



U.S. Army Soldiers with the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) layout tent and camouflage netting equipment. Leaders should deliberately plan and resource inventories like other small-unit collective tasks. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Garrett L. Dipuma)

# Want to avoid a FLIPL? Focus on Supply Discipline

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**T**he Army is remarkably tolerant of failure if it generates learning and improvement. Long before Silicon Valley entrepreneurs advised companies to fail quickly to accelerate learning, Army units experienced lightning-fast failure a few hundred miles away in the Mojave Desert at the National Training Center. Our entire training enterprise is built around the idea that no one will get a task perfect on the first try. However, this tolerance for failure does not extend to supply discipline. A young captain or sergeant is more likely to face serious consequences from mistakes in property accountability than anything not involving misconduct. Based on this, Soldiers and their leaders need concrete guidance to avoid adverse fiscal and professional consequences.

The Army formally captures supply and property efforts within the Command Supply Discipline Pro-

gram (CSDP). Leaders responsible for CSDP hands-on implementation at the small unit level should focus on tasks at echelon as a practical way to implement this commander's program. Put simply, focus on what we want people to do to maintain supply discipline. This approach simplifies CSDP and gives the power back to our noncommissioned and company grade officers.

## The Problem

CSDP is designed to address "supervisory and/or managerial responsibilities within the supply system from the user to the Army command, Army service component command, and/or direct reporting unit level" (Army, 2016). In common practice, CSDP is broadly used to describe all things related to supply and property in units, but the precise meaning of this term eludes many.



As a battalion and brigade commander, I spent significant time with young leaders struggling to make sense of what “commander’s program” meant in terms of their daily to-do list. In my current position as deputy commander of a division-level headquarters responsible for multiple brigades, I approve Financial Liability Investigations of Property Loss and see first-hand how small units struggle with CSDP implementation. From experience, I’ve noticed five broad trends:

1) Responsibilities are poorly understood. Leaders at nearly every level do not have a clear understanding of their specific responsibilities. Junior enlisted Soldiers, sergeants and captains do different things by the nature of their duty positions, but CSDP guidance for battery-level units (14 pages of guidance in AR 710-2) primarily outline end states that battery-level commanders must achieve. This effects-based guidance lacks detailed implementation instructions that must be mastered by Soldiers and their leaders.

2) Low-density experts drive results. Supply sergeants, property book officers and accountable officers, supported by S-4 and G-4 teams, are decisive in executing CSDP. This is because supply and property systems require significant technical expertise to function. Units missing these experts suffer significant degradation in supply discipline.

3) Company-level commanders bear the weight of the “commander’s program.” The heaviest CSDP burden is largely felt by company, troop, and battery commanders. Captains are the highest-ranking leaders who sign for nearly all Army property, so they also bear the financial burden when things go badly. Battalion and brigade commanders have command

responsibility but are rarely financially liable for a missing wrench or truck. Battalions and brigades set the broad conditions by establishing priorities and using information requirements (meetings, reports, etc.) to drive behavior, but they do not directly execute the daily activities inside subordinate units. As a result, company-level commanders who lack a staff try to stay afloat while executing their missions and hope for a FLIPL-free change of command.

4) Shortage management is poorly executed. The majority of FLIPLs I review are for change of command inventories, with losses that are largely driven by shortages of components of end items (COEI) and basic issue items (BII). The shortage management system is poorly understood and not formally taught. When I assess my own knowledge, I was a battalion executive officer routinely advised by technical experts before I fully understood shortage management.

5) Cyclic inventories are not conducted to standard. Most small units do not leverage cyclic inventories to keep their books in order. Every change of command FLIPL I review reinforces this point; I have never seen a statement of charges as part of the investigation that would indicate units are doing the hard work of keeping the paperwork updated as they go.

We should not be surprised by these challenges because as an institution we have not prepared our junior leaders to succeed. Supply discipline is not taught in Basic Officer Leader Courses or any of the Captain’s Career Courses. Except for Soldiers in supply-related specialties, noncommissioned officers (NCOs) do not receive formal education on CSDP or property management beyond common core classes. This shifts the burden of training and educating leaders to the operational force. Many units create leader certification programs to address these shortcomings, but this is not a universal solution to a universal problem.

## How to Help Leaders

So, what should we do to address these challenges? More precisely, what should our junior leaders and Soldiers do? After all, they are still the people who use and care for every piece of Army equipment. A captain taking command can hardly wait for a career course redesign to provide the necessary skills and training for CSDP success. They need immediate help and practical advice.

My recommendation for junior leaders is look beyond the commander’s program and instead focus on the tasks that build and enforce supply discipline. Put simply, focus on what you want people to do. This approach requires the same thinking used to build a train-



A 4th Infantry Division Soldier conducts an inventory of the basic issue items that comes with a tactical vehicle during the pre-inspection checks for the Command Post Exercise on Fort Carson, Colorado, Jun 11, 2020. Account for sub-hand receipted equipment. This includes the items that go with the equipment, like wrenches or a vehicle jack. If something is missing, tell your first line leader. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Daphney Black)

ing crosswalk from individual tasks to mission essential tasks. Individual tasks are the foundation of small-unit collective tasks, which in turn combine to form larger unit tasks. Supply discipline operates in the same way.

Figure 1 outlines a proposed supply discipline crosswalk. It defines tasks for different echelons, and I will refer to this diagram for the remainder of this discussion. Leaders can use this list as a starting point for enforcing supply discipline and add additional tasks to address their specific unit circumstances.

### Soldiers

Every unit task starts with individual tasks. Fortunately, we only need our junior enlisted Soldiers to successfully execute four simple tasks. These four tasks are the foundation of supply discipline, and a unit can only achieve success when Soldiers are trained to execute them to standard.

- Task 1. Account for your organizational clothing and individual equipment (OCIE). Keep track of the individual gear issued to you by the Central Issuing Facility (CIF) and your unit.
- Task 2. Conduct individual field recovery. Inventory your gear when you return from the field. If something is missing, tell your first line leader.
- Task 3. Account for sub-hand receipted equipment. Keep track of other items you are personally signed for from your unit. This includes the items that go with the equipment, like wrenches or a vehicle jack. If something is missing, tell your first line leader.
- Task 4. Identify equipment faults. When something breaks, tell your leaders using the appropriate process so they can help you fix the equipment.

### Squads, Sections and Platoons

This is the first level of collective tasks. While exact unit organizational designs may vary, the fundamental small-unit collective tasks are essentially identical. Deliberate planning through training management is critical to the success of these tasks since many require time and resources to execute.

- Task 1. Conduct squad and platoon inventories. This is a demanding task that requires trained leaders who understand the process. It must be deliberately planned and resourced. Put every inventory on training calendars and then guard them. Commanders at every level must protect this time.
- Task 2. Conduct squad and platoon field recovery

## Supply Discipline Collective Task Crosswalk

Soldiers	Squads, Sections, Platoons	Batteries, Companies, & Troops	Battalions & Brigades
1. Account for OCIE	1. Conduct squad & platoon inventories *	1. Conduct inventories * -Change of command -Cyclic -Sensitive items	1. Manage BN and BDE commander's CSDP program
2. Conduct individual field recovery	2. Conduct squad & platoon field recovery operations *	2. Conduct field recovery operations *	2. Execute FLIPL oversight
3. Account for sub-hand receipted equipment	3. Conduct OCIE inventories *	3. Validate OCIE inventories	3. Supervise SSA ops
4. Identify equipment faults and repair parts required	4. Manage sub-hand receipts	4. Manage shortages	4. Provide oversight of lateral transfers and excess property
	5. Manage shortages	5. Execute supply room ops	5. Execute GPC program and provide oversight
	6. Ensure identified equipment faults captured in GCSS-A	6. Conduct lateral transfers and turn-in excess property *	6. Manage ZPARK
	7. Order repair parts in GCSS-A	7. Initiate FLIPLs	7. Execute semi-annual CSDP inspections *
		8. Manage CLIX orders in GCSS-A	

\*Planned events captured on training schedules

CLIX: Class IX (Repair Parts)  
CSDP: Command Supply Discipline Program  
GCSS-A: Global Command and Support System - Army  
GPC: Government Purchase Card  
FLIPL: Financial Liability Investigation of Property Loss  
OCIE: Organizational Clothing and Individual Equipment  
SSA: Supply Support Activity  
ZPARK: Not an acronym; ZPARK is the GCSS-A tool used by BDEs and Divisions to apply funds to supply requisitions

## Figure 1. Supply Discipline Collective Task Crosswalk

ery operations. Equipment is typically only lost when it is used; most other losses are usually due to theft or the unit simply forgetting where they put a piece of equipment. Deliberate recovery operations after field training will identify most property losses. This is one of the most frequently skipped tasks, usually due to a compressed training timeline. Leaders must build this time into their training plan and then ruthlessly enforce execution to standard.

- Task 3. Conduct OCIE inventories. This ties directly to the first Soldier task. Leaders must set conditions for Soldiers to execute their responsibilities by establishing planned and supervised inventories. This is also fundamental to training future NCOs.
- Task 4. Manage sub-hand receipts. Leaders must ensure Soldiers sign for the property they use. This is a multi-echelon task that must be mastered by every leader standing between a commander (and their property book) and a Soldier using each piece of equipment.
- Task 5. Manage shortages. Once you've identified something is missing, document it appropriately and order it. When ordered equipment arrives, give it to the Soldier or leader responsible for using the item and update the paperwork. While only the supply sergeant can fix the paperwork, leaders must track required changes made to their documents.
- Task 6. Ensure identified equipment faults are captured in the Global Command and Support



Soldiers conduct an equipment layout. A successful Command Supply Discipline Program requires leaders at the small unit level to focus on tasks at echelon as a practical way to implement this commander's program. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Wynn Hoke)

System – Army (GCSS-A). When Soldiers fill out a DA Form 5988E, leaders must ensure the identified faults are entered into the system. This is the only way in which the equipment can receive repair parts and be fixed.

- Task 7. Order repair parts in GCSS-A. Tied closely to Task 6, this includes tracking the part request as it moves through the supply system. Leaders can usually address this task through maintenance meetings when they review equipment status reports.

### Batteries, Companies, and Troops

The supply discipline tasks executed by commanders set the conditions for Soldiers and leaders to execute their required tasks. This includes conducting inventories, field recovery operations and company-level shortage management with the property book officer. Since I have already discussed the subordinate-unit tasks, I will not describe each commander task in detail as I have for Soldiers and their immediate leaders. Instead, I will discuss three important points.

First, every inventory is critical to maintaining supply discipline. While most captains focus on executing deliberate inventories when they assume command, cyclic inventories receive much less attention. Cyclic inventories are an opportunity for commanders to validate that deficiencies identified when they assumed command have been fixed. In fact, cyclic inventories may be their only chance since time constraints reduce opportunities to conduct 100% inventories. By breaking the property

book into smaller chunks, leaders can determine what changed and take the necessary steps for resolution, such as adjusting documents or charging Soldiers for lost property. While distasteful, a statement of charges is one of the most powerful tools leaders possess to enforce supply discipline. Additionally, Army regulations do not require cyclic inventories to be executed monthly, and some units execute them quarterly to conduct fewer inventories but execute them to a high standard. Brigade or division commanders can establish the frequency of inventories as they see fit.

Second, property book management starts at the battery/company/troop level. Keeping the property book straight is a routine task that requires routine attention. This includes lateral transfers, excess turn-in operations and initiating FLIPLs. Shortage management is part of this, and one useful question to routinely ask is “where is my approved shortage annex?” In theory, it should change every time the unit has a shortage or whenever they conduct an inventory. Company-level commanders can never take their eyes of their property books for too long.

Third, executing unit maintenance to standard will greatly assist in supply discipline. Although maintenance discipline is a separate commander’s program, it overlaps in many ways with supply discipline. If nothing else, units with strong maintenance cultures pay close attention to their equipment and will quickly identify deficiencies.

### Battalions and Brigades

Practically speaking, battalion commanders are the



first level of leadership that can rightfully call CSDP a commander's program. Company-level commanders are busy executing tasks, while battalion commanders are setting conditions and providing the oversight needed for successful execution. Battalion commanders have broader authorities, greater experience, and a staff with appropriate expertise. Battalion commanders must leverage their resources to ensure the burden of the commander's program rests with their headquarters so that subordinate units can focus on training their units to lead supply discipline. Brigade and battalion commander responsibilities are nested, although Brigades have the added responsibilities of financial management, through GCSS-A and ZPARK. Battalion and Brigades are also responsible for conducting semi-annual CSDP inspections. One technique is to nest them with command inspections when possible. Brigade and Battalion commanders can greatly assist battery-level commanders by protecting inventories and forcing compliance with recovery standards.

## Systemic Fixes

While Soldiers and their leaders must execute supply discipline in real time, some Army-wide changes could greatly assist their efforts. If everyone has a problem with a system, then the system itself is the problem. Here I offer some recommended changes to Army policy and CSDP implementation to further enhance supply discipline.

My experience suggests most units struggle with managing shortages. Army investments in improving this process will pay significant dividends in terms of time returned to small-unit leaders. This will also give the Army a more accurate picture of how much property is confirmed missing and the true fiscal impact. One challenge is that the current process can drive multiple FLIPLs over many years for the same missing shortages.

A change of command FLIPL will likely include the shortages identified and documented on the previous change of command FLIPL. While the original FLIPL should clean this up in theory, in practice the workload associated with this endeavor exceeds the ability of supply sergeants and often property book officers.

Supply sergeants may order shortages which are later cancelled at any number of levels or received and not issued. Units require a way to electronically code their documents to indicate whether a shortage has been previously validated on an approved shortage annex. Even if the shortage annex is lost (a shockingly common occurrence), the electronic record can serve as a document and reduce repetitive administrative burdens.

The Army could further leverage GCSS-A to ease shortage management by identifying which shortages can be addressed by the supply system. The Bill of Materials (BOM) used as the basis of defining the components of end item should be electronically linked to the supply system so the BOM can update in real-time when a specific LIN becomes terminal or zero-balance with no intention by the Army to restock. This would save supply sergeants from ordering items that will never arrive while ensuring units do not obligate funds (or de-obligate funds across fiscal years) with no meaningful effect on readiness.

Finally, we must formally educate our leaders to lead and execute supply discipline. The problems I describe are in no way unique to the units where I have personally served. The institutional Army must take some of this burden from the operational force. For our most junior leaders, the stakes are high and almost immediate.

## Conclusion

As discussed in the introduction, the Army is remarkably tolerant of failure that generates learning. Because the stakes are high for supply discipline, we should apply the hard-won lessons across the entire force to ensure the young leaders who follow us will not have to learn the same painful lessons. As we review these lessons, we should reflect on how we leverage our incredible corps of NCOs who have long been America's asymmetric advantage. Successful CSDP requires a practical to-do-list sergeants and Soldiers can immediately use since this is where supply discipline occurs. When in doubt, focus leaders on action instead of programs; the programmatic view belongs at the battalion and above. This hands-on approach will drive disciplined adherence to unit standing operating procedures led by our NCOs. ■

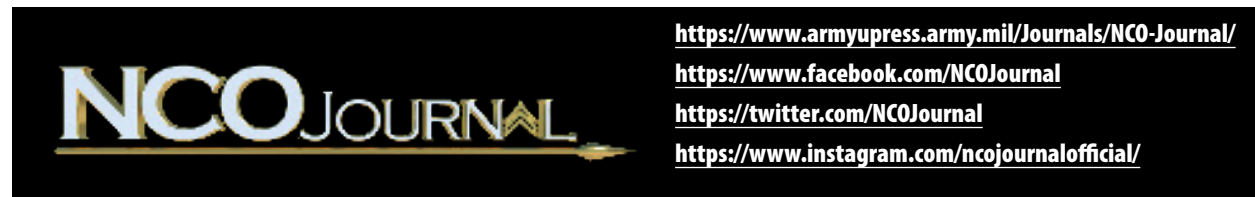
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