



The Optimal Employment of the Forward Support Company in Decisive Action

■ By Lt. Col. Brent Coryell and Capt. Christopher Devenport

Staff Sgt. Michael Hasel, a culinary specialist from F Company, a forward support company with the 145th Brigade Support Battalion, 116th Cavalry Brigade Combat Team, Idaho Army National Guard, inventories equipment with the help of Pfc. Juan Lopez, a motor transport operator, during a night shift work detail at Fort Irwin, California, on Aug. 11, 2015. (Photo by Maj. W. Chris Clyne)



In brigade combat team (BCT) decisive action operations, many forward support companies (FSCs) do not provide maximum operational reach and optimal logistics support because they are not effectively organized across all sustainment echelons. Task organizing the leaders and capabilities of FSCs at the proper echelons fully extends the operational reach of the BCT and reduces immediate resupply operations.

This proactive BCT sustainment begins with a thorough logistics estimate and a logistics task organization that optimally position the brigade support battalion (BSB) and FSC sustainment assets between the supported company, the combat trains, the field trains, and the brigade support area (BSA).

This article reviews the FSC design, provides recommendations regarding effective FSC employment, and highlights FSC challenges faced with mission command, distribution, and maintenance in a decisive action environment based on recent observations by observer-coach trainers (OC/Ts) at the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, California.

The FSC Design

The FSC was designed to be a somewhat flexible and tailorable organization to provide sustainment support where it is needed most—at the front. When maneuver elements move forward and task organize for decisive action, sustainment elements are designed with the mobility and flexibility to continue to provide support. For example, if a cavalry squadron gets a platoon of tanks attached to it, it should get the maintenance, fuel, and distribution assets it needs to support the tanks.

The BSB's six FSCs provide direct support to each of the BCT's maneuver battalions and squadrons, the field artillery battalion, and the

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“In brigade combat team decisive action operations, many forward support companies (FSCs) are not providing maximum operational reach and optimal logistics support because they are not effectively organized across all sustainment echelons. This article presents proven methods for optimally employing FSC assets at different support echelons to create maximum operational reach, flexibility, and logistics synchronization.”

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brigade engineer battalion. Each FSC is organized to support a specific type of battalion or squadron. The FSC provides field feeding, bulk fuel, general supply, ammunition, and field maintenance.

Conceptually, each maneuver battalion can carry a one-day load of basic supplies on its combat systems. The FSC is designed to carry the battalion’s second day of supply, and a third day of supply is maintained by the BSB at the BSA.

The FSCs are the link from the BSB to the maneuver battalions and provide the BCT the most flexible logistics support by using assets at the field trains command post (FTCP) and the combat trains command post (CTCP) to complete missions. Both the FTCP and the CTCP are mobile mission command posts for logistics that execute supply break points to build combat-configured support packages for forward units. The design is sound; the challenge is determining how to best array FSC personnel and assets based on what capabilities are required when and where.

Organizing for Success

As the Army focuses on decisive action training, OC/Ts are observing challenges with optimally employing the FSC. Sustainment often is not synchronized between the support echelons, and battalion distribution plans are inconsistent in terms of logistics capabilities and the skill sets of Soldiers placed at the CTCP and the FTCP.

Sustainment doctrine is intentionally not prescriptive to allow the BCT flexibility in manning and arraying sustainment forces between the FTCP, CTCP, and the company trains. Because there is no specified doctrinal solution, BCT sustainment planners devise numerous concepts of support to employ FSC assets; some work, and some do not. Concepts of support that do not work can cause emergency or immediate and unplanned resupply situations.

Estimating Accurately

By using known requirements, capabilities, and consumption rates for all supply classes, sustainment planners should produce a logistics estimate with a logistics task organization that mitigates shortfalls and backhaul. BCT sustainment planners are generally challenged when conducting this anticipatory logistics analysis because they are not educated on the science of maneuver warfare and armored tactics needed to estimate well. This lack of understanding and poor forecasting drives multiple unplanned resupply operations.

To achieve proactive support, sustainment planners must produce a logistics estimate that considers the distance traveled by the maneuver task force, time needed to travel those distances, and the consumption rates for all supply classes. This logistics estimate will inform the concept of support that will specify the task organization of the FSC assets between the FTCP and the CTCP. Thorough logistics estimates and concepts of support help to optimally emplace FSC assets at these echelons.

The FTCP and the BSA

The FTCP team receives and directs all FSC convoys arriving and departing the BSA and serves as a direct liaison to the BSB support operations officer.

OC/Ts have observed that having the FSC executive officer provide mission command at the FTCP in close proximity to the support operations officer results in successful coordination of emerging requirements. FTCP equipment required in the BSA can be limited to mission command systems, general supply transport, troop transport, and a load handling system or palletize load system to augment the distribution platoon. A gun truck is also needed to assist in the defense the FSC’s assigned sector of the BSA.

OC/Ts have observed that FSC capabilities at the BSA range from

none to the entire FSC. Too little or too much FSC representation presents a challenge. As the size of the BSA becomes unmanageable, support is less responsive.

The FSC does not have its own long-range communications assets outside of Joint Capabilities Release and a very small aperture terminal. Because of this shortfall, many maneuver battalions feel like they have no communication with the FSC and its FTCP operations. Locating the FTCP near the BSB tactical operations center allows for nonsecure internet protocol router network support from the joint network node and the battalion command post. FTCPs should use this asset to maximize the full capability of the very small aperture terminal and the Combat Service Support Automated Information System Interface.

The FSC also does not have the weapons and personnel to secure itself in a static location and provide adequate convoy security. Because of this, OC/Ts recommended that the FTCP co-locate with the BSA in order to benefit from and augment the security of the BSA. The FSC can then use the communications network established by the BSB.

Regarding capabilities, the FSC should place personnel in the FTCP to facilitate class I (subsistence), class III (petroleum, oils, and lubricants), and class V (ammunition) resupply and the flow of class IV (construction and barrier materials), class VIII (medical materiel), and class IX (repair parts). An FSC food operations sergeant, ammunition supply specialist, petroleum supply specialist, and a unit supply specialist at the FTCP can provide the commodity management expertise that the BSB needs.

Additional vehicle operators and supply specialists can assist the distribution platoon in accurately breaking up supplies and building configured loads for forward movement. FSC commodity teams at the FTCP prepare assets requested on the logistics status report. Each

team gathers requested commodities, breaks bulk materiel, and configures loads. These loads are then picked up by the FSC distribution platoon, if supply point distribution is used, or they are delivered to a logistics release point (LRP) by the transportation platoon for units to pick up.

Positioning the right FSC capabilities at the right echelons will limit immediate resupply operations, fully extend the operational reach of the BCT, and provide proactive versus reactive support.

The CTCP

The CTCP is the closest sustainment node to the forward line of troops commanded by the maneuver battalion. It serves as the focal point for all maneuver battalion logistics. Doctrinally, the CTCP operates four to 12 kilometers behind the maneuver task force. Combat trains usually consist of elements of the battalion S-1, S-4, role 1 aid station, the maintenance collection point (MCP), and the FSC distribution platoon.

The CTCP usually stocks emergency food, fuel, and ammunition. It is a good location for the FSC commander to be located because it is closer to the battalion S-3 and executive officer in the battalion tactical operations center and provides flexibility for the three to plan together.

The battalion S-4 or the headquarters and headquarters company commander often serves as the CTCP officer-in-charge, and the maintenance control officer serves as the officer-in-charge of the MCP. The maintenance control sergeant, control technician, platoon leader, and platoon sergeant also operate from the CTCP.

The bulk of the FSC's distribution platoon, maintenance control, field maintenance, field services, and recovery sections reside at the CTCP

for distribution and maintenance support. Consequently, the distribution platoon leader and shop officer should also be at the CTCP. The FSC's distribution platoon located at the CTCP receives battalion configured loads from the FTCP and the BSA and breaks them into company-configured loads that are

pushed forward as logistics packages (LOGPACs).

The maintenance sections in the CTCP provides general support to the battalion at the MCP and reports to the BSB through the Standard Army Maintenance System-Enhanced.

The Company Trains

Forward of the CTCP, in the company trains, field maintenance teams are frequently co-located with supported maneuver companies to quickly regenerate combat power. Each team has a forward repair system, specialized tools, military occupational specialties (MOSs), and recovery assets that are tailored to the type of company it supports.

Mission command usually lies with the senior mechanic who uses Joint Capabilities Release or Joint Capabilities Release-Logistics to communicate with the CTCP about vehicle faults and additional support requirements. Field maintenance teams execute the "fix forward" concept to enable the BCT's success in tactical operations.

Moving toward the forward line of troops with sustainment assets must be rehearsed and well understood by both the FSC elements and the maneuver company commanders. Maneuver first sergeants and com-



Pfc. Edward Gomez, a forward support company distribution platoon driver for the 14th Engineer Battalion, 555th Engineer Brigade, provides vehicle security during night time driver's training at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, on Nov. 27, 2015. The training was part of the platoon's preparation to support the 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team at the National Training Center, at Fort Irwin, California. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Dayan Neely)

pany supply sergeants are critical in synchronizing the movement of sustainment assets and commodities to the warfighter.

Mission Command Challenges

There is often confusion in the delineation of duties between the maneuver battalion S-4 and FSC commander. The maneuver battalion S-4 is the logistics planner for the battalion and responsible for developing the battalion concept of support, which should be nested with the BCT concept of support. The FSC commander executes the missions derived from the concept of support.

Typically, battalions assign a pre-career course first lieutenant as the S-4. By modified table of organization and equipment, it is a combined arms captain position for an

individual who has completed the logistics captain's career course. Often, this is the lieutenant's first staff position, he is inexperienced in military decision-making, and he does not understand the fundamentals of sustainment.

This inexperience drives the maneuver battalion commander directly to the FSC commander who is the senior officer and most experienced logistician in the task force. This marginalizes the effectiveness of the battalion S-4 and creates risk in sustainment execution by shifting staff duties to a company commander. The FSC commander should focus on commanding the FSC and executing the support mission.

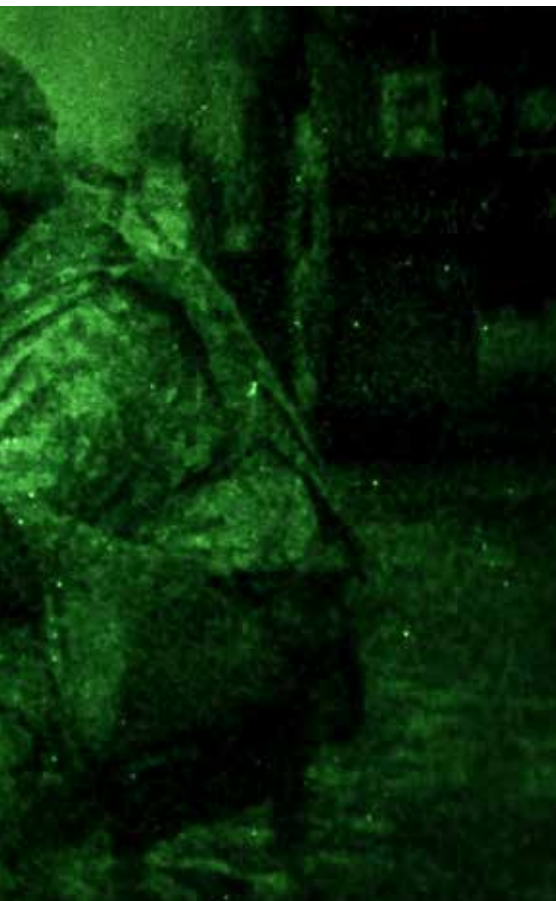
The BSB and maneuver battalion commanders need to ensure the duties of the FSC commander and the

maneuver battalion S-4 are spelled out and functional. Any confusion about who is responsible for what needs to be delineated by the BSB and maneuver battalion commanders.

Distribution Challenges

FSC distribution platoons are often overused, while the transportation platoon from the BSB's distribution company is underused. The FSC distribution platoon regularly covers long distances and delivers multiple LOGPACs daily to support their battalions. They frequently operate between the field trains and combat trains, breaking loads and then pushing supplies forward to the company trains.

Using the BSB transportation platoon to regularly move commodities between the FTCP and CTCP



Setting up the BSB and the FSC for Success

■ By Lt. Col. Brent Coryell and Capt. Christopher Devenport

A good relationship between the brigade support battalion (BSB) and the forward support company (FSC) starts in garrison, and it is difficult. The BSB is assigned subordinate FSCs by its modified table of organization and equipment, but most FSCs in the Army are under the operation control of and are almost entirely integrated into their supported battalions.

There is a tendency for the FSCs to become “distanced” from the BSB, which limits the BSB commander’s influence and undermines his authority as the senior logistician in the brigade combat team (BCT). This is mainly because those within the BCT do not understand the difference between command and support relationships. The BSB commander is the BCT’s senior logistician and is responsible for sustainment planning, coordination, integration, and synchronization for the brigade, regardless of FSC command relationships.

Establishing Terms of Reference

In garrison, the task organization and command relationship of the FSCs require analysis of BCT operations and the consensus of all commanders. With this in mind, the BSB commander should establish a memorandum of agreement that delineates roles and responsibilities and ensure that the agreement is supported by the BCT and the maneuver commanders.

This “terms of reference” document must clearly delineate who is responsible for what while in garrison and in the field. With only a few exceptions, FSCs receive the same support from their supported battalion as the supported battalion’s organic companies.

Talent Management

The BSB commander should have the authority (delegated from the BCT commander) for logistics officer management, while the BSB command sergeant major (CSM) should have the delegated authority for logistics noncommissioned officer (NCO) management.

Talent management and honest, accurate assessments of all subordinate leaders are critical to mission success and support flexibility. Many BSB commanders put their best Logistics Captain’s Career Course graduates in the FSCs. The BSB CSMs do the same with senior NCOs; they accept risk with the internal BSB leader talent because they have more control to mentor less talented leaders.

Talent should be dispersed proportionately between the BSB and the FSCs. The BSB commander should make an effort to professionally develop logistics lieutenants and grow the next generation of logisticians. BSB commanders should rotate logistics lieutenants between supply, maintenance, and transportation jobs with the lieutenant’s final year ending as a company executive officer or in a staff position. A second lieutenant should do a branch-specific job first, if possible, but position openings do not always align with new arrivals.

can help offset this imbalance. The transportation platoon of the BSB’s distribution company can support multiple FSCs and CTCPs through synchronized and rehearsed LRP operations to help balance the use of distribution assets. LRPs are an excellent way to extend operational reach, but they are not often used during NTC rotations.

Swapping modular systems, such as a palletized load system flatracks, load handling system compatible water tank racks, and modular fuel system tanks is also useful. These systems are designed to decrease the time of sustainment assets on station, thus increasing efficiency and extending operational reach. At the NTC, many units do not exchange these systems because they are afraid of losing property accountability or damaging equipment.

The FSCs that position all of their distribution capabilities with the FTCP in the BSA do not have the assets forward in the CTCP to con-

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Forward support company paratroopers, from the 1st Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, conduct recovery operations for a vehicle disabled by a simulated improvised explosive device during a logistics convoy at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, on Aug. 11, 2015. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Jason Hull)

duct LRP operations with the BSB’s transportation platoon. Conversely, if all FSC distribution assets are at the CTCP, it forces the FSC distribution platoon to return to the BSA to get supplies in order to push from the CTCP. An effective solution is meeting in the middle at an LRP. At the LRP, the maneuver company first sergeants and supply sergeants link up with the FSC distribution platoon or the BSB transportation platoon to conduct LOGPAC operations.

Maintenance Challenges

NTC OC/Ts have observed that commanders have low confidence in the technical abilities of FSCs’ forward mechanics. In many cases, FSC mechanics are not fixing forward because they lack the troubleshooting skills to identify faults. The underlying issue is that specialty technicians who reside in the BSB shops do not provide forward support team me-

chanics with the low-density MOS training needed to repair radios, small arms, night-vision devices, and ground support equipment.

The BSB often pulls the forward mechanics in low-density MOSs back to its field maintenance company (FMC) so that they can work under the supervision of the commodity warrant officer technician. In other cases, items are not repaired because the untrained forward FSC mechanics have been given other jobs such as unit armorers or orderly room clerks.

The BSB support operations officer and the maintenance officer, along with the maneuver battalion S-3s and executive officers, could resolve the issue of untrained Soldiers in low-density repair MOSs by publishing a training plan that develops the necessary technical skills to troubleshoot and fix equipment forward. Specialty maintenance technicians

assigned to the FMC should take an active role in training and mentoring Soldiers in low-density maintenance MOSs in order to develop their skills in the FSCs.

Recommendations

BCT sustainment planners must clearly understand requirements derived from effective forecasts and the functions and capabilities of the FSCs in order to develop the battlefield geometry required to maximize the operational reach of the BCT. Optimal FSC asset emplacement in decisive action requires thorough staff analysis, a complete understanding of FSC capabilities, and clearly defined personnel functions to support the tactical operation.

Accurate and continuous logistics running estimates will determine what is needed where and when on the battlefield. With input from

the BSB commander, sustainment planners need to have the flexibility to move and adjust sustainment forces across the CTCP and FTCP, use LRP as required, and enforce the use of modular system exchanges to best support the BCT.

The BCT S-4 should plan the sustainment missions and the FSC commander should execute them. The BCT sustainment planners need to establish the right balance of distribution assets and methods between the FSC distribution platoon and the BSB distribution company's transportation platoon so that one or the other is not being overused or underused.

Specialty maintenance technicians assigned to the FMC should training and mentor low-density maintenance MOSs in order to develop the skills of Soldiers in the FSCs. This will prevent the pooling of mechanics and the evacuation of not-mission-capable equipment to the FMC.

Positioning the right FSC capabilities at the right echelons will limit immediate resupply operations, fully extend the operational reach of the BCT, and provide proactive versus reactive support.

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The goal should be for all logistics lieutenants to have three job assignments during their tenure with the BCT that include both time in the BSB and the FSC. This will make them well-rounded and ultimately better prepared to be multifunctional logistics captains.

Training Together

The BSB should incorporate the FSCs into all battalion-level field training exercises so that the support relationships remain intact. BSBs should establish the brigade support area with its FSCs at least twice a year and practice the complexity of tactical distribution, sustainment synchronization at each echelon, and the science of control by establishing the field trains command post and combat trains command post and defining the skill sets and equipment (to include communications systems) that should reside at each location.

The BSB commander and CSM should establish and validate the sustainment tactical standard operating procedures to cover all sustainment echelons in the BCT. The BSB should provide resourced training packages for all sustainment Soldiers and oversee their professional development by mentoring and training all junior sustainment leaders. The BSB commander and CSM can host a "Sustainment University" that meets monthly and covers sustainment functions like reporting logistics statuses and preparing logistics estimates.

Another training event that works for logistics lieutenants is a logistics lieutenant "stakes" competition. Have logistics sergeants first class grade the lieutenants so that it is a training event for the NCOs as well. Have the lieutenants participate in 10 to 15 graded events such as setting up an OE254 radio antennae, conducting preventive maintenance checks and services on a humvee, and turning on and distributing fuel from a heavy expanded-mobility tactical truck fuel tanker. This competition will test mental toughness, physical fitness, technical and tactical proficiency but most importantly will build camaraderie among the logistics lieutenants and improve their skills in many areas.

Train As You Fight

While in garrison, do not allow FSCs to pick up fuel from main post. Make the distribution company issue it from the motor pool. This is how petroleum supply specialists in the FSCs develop working relationships with their fellow fuel handlers in the BSB.

The BCT should set up all of the very small aperture terminals and conduct tactical file transfer protocol between logistics information systems daily. It is easy to get tied to the Network Enterprise Center, which is not training as we fight.

Have all of the commodity maintenance technicians in the field maintenance company incorporate all of the low-density MOSs into monthly "fenced" MOS training. Training between the BSB and the FSCs is essential and requires coordinated efforts and agreements among commanders.

Build the BSB and FSC relationship in garrison with a memorandum of agreement between commanders that clearly outlines the terms of reference that define who is responsible for what. Then, most importantly, BSB and FSCs must train together.