupational specialty (MOS) NCOs (communications and CBRNE NCOs) may not be available in the CP while performing MOS-specific tasks. The executive officer may need to travel away from the CP to enable other operations, such that the operations NCO must be proficient in conducting all CP functions in his absence.

Troops must maximize opportunities to train CP operations prior to maneuvering at scale during a combined arms live fire exercise or attending a combat training center rotation. Deploying the troop CP in its tactical configuration to support crew gunnery, dismount live fire, and platoon situational training and live fire exercises provides repetitions for CP personnel to develop proficiency, enables the troop to refine CP systems, and validates the maintenance readiness of CP equipment. Squadron staffs can support multi-echelon CP training by deploying the squadron main command

post concurrent with these training events to validate squadron C2 systems.

Conclusion

In tactical environments characterized by great uncertainty and effects spanning multiple domains, troops will face challenges maintaining the control necessary to synchronize combined arms maneuver. Effective troop CPs provide the control, internal and external coordination, and support to assessment vital to maintaining an operation's tempo.

As they build cohesive teams, commanders must maximize opportunities to develop proficient and capable CPs which contribute to the success of subordinate, adjacent, and higher unit missions.

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Notes

[1] Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Army Techniques Publication 3-20.97, Cavalry Troop, (Washington,D.C., 2016).

[2] HQDA, Field Manual (FM) 6-0, Commander and Staff Organization and Operations, (Washington, D.C., 2022), 7-1.

[3] ATP 3-20.97, Cavalry Troop.

[4] HQDA, Army Doctrine Publication 6-0, Mission Command, (Washington, D.C., 2019c).

[5] HQDA, FM 6-0, Commander and Staff Organization.

[6] HQDA, FM 3-98, Reconnaissance and Security Operations, (Washington, D.C., 2023). "The troop commander determines the troop trains, which may consist of the troop first sergeant, supply sergeant, and troop medical assets. Maintenance teams from the Forward Support Company may be included."

7 ATP 3-20.97.

8 FM 3-98.

9 Although the BCT is equipped with a limited number of TACSAT systems, such systems can be employed to enable effective communications between cavalry troops and squadron/brigade CPs when the troops are conducting reconnaissance or security missions far forward of the main body.

Acronym Quick-Scan

ABCT – armored brigade combat team
BCT – brigade combat team
BDA – battle damage assessment
C2 – command and control
CASEVAC – casualty evacuation
CCP – casualty collection point
CP – command post
ELINT – electronics intelligence
FIST – fire integration support team
FM – frequency modulation
FMT – field maintenance team
FSO – fire support officer
HF – high frequency
JBCP – Joint Battle Command-Platform
MOS – military occupational specialty
OP – observation post
OPFOR – opposing forces
PIR – priority intelligence requirement
O&I – operations and intelligence
QEAM – Quick Erect Antenna Mast
ROZ – restricted operating zone
TACSAT – tactical satellite
TTP – tactics, techniques, and procedures
UAV – unmanned aerial vehicleSupport

FORT MOORE, GA – 2nd Squadron 15th Cavalry Regiment trainees learn Land Navigation during the ANVIL phase of basic training July 26, 2023. Trainees are learning the ability to navigate terrain with a map and compass. *(U.S. Army photo by Denise Mosley, Maneuver Center of Excellence and Fort Moore Public Affairs)*