

# Stewards of Kings: Preparing Distribution Platoon for the National Training Center

By CPT John M. LeClair

*A junior lieutenant dismounts their Palletized Load System (PLS) in the dead of night. Stumbling over rocks and sand just off the shoulder of Bitter Springs Main Supply Route (MSR), they make their way back to their assistant convoy commander's vehicle.*

*"Did we miss a turnabout a kilometer back?" they ask their transportation section sergeant, acting as the assistant convoy commander.*

*"I think so, but I can't say for sure," the section sergeant responds.*

*"This wouldn't have happened if we weren't also jacked up on ammo, which set us back a few hours."*

Distribution platoon leaders in the Field Artillery battalion (FA BN) regularly face stressful situations like this at the National Training Center (NTC). To ensure these issues don't continue, distribution platoons must prepare by conducting practical, tactical mounted land navigation, mastering ammunition management and implementing realistic training on logistics release points (LRPs) and rearm, refuel, resupply points (R3Ps).

"Sustainment is a central, potentially decisive aspect of ensuring the [Fire Support] system functions effectively; additionally, it is an essential component of the endurance tenet of multidomain operations and as such leaders should strive to integrate it into all [Fire Support] plans and operations. It is not a separate function or afterthought" (Field Manual 3-09). Leading up to a rotation at NTC, there is no shortage of opportunity for a distribution platoon to conduct the training required to propel it to success. As a unique forward support company (FSC) within the brigade combat team (BCT), the FA BN FSC is involved in numerous training exercises unseen throughout the rest of the BCT, including but not limited to artillery tables VI, XII, XV and XVIII. During these training exercises, it is paramount that the distribution platoon hone their tactical expertise. Given the controlled environment at home station, FSCs can utilize required real world sustainment missions to train on their essential tasks. Second Lieutenant Alex Caudill, a distribution platoon leader in Foxtrot Forward Support Company, 3rd Battalion, 16th Field Artillery Regiment, who has completed a rotation at NTC, states, "Battalion training exercises allowed everyone to put their knowledge to the test in a controlled training environment. Training exercises allowed Soldiers to see what our equipment can and can't do to ensure the success of the battalion's mission."

*F FSC, 1-5 FA, 1ABCT, 1ID conducts a convoy brief in the Intermediate Staging Base (ISB) Warrior Motor Pool on 7 February 2025 prior to movement to "The Box" during Rotation 25-04 at the National Training Center.*



## MOUNTED LAND NAVIGATION

Distribution Platoons are often led by a junior lieutenant who may only have a few battalion-level and maybe one brigade-level training exercises under their belt. Between the constant garrison sustainment missions, FSC commanders must be creative in training their distribution platoon in the first focal point of preparing for NTC: tactical mounted land navigation. The FSC commander must also verify that their distribution platoon leader is proficient and setting the standard. How to properly read a map and utilize MSRs, alternate supply routes (ASRs) and any passable road to reach a destination on time, efficiently and safely is a skill all distribution platoon Soldiers must possess. The next step is to conduct all this training while utilizing night vision devices (NVDs). The use of NVDs in a convoy is no surprise to distribution platoon leaders across the Army. Armored brigade combat teams (ABCTs) are known for saying such words as “Fight at Night” or “We Own the Night.” Sustainment operations, too, need to be successful under the cover of darkness.

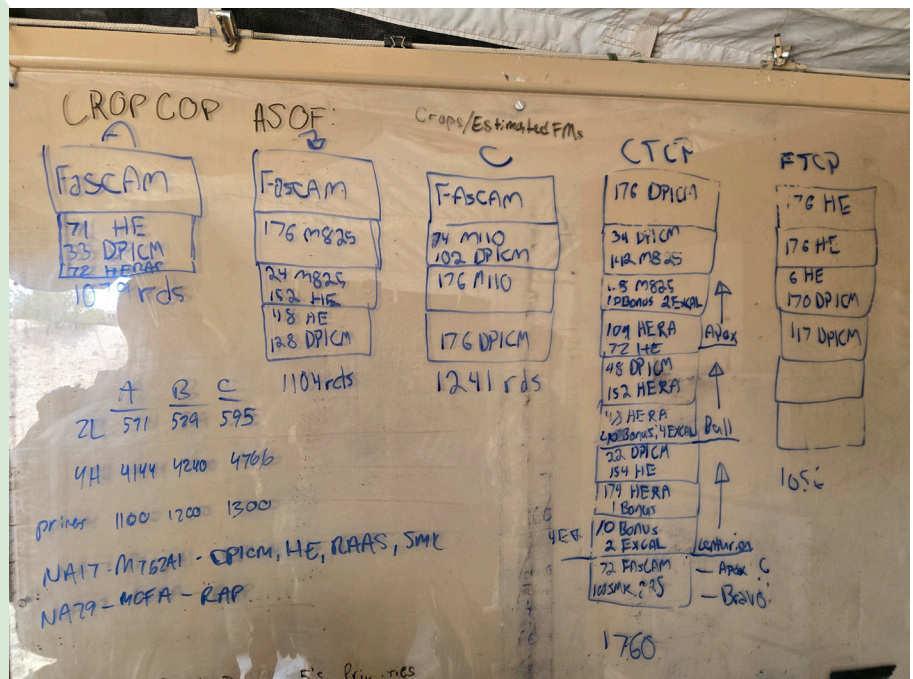
One of the most common problems that the FSC, specifically the distribution platoon, runs into is the lack of fully mission capable (FMC) communications platforms. The lack of FMC communications equipment creates two complications when commanding and navigating a convoy at NTC. First, without sufficient frequency modulation (FM) communications systems within the convoy, orders and information from the convoy commander and assistant convoy commander may fall on deaf ears or no ears at all. This poses an obvious safety risk while operating at night. Second, operational Joint Battle Command-Platforms (JBC-Ps) may be far and few between within a distribution platoon. Without systems to communicate and navigate, the distribution platoon leader or convoy commander will be set up to fail. Ensuring that communications systems are FMC and Soldiers are trained to operate them will significantly improve the movement of the logistics package (LOGPAC) convoy to, from and during LRP or R3P operations.

## AMMUNITION MANAGEMENT

Another skill that will lead to success for the distribution platoon at NTC is mastering ammunition management, specifically between the modular ammunition transfer point (MATP) and the artillery batteries. All Soldiers handling ammunition within the distribution platoon must understand what ammunition is on hand, typically broken down into combat configured loads (CCLs). These CCLs will be married to a Container Roll-In Roll-Out Platform (CROP) or flat rack from the MATP all the way until the CCL is broken down and loaded into a Paladin or FA Ammunition Supply Vehicle (FAASV). Understanding which CCLs are on hand and located at which nodes on the battlefield is critical. The FSC commander and distribution platoon leader must regularly coordinate with the battalion S-4 for ammunition updates and orders.

Recognizing the difference between hauling capacity and holding capacity will do wonders for a distribution platoon. Second Lieutenant Caudill explains, “There was prior planning based on hauling capacity. However, things change, and we ended up carrying more ammo than originally expected.” Ammunition drawn in excess of internal hauling capacity due to the requirement to haul additional secondary

2-82 FA CL V Ammunition Tracker within the Battalion Administration and Logistics Operations Center (ALOC) at the Combat Trains Command Post (CTCP) during Rotation 25-06 at the National Training Center.





loads other than ammunition will be considered under the unit's holding capacity. These CCLs are not loaded on a PLS because those systems are not directly dedicated to hauling only that ammunition.

## TACTICAL LRPs AND R3Ps

The final skill that a distribution platoon must execute proficiently is the tactical execution of LRPs and R3Ps. "A progressive approach enables a logical succession, builds skills and knowledge from basic to advance tasks and sets conditions for individual and collective training" (Field Manual 4-0). By utilizing this crawl, walk, run method as well as wrapping mounted land navigation and ammunition management into the LRP or R3P operation, the distribution platoon exercises their

*F FSC and C BTRY, 2-82 FA, 3ABCT, 1CD conduct a tactical Rearm, Refuel, Resupply Point (R3P) in preparation for a live fire exercise on 8 April 2025 during Rotation 25-06 at the National Training Center.*



trained skills to stay aware of the location of the supply point, using the terrain as concealment while executing a security plan. These resupply activities are time sensitive, and the distribution platoon must practice effective and efficient resupply of bulk fuel and ammunition to complete the operation within two hours, as to not to compromise the LRP or R3P location. Integrating LRP and R3P operations into the unit tactical standard operating procedure (TACSOP) will ensure all involved parties are on the same page, from the link up to which sustainment asset is to provide for which battery to the flow of traffic through the R3P site. Executing these tactical LRPs or R3Ps as much as possible during all battalion training exercises should be the goal and expectation of the FSC commander and the FA BN commander.

Many sustainment organizations face problems when training at NTC. Regardless of the cause—be it a lack of resources, training time or a true understanding of the issues at hand, there are a few focus areas that should prepare the distribution platoon for the true test that NTC is. In training, tactical mounted land navigation, ammunition management and tactical LRP and R3P execution are necessary priorities. Master these three tasks, and you enable the King of Battle to win.

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## References

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