

Bridging the Knowledge Gap From the Classroom to the Battlefield

■ By Capt. William K. Smith

After graduating from the Maneuver and Logistics Captain's Career Courses in September 2014, I arrived at Fort Wainwright, Alaska, to take command of a newly created forward support company (FSC) within the 3rd battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT), 25th Infantry Division.

In January 2015, the SBCT deployed to an 18-day decisive action training rotation at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California. After completing this rotation and having some data points for SBCT FSC organizations, I have some recommendations for both new FSC commanders and students of the Maneuver and Logistics Captain's Career Courses.

Career Course Lessons

Career courses focus on doctrine and using your unit's modified table of organization and equipment in the decisive action environment, which is exactly what the SBCT FSC did during its NTC rotation. The courses teach logistics planning with an armored brigade combat team (BCT). This format forces students to plan for massive consumption factors. If you can plan and execute logistics for an armored BCT, you can plan and execute logistics for any brigade.

Apart from the common core classes taught in the first six weeks, the curricula for the Maneuver and Logistics Captain's Career Courses are vastly different and do not necessarily complement each other. For example, while in school, a logistician will never write paragraph four of a company operation order, which would be considered a common assignment for an

infantry officer. Infantry officers focus on tactical issues, while logisticians focus on operational matters.

Decisive Action Lessons

The first challenge typically faced that is not addressed in the classroom is how to operationalize logistics down to the lowest level. This is challenging because each type of battalion fights and supports itself differently.

Like many logisticians, my lieutenant years were spent in non-BCT brigades. Specifically, I was in a military police brigade and a sustainment brigade. My knowledge of BCT operations could have been stronger going into my first company command. However, the headquarters and headquarters company (HHC) commander helped bridge my knowledge deficiency.

Building a strong working relationship with the HHC commander early on is a must. Garrison operations do not require this relationship, but fighting in the decisive action environment will force it. Unlike FSC commanders, almost all infantry HHC commanders are rifle company commanders before commanding HHCs. The HHC commander can visualize exactly what rifle company commanders should expect on the receiving end of the logistics plan. In addition, he is already skilled at operationalizing other battalion enablers such as fire support, medics, battalion scouts, and mortars.

As the only logistics commander in the battalion, the FSC commander knows exactly what is available, how to get it, how to plug into resources from higher echelons through the support operations section and the brigade support battalion, and where to look when things are not flowing right. He also knows how to remain

connected to nonstandard resources.

When the S-4 involves the HHC and FSC commanders together in planning, they can help set expectations on both ends of the logistics spectrum and ensure the logistics plan is feasible and attainable for both the FSC and infantry companies.

HHC and FSC commanders who do not attempt to understand each other's role in the battalion decisive action fight are on a collision course.

Establishing the roles and responsibilities of the HHC commander, FSC commander, and the battalion S-4 early on is critical to the success of the battalion. During the after-action review, our infantry battalion realized that home-station training did not test logistics systems the same way a decisive action environment does.

Bridging the knowledge gap from the classroom to the battlefield means applying your knowledge and the knowledge of your team members early and often. Your battalion will sink or swim depending on your relationship with the HHC commander. Define your roles and lanes early; admit that neither of you can do the other's jobs.

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