

CSS and the Battalion Scout Platoon

by Sergeant First Class Harald Jeffery

*Barlesius is awake in an instant. People are stirring around the other cars. The silhouettes of the soldiers stand out against the sky. All listen intently. There! They hear it quite plainly. The distant roar of engines; like the drone of bumblebees. "They're a long way off." Barlesius jumps to the ground and kneels with his ear close to the earth. There is no doubt about it. "Michel, start up! Bearing 43!" Barlesius swings into the car which starts up noiselessly. The darkness swallows them up. Compass in hand, the Oberfeldwebel tries in vain to pierce the surrounding blackness. They hear it plainly now — a low rumble mingled with a high squeaking. "Cars-about!" It is 0130 hours when the first radio transmission goes out: "Loud noise of engines from south and southeast. Ten kilometers distant."*¹

Thus began British General Archibald Wavell's Operation Battleaxe in North Africa during World War II. With the early warning provided by the German armored car outposts, General Wavell's troops lost any element of surprise, resulting in heavy losses and a British reversal. This battle demonstrated the need to keep scouts on the battlefield where they can provide the commander with the critical information needed for success. To increase the number of scouts available, we must first develop workable solutions for resupply, maintenance, and casualty evacuation (CASEVAC). Since the introduction of motorized transportation, scouts have become tied to their need for logistical support, and gone are earlier days of foraging for supplies. We will focus on the logistical system and attempt to introduce some useful techniques, used throughout history and relearned during our last NTC rotation.

Logistics resupply activities must take place as far forward as possible, and ideally during mission transition. During sustained security operations, when this is not possible, we are faced with two hard choices. We can pull the platoon back for resupply or maintain the counterreconnaissance screen. How do

we handle this problem? By first understanding current doctrine and by developing supporting techniques.

Doctrinally, either the task force or the scout platoon sergeant facilitates resupply. If the task force is the primary facilitator, they have two methods. The battalion can dedicate a logistics package to the scout platoon. This LOGPAC slice is brought forward by the HHC 1SG, the support platoon leader, the HHC XO, or another responsible individual. Doctrinally, this is the best method for the scout platoon but the most difficult for the battalion.

Realistically, this does not work due to the two-hour turn-around time on the LOGPAC. In order to meet this time limit, the scout platoon must locate in an area close enough to the LRP to receive resupply, wasting valuable time that can be better used conducting reconnaissance. The second method calls for the scout platoon to use the nearest company team's CSS assets for resupply. This method requires the forward company's 1SG to pick up the scouts' LOGPAC and the scout platoon to move back to that company for resupply. This method permits the scouts to resupply at a more forward location. However, identifying the company team responsible for resupply and ensuring that the scouts can link up can prove difficult. This method also has the problem of the two-hour turn-around time.

The other doctrinal method is to use the scout platoon sergeant to facilitate the resupply. With this method, the PSG coordinates for supplies, picks up LOGPAC, distributes the supplies, and returns the LOGPAC to its parent-unit location. This is the easiest method of resupply for the battalion, but the worst for the scout platoon. Using this method stretches the platoon's ability to perform reconnaissance missions because it must operate without the platoon sergeant for extended periods of time. This method reduces the reconnaissance force by one team or forces a vehicle to operate independently and creates the danger of opening a hole in the reconnaissance net. The

greatest advantage to this method is that the scout platoon has an individual with a vested interest handling the platoon's CSS needs.

In order to develop a better resupply system, we must sever the scout platoon's tie to the LOGPAC timeline. The easiest solution is to increase the supplies that the platoon can carry. To do this, our platoon used the rack described in the May-June 1999 issue of *ARMOR*.² This additional space allowed us to carry two extra 5-gallon cans of fuel, which increased our operational range by another 150 miles. We also added two extra water cans and two cases of MREs, giving us the ability to deploy unsupported for three to seven days.³ This still left us enough room to carry mission-specific equipment and extra ammunition.

The next step is to eliminate the two-hour timeline. A workable technique is to create an independent push package for scout resupply. This would consist of fuel and water cans, MREs, maintenance parts, and ammunition. This package is loaded on a trailer and brought to the LRP by the HHC 1SG. It is then transferred to the 1SG of the forward-most deployed company team, and he moves it to his AA. It can then either be pushed forward or left for another scout element to pick up. Any unused supplies can be used by the scout platoon to establish a cache site. If the scout platoon cannot make link-up, the push package can be retained with the lead company or moved to the company team collection point (CTCP) for emergency resupply. The advantages are that this will support the scout platoon with the minimum supplies needed to continue operations and the push package is not locked into the two-hour timeline.

The difficulties with this system are ensuring the push package gets to where it needs to be and is properly resourced. At a minimum, it must consist of 10 gallons of fuel, 5 gallons of water, a two-day supply of MREs per vehicle, and spare batteries. Two trailers will be needed to support the scout package; one will be deployed with the

platoon, and the other brought forward for the next resupply and exchanged for the empty trailer. By using this technique, the scout platoon remains forward of the battalion, allowing all assets to stay focused on the reconnaissance mission.

Maintenance

Resupply is only one of the logistical challenges facing the scout platoon; maintenance is the second. During our deployment to the NTC, we were assigned a wheeled vehicle mechanic, complete with toolbox, manuals, and a light wheeled tow bar. This permitted deficiencies to be verified and the part number annotated on the 5988-E without bringing the platoon to a central location. Also, it gives the platoon the ability to conduct limited recovery to either a company team or maintenance collection point. By ordering the part on the A&L net, we were able to get it with the next LOGPAC. These techniques decreased a vehicle's down-time and, in several cases, the mechanic was able to make repairs and keep the vehicle in the fight. The task force also needs to pre-stock common repair parts. This includes two to three tires mounted on rims, half-shafts, half-shaft bolts, and generator belts. These items can then be quickly pushed forward.

A second technique is to establish a Maintenance Contact Team for the scout platoon. This consists of two mechanics and a "six-pack" HMMWV. This team would carry the tools necessary for larger repairs — an impact wrench, air compressor, and a tow bar. The contact team deploys with the forward company and, as needed, could be escorted to the disabled scout vehicle. This gives the platoon a dedicated maintenance team and permits repair as far forward as possible. Scouts in the BSA provide little intelligence value.

Medical/CASEVAC

CASEVAC is the most difficult task to accomplish and, historically at the CTCs, scout platoons suffer a 70-90 percent Died of Wounds rate. This greatly affects the scouts' ability to conduct follow-on missions and cannot be handled by the scout platoon alone. Combat lifesavers and assignment of a medic to the platoon greatly enhances the ability to provide medical assistance but does not get casualties off the battlefield any faster.

To increase casualty assistance and to speed up patient preparation time, each vehicle carries a combat lifesaver (CLS) kit and a litter. The PSG's vehicle also carries two to three extra CLS kits. As the PSG collects the casualties, he replaces used CLS kits and gives the crew an empty litter. Once the PSG gets to the Battalion Casualty Collection Point (CCP) he picks up another litter and restocks the used CLS kits. This ensures that there are enough medical supplies forward to render assistance.

Within the scout platoon, the PSG facilitates CASEVAC, and this forces him to shift his focus from reconnaissance. Once again, this reduces the platoon's reconnaissance platforms by one section or forces the PSG to operate independently. While it can be done for limited casualties, one litter and two walking-wounded per trip, it stretches the PSG's abilities. The problem escalates if there are casualties at multiple sites. Suppose, for example, that the PSG begins maneuvering to pick up a casualty from A Section (30-minute travel time) when B Section reports taking casualties. Once he has A Section's casualty loaded, he begins maneuvering to B Section (30 minute travel time). He then takes all casualties back to the Battalion CCP (1 hour travel time). Total time used for evacuation: 2 hours.

To begin fixing the CASEVAC problem, the platoon must develop an internal plan that is well understood and rehearsed. The plan used by our platoon began with developing dedicated CASEVAC platforms. To start, we crewed the PSG vehicle with a medic driver, a mechanic gunner, and myself. The two scouts normally assigned to the PSG's vehicle were then given to the Charlie and Delta sections. This gave these two sections the ability to man OPs, guard the vehicles, and still left enough personnel to crew CASEVAC vehicles. The PSG then deploys

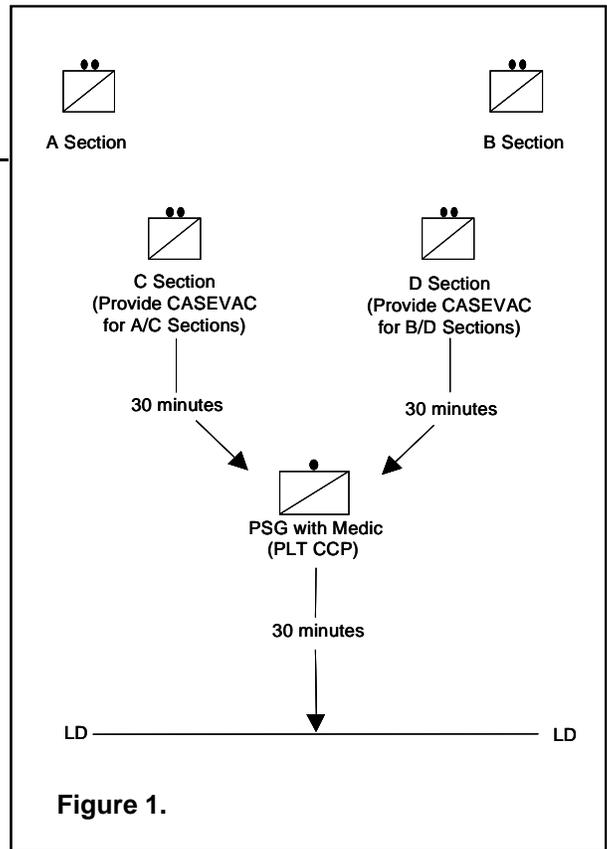


Figure 1.

no further than a 30-minute travel time from the LD, battalion CCP, or he covers the nearest NAI. He then identifies the platoon's CCP. Charlie and Delta sections continue forward to a maximum distance of 30 minutes from the platoon's CCP or the next set of NAIs. They then become the primary evacuation platform for their teams (Figure 1) thus reducing the turn-around time for CASEVAC. By using the above method, we have cut the evacuation time by one hour and are in position to evacuate any additional casualties.

To further increase effectiveness, our platoon created an internal CASEVAC report called the "911 Report" (Figure 2). This report can be sent in one transmission to the PSG giving him enough information to start formulating his reports to higher and begin deploying CASEVAC assets.

Another alternative to enhance the platoon's CASEVAC capabilities is to augment the scout platoon with a dedicated CASEVAC vehicle. This should be either a six-pack HMMWV or a medical M113. The crew for this vehicle will consist of the PSG, a medic, and a wheeled mechanic. This technique would permit the PSG to focus solely on CSS while still providing the platoon with maximum reconnaissance

911 Report

Line 1: Vehicle bumper number and type of damage:

Zapped=Destroyed Maneuver	Firepower Commo
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Line 2: Location.

Line 3: Crew position and type of casualty:

T=TC	1=KIA
D=Driver	2=Urgent
G=Gunner	3=Priority
X=Dismount	4=Routine

EXAMPLE: Red 4 this is Red 3, 911 follows, Red 2 Firepower grid 123456 T2 G3, over.

Figure 2

platforms. It would also provide the scout platoon with a vehicle capable of carrying multiple casualties and, equipped with a tow bar, it provides recovery capabilities.

While these techniques are a good first step, the task force must be proactive when supporting or augmenting the scout's CASEVAC. They must be will-

ing to commit combat power to recover scouts or risk going into battle blind. Company team medic vehicles must be prepared to evacuate scout casualties while moving forward of the LD. The platoon plan must be integrated into the task force's CSS plan. CSS operations must be rehearsed so all players understand their roles.

Conclusion

On 17 March 1915, a British column of 45 vehicles, consisting of 12 armored cars, Ford tenders, and a string of ambulances, departed Sollum. Their mission was to travel 120 miles into the desert and conduct a raid

on Bir Hacheim, rescue the crew of the *HMS Tara*, and return 120 miles to Sollum.⁴ The success of this mission was due to the armored cars' ability to bring all their CSS needs with them. While we cannot send a fleet of trucks to meet the scout's logistical needs, we should ensure they have everything necessary to survive away from the task force.

Notes

¹Perrett, Bryan, Bruce Culver, and Jim Laurier. *German Armored Cars and Reconnaissance Half-Tracks 1939-45*. Oxford, England: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 1999.

²Johnson, T.J. Captain. "The HMMWV Storage Rack." *ARMOR*. May-Jun 99, Back Cover.

³Edwards, John E., Major (Ret.). *Combat Service Support Guide 2nd Edition*. Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1993.

⁴Zumbro, Ralph. *The Iron Cavalry*. New York: Pocket Books, 1998.

SFC Harald Jeffery has served as a section sergeant, senior scout, and platoon sergeant with the 2nd Battalion, 34th Armor's scout platoon at Fort Riley for the past five years. He is a graduate of PLDC, BNCOC, and ANCOG, as well as the Scout Platoon Leader's Course, Infantry Leader's Course, and the Observer/Controller Course at Fort Polk. He is currently assigned to the 1st Battalion, 305th Armor (TS) at Camp Shelby, Miss., to provide training support for the Mississippi and Alabama National Guard.