

CRACKING THE CODE ON CLASS IV/CLASS V SUPPLY POINT OPERATIONS

By Captain Mark T. Martinez

Cracking the code on how to plan and conduct Class IV/Class V supply point operations on the battlefield can be painful and, if not done correctly, can cause a lot of finger pointing during after-action reviews (AARs). A challenge for any brigade is to develop a standing operating procedure (SOP) for running a Class IV/Class V supply point, identify those responsible for planning and running it (called "pinning-the-rose"), and train those individuals with the rest of the brigade according to the SOP. This article describes how the 3rd Brigade Combat Team (3BCT), 1st Armored Division, Fort Riley, Kansas, cracked this code during their train-up for, and deployment to, the National Training Center for Rotation 98-08.

Doctrine Guidance

What was once known as the engineer forward supply point (run by an overworked, sleep-deprived engineer assault and obstacle platoon leader) is now the task force Class IV/Class V supply point. It is run by the maneuver S4. According to guidance in FM 90-7, *Combined Arms Obstacle Integration*, page C-9, this central receiving point for all obstacle material in the task force sector is established and operated by the task force, not the engineers.

"Pinning the rose" on the task force S4 is sometimes difficult. He is not trained for this task, and his chain of command may view Class IV/Class V operations as an engineer's job. When the task force pawns this task off on its organic engineers, it degrades engineer capabilities on the

ground. We must educate our maneuver brethren to correctly use their engineer assets by taking ownership of the Class IV/Class V supply point.

Make It Simple

The first thing engineers must do to educate the brigade's maneuver personnel is to condense complex information in field manuals and all of the algebraic planning factors into easily understood and executable concepts. The 3BCT uses acronyms (Figure 1) to simplify these planning factors and PowerPoint slides to present them.

Simple to Plan

In the 3BCT, each task force S4 and XO is given what the engineers call a "WELCOMES" card that outlines planning considerations a task force S4 must observe to conduct a successful Class IV/Class V supply point. The acronym "WELCOMES" means the following:

W = Work Detail. The 3BCT SOP calls for one noncommissioned officer in charge (NCOIC) and 20 soldiers to form a work detail. The NCO is not an engineer and usually is from the task force S4 shop. The 20 soldiers make up three crews. The unloading crew downloads wire and mines from Corps throughput assets, and the uncrating crew uncrates mines, inspects them, and configures them into push packages. The loading crew then loads the push packages onto task force transportation assets for transport to forward mine dumps.

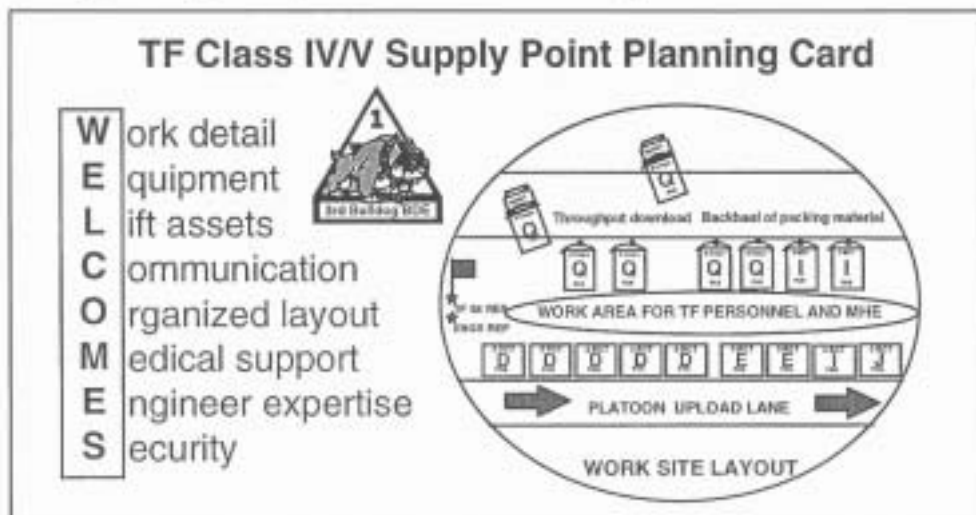


Figure 1

“Planning and running a Class IV/Class V supply point is like having a tooth pulled—no matter how many times you do it, it’s still not much fun.”

A task force S4

AAR Comment. Use the task force’s heavy expanded mobility tactical vehicle (HEMTT) to transport push packages.

E = Equipment. Equipment required to run the supply point includes wire gauntlets for each soldier, banding machines, tin snips, crowbars, and engineer tape. Material required to lay out the site includes bicycle flags or a hand-emplaced minefield-marking set, engineer tape, green and red chemlights, and a picket pounder (Figure 2). A warm-up or sleep tent also may be needed.

AAR Comment. Each TF S4 shop should maintain a footlocker with this necessary equipment that can be easily transported to the Class IV/Class V supply point site.

L = Lift Assets. According to the 3BCT SOP, the task force S4 requests materiel-handling equipment (MHE) and additional transportation assets from the forward support battalion’s support operations officer. The Class IV/Class V supply point belonging to the task force responsible for the main effort has priority for receiving lift assets.

AAR Comment. During the planning process, units should war-game and “rock drill” moving the MHE to the Class IV/Class V supply point. Ensure that the forklift operator is equipped with night-vision goggles for night operations.

C = Communications. The task force S4 maintains communications with the task force tactical operations center (TOC). The engineer representative at the Class IV/Class V supply point maintains communications with

engineer platoons and the engineer company TOC. The engineer company TOC maintains communications with the engineer S4 on the engineer battalion administrative/logistic (A/L) net. This communication web is driven by the unit’s signal plan and varies with each unit.

AAR Comment. A good retransmission plan for the battalion A/L net is essential for this to work.

O = Organized Layout. The 3BCT uses the palletized load system to deliver Class IV/Class V supplies. A standard layout was developed to give the task force S4 a baseline for using this system effectively (Figure 2). During the National Training Center rotation, each task force S4 revised the standard layout according to the mission, enemy, terrain, troops, and time available (METT-T).

AAR Comment. Mark this layout clearly before night operations, because vehicles that wander into the work area after dark pose a serious safety threat to personnel.

M = Medical Support. The task force S4 must coordinate for medical support and develop an evacuation plan. The task force Class IV/Class V supply point NCOIC maintains a list of trained combat lifesavers in each work group and the battle roster of all personnel at the supply point.

AAR Comment. The medical support plan must be synchronized with the task force scheme of support for that phase of the operation.

E = Engineer Expertise. Each engineer company supporting the task force in sector provides an engineer NCO representative to the task force S4. This NCO is not the supply

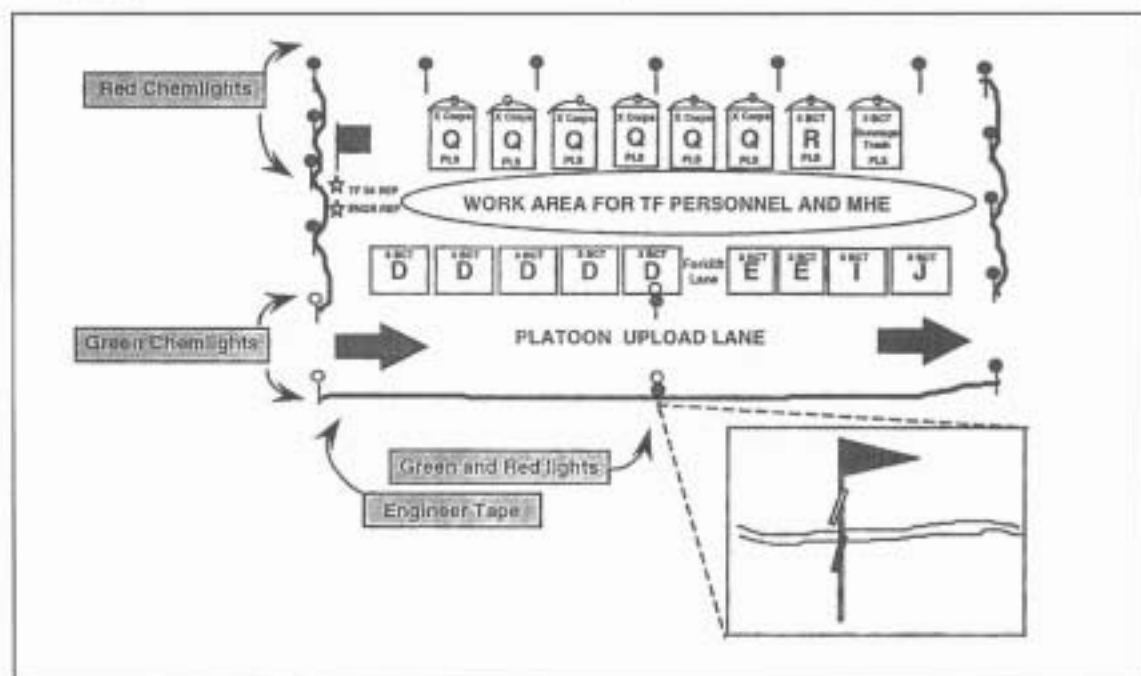


Figure 2

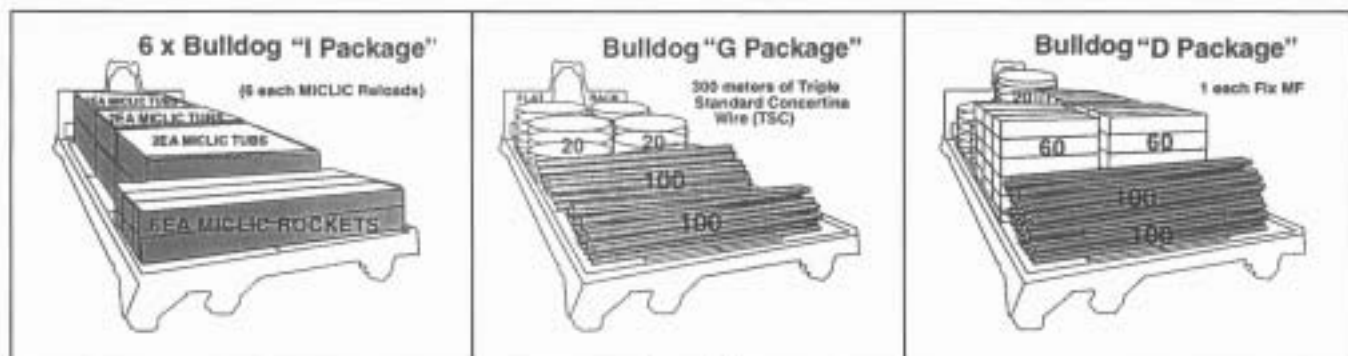


Figure 3

point NCOIC and does not supervise the work detail. He provides technical expertise for the push-package configuration; oversees the handling of mines, fuses, and anti-handling devices; and monitors and records the quantities of Class IV/Class V supplies at the site.

AAR Comment. Use the same NCOIC each time, so he will build a good working relationship with the task force S4.

S = Security. The task force S4 and staff, in cooperation with the engineers, selects a Class IV/Class V supply point location that can be easily defended against both mounted and dismounted troops. The S4 develops and enforces the site security plan. The task force provides a security force for the supply point.

AAR Comment. This task often is given only "lip service." The task force must initiate a security plan. Losing the Class IV/Class V supply point to "dismounts" has grave consequences.

Simple to Run

A plan is only good until the line of departure, so keep it as simple as possible. FM 90-7, page 8-9, states that most brigades and regiments in the U.S. Army use push packages to simplify and expedite planning and resourcing of Class IV/Class V supply points. Push packages are the most efficient way to get the right amount of wire and mines to the right spot on the battlefield, especially when you are 72 hours into your failed sleep plan.

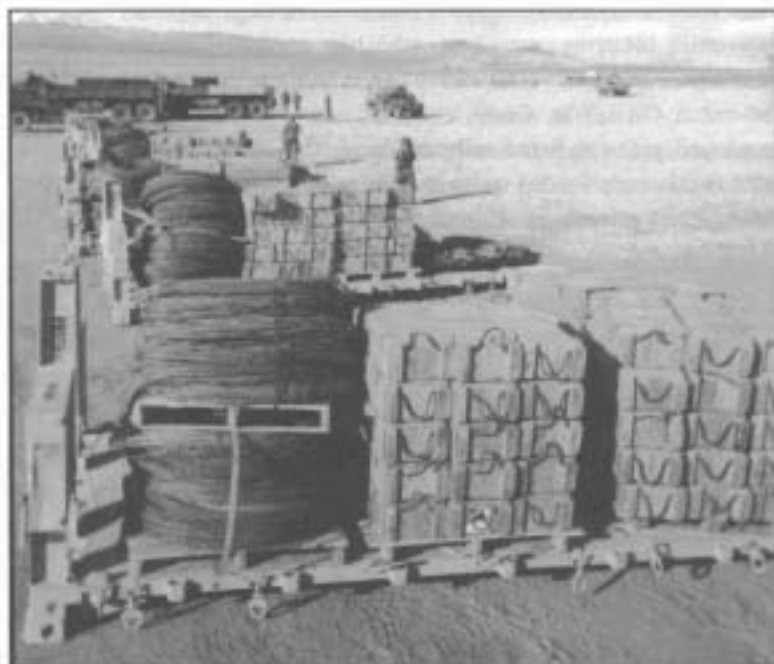
The 3BCT takes the push-package concept one step further and provides the task force S4s with a "cookbook" that describes the push packages (Figure 3). Each page shows a picture of the material required for a particular type of obstacle. To facilitate building and transporting, the page also shows how the material is arranged on the palletized load system flatrack. At the National Training Center, this cookbook was extremely helpful in recovering and reconfiguring push packages so they could be used again in the next fight. For example, the task force S4 used the cookbook to provide a picture of the "G Package"

to the supply point NCOIC and asked him to build a number of them. In this case, one picture is worth a thousand directives.

Sustain the Fight

The Class IV/Class V supply point plays a key role in sustaining the fight. This fact sometimes is overlooked until the call comes to end the mission, and then it becomes a reaction drill to recover lost barrier material. An easy way to plan recovery operations is to use the four "Rs": retrieve, reconsolidate, reconfigure, and reintroduce. When transitioning from the defense, the implied task for the task force can be: "Conduct battlefield recovery operations using a collective effort to retrieve, reconsolidate, reconfigure, and reintroduce Class IV/Class V supplies into the battle." To recover obstacle effects, reconfigure the packages, and reintroduce them into the fight is essential in conducting sustained defensive operations. The Class IV/Class V supply point should be the cornerstone for this operation, and the task force S4 must be trained in recovery operations.

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Push packages loaded with obstacle material.

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Sell the Idea

No matter how great his ideas, an engineer is worthless to those he supports if he cannot sell himself and those ideas. Unfortunately for engineers, infantry and armor officers make the final call on the brigade SOP. New ideas are a hard sell, especially to those comfortable with the "old ways." Engineers in the 3BCT developed a PowerPoint slide presentation that shows the Class IV/Class V supply flow on the battlefield. This presentation points out to the task force S4s that the supply point is their responsibility and demonstrates with the "WELCOMES" card how easy their job can be. After the 3BCT commander blessed the concept, it was included in the brigade's noncommissioned officer and officer development plans. Then, with a measurable amount of insistence on the part of the engineers, the Class IV/Class V supply flow was exercised during the home station train-up for the National Training Center. After receiving guidance, the task force S4s took ownership of their supply points and ran them quite well. This achieved the brigade commander's intent to free up the engineers and use the brigade's limited assets to push enough material to keep those engineers gainfully employed on the ground.

Maximize Assets

FM 20-32, *Mine/Countermining Operations*, states that "Mine warfare logistics at the task force level can be complex. It requires prudent use of scarce haul and materiel handling equipment and demands positive command and control." With dwindling resources in personnel and equipment across the Engineer Corps, it is paramount to use all the brigade's assets for Class IV/Class V supply point operations. Training maneuver elements in the brigade before they deployed to the National Training Center paid high dividends for the 3BCT—and it would be time well spent during any brigade's train-up. Key tasks for engineers are to simplify doctrine, assign responsibilities, sell the idea, and train maneuver elements to take ownership of the supply point. When a unit can free engineers from processing mines and mass their efforts on mine emplacement, they have cracked the code on Class IV/Class V supply point operations.



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London, pages 62, 81, 84, 85, 190, & 191. See also, *Bagrations 1944, The Destruction of Army Group Centre*, by Steven Zaloga, pages 33, 34, and 49.

⁴⁰ OP CIT, *Jane's Military Vehicles and Logistics, 1991-1992*, pages 234, 235, 238, and 240.

⁴¹ *History of the Corps of Royal Canadian Engineers, Volume II, 1936-1946*, by A. J. Kerry and W. A. McDill, The Military Engineers Association of Canada, Ottawa, 1966, page 99. However, it is possible that the Germans were first, see *German Mine Warfare Equipment*, pages 215-216.

⁴² *Cassino to the Alps, The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, by Ernest Fisher, Center of Military History, US Army, Washington, D.C., 1977, 120-128.

⁴³ OP CIT, *The Story of the 79th Armored Division*, page 136.

⁴⁴ OP CIT, *Jane's Military Vehicles and Logistics, 1991-1992*, pages 238, 242, 247, & 248.

⁴⁵ *Taming the Landmine*, by Peter Stiff, Galago Publishing, Alberton, South Africa, 1986, pages 23-28. Alternatively, the Russians may have been first, see *Soviet Tanks and Combat Vehicles of World War Two*, page 62.

⁴⁶ *Vanguard of Victory, The 79th Armored Division*, by David Fletcher, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1984.

⁴⁷ OP CIT, *Jane's Military Vehicles and Logistics, 1991-1992*, page 232.

⁴⁸ OP CIT, *Encyclopedia of Tanks*, pages 133 and 143.

⁴⁹ *German Remote-Control Tank Units 1940-1943*, by Markus Jaugitz, Schiffer Military, Atglen, Pennsylvania. These devices are arguably related to the much older concept of a "fire ship" from naval warfare.

⁵⁰ *The Genius of China*, by Robert Temple, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1986, page 237.

⁵¹ *Engineers of Independence, A Documentary History of the Army Engineers in the American Revolution, 1775-1783*, by Paul K. Walker, Historical Division, Office of the Chief of Engineers, Washington, D.C., page 185.

⁵² *Torpedoes: Their Invention and Use, From the First Application to the Art of War to the Present Time*, by W. R. King, Washington, 1866, page 34-86.

⁵³ OP CIT, *Infernal Machines, The Story of Confederate Submarine and Mine Warfare*, page 4.

⁵⁴ OP CIT, TC 5-31, pages 4-14 and 4-15.

⁵⁵ *On Air Defense*, by James D. Crabtree, Praeger, Westport, Connecticut, 1994, pages 183-184.

⁵⁶ OP CIT, *Jane's Military Vehicles and Logistics, 1991-1992*, page 198 and "Anti-Helicopter Mine" Brochure, Ferranti International, undated.

⁵⁷ "Russia Unveils Anti-Helicopter Mine Project," *Jane's International Defense Review*, 1/1998, page 16.