Forward-Support Company Employment in a Decisive-Action Environment

by LTC C.J. King Jr. and MAJ Chris Dempsey

Forward-support company (FSC) employment is a topic that emerges frequently, particularly as brigades approach combat training center (CTC) rotations and begin to examine how freedom of maneuver and momentum can best be maintained over ground lines of communication (LOC). The 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team's (ABCT) most recent National Training Center (NTC) rotation made one thing crystal clear to both maneuver and logistics commanders: in most environments, under most conditions, support efficiency is maximized when most of the FSC's distribution assets along with a mission-command node (essentially the battalion trains, which many still refer to as the field-trains command post (FTCP)) are co-located in the brigade-support area (BSA) with the brigade-support battalion (BSB).

Problem

While Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 4-90, ***Brigade Support Battalion***, states FSCs are assigned to the BSB and may be attached to or placed under operational control of maneuver units for short durations, many brigade combat teams (BCTs) arrive at NTC with FSCs already attached to or already under opcon of maneuver units well before the rotation. Given this relationship, the BSBs sometimes struggle to communicate with FSCs; are not fully aware of FSC personnel strengths and weaknesses; do not fully understand FSC voice and digital communication challenges; and lack clarity on FSC training proficiency or the FSC's ability to manage maintenance for its supported unit.

Perhaps most importantly, supported units sometimes view FSCs as subordinate units and dictate the FSC's employment, preventing FSC representation in the BSA, regardless of the BSB's concept of support. As a result, communication challenges, situational understanding and support inefficiency often emerge when exposed to the slightest friction. Simple functions such as logistics-status (LOGSTAT) submission and logistics-synchronization (LOGSYNCH) meetings are often seemingly impossible endeavors; management of liquid logistics (fuel and water) across the BCT suffers gaps; and brigades often culminate very early in the fight due to sustainment shortfalls rather than due to gaps in intelligence, communication, fires or any of the other warfighting functions (WfF). In short, brigades are often unable to maximize training on other WfFs simply due to poor logistics planning and the BSB's inability to effectively integrate FSCs into the concept of support.

To be clear, the purpose of this article is not to advocate for a specific command or support relationship between FSCs and maneuver battalions, as ATP 4-90 and Field Manual 6-0, ***Commander and Staff Organization and Operations***, already provide doctrinal guidance to commanders regarding options on this subject. However, regardless of the command or support relationship employed, taking deliberate steps to improve communication and reinforce relationships between the BSB and the FSCs while in garrison is absolutely a prudent and necessary measure that will lead to efficiencies during a CTC rotation or a deployment.

While FSCs were attached to supported battalions in our own brigade well prior to NTC, as our rotation approached, maneuver and logistics commanders and planners analyzed how we could best support a brigade movement-to-contact over extended LOCs. Given that the BSB's distribution company was not robust enough to execute daily tactical convoy operations in support of six independent battalions, it became clear the best way to support most of our battalions would be to retain a portion of each unit's trains in the BSA and push the combat-trains command post (CTCP) along with each battalion's unit maintenance-collection point (UMCP) forward. By doing so, the BSB could employ its distribution company primarily for supply-point distribution, which maximized its capability to receive, store and issue one day's worth of commodities for the BCT. This model provided the BSB with flexibility to conduct up to two independent resupply operations forward daily, either in the form of a standard or emergency-resupply logistics package (LOGPAC) when needed, or in the form of a forward logistics element (FLE).

We saw a marked improvement in direct communication among the FSC commanders, our S-3, support-operations (SPO) officer and the BSB commander as our NTC rotation approached. FSC commanders became increasingly

aware a portion of their trains would be co-located with the BSB. As such, the BSB became much more aware of FSC personnel and equipment limitations; far more informed and able to provide effective advice on logistics matters unique to each supported battalion; and better armed to immediately address leadership and equipment capability gaps within each organization. As a result, our brigade overcame many issues before our NTC rotation. For issues not fully addressed prior to our rotation, we determined exactly where we could assume risk and where we needed to surge logistics effort to ensure the BCT's momentum and its commander's freedom of maneuver during movement-to-contact.

We would be remiss if we did not point out that two battalions retained control of their entire FSC throughout our decisive-action rotation; in one case, a unit reverted to dated doctrine and employed a combined-arms BSA concept with the FTCP, CTCP and UMCP co-located far forward. The other unit simply pulled its trains out of the BSA, pushed them a few kilometers forward on the battlefield and pushed supplies from its trains to its CTCP and companies forward.

While our brigade was ultimately very successful from a logistics perspective, tailoring support to those two units reinforced that the BSB would be extremely challenged to support more than two complete FSCs forward at any given time, given the limitations of its distribution company. Simply put, without control over disposition and employment of the FSCs, the BSB and its distribution company is not designed, manned or equipped to push a brigade's worth of requirements forward of the BSA on a daily basis, particularly when the BCT has enablers (additional consumers) attached. Unfortunately, that is exactly how many units attempt to support brigade requirements. Contrary to popular belief, the BSB does not exist simply to resupply the FSCs; instead, the FSCs and their distribution assets exist to enable the BSB to extend operational reach to support and resupply the brigade.

To be completely transparent, the method our brigade used very successfully during Rotation 15-06 requires FSCs to co-locate a portion of their trains along with a mission-command node at the BSA; draw commodities from the BSA; push supplies forward to logistics release points (LRPs); resupply platforms at the company trains; and return to the BSA to synchronize logistics and set conditions for future requirements. This technique works exceptionally well when the brigade is in defense or operating over short- to medium-range LOCs of 25 kilometers or less. However, it cannot be sustained for long durations over extended LOCs (greater than 25 kilometers). To do so requires the BSA to either jump forward – thereby reducing the ground LOC to something more manageable for the FSC to negotiate – or risk overextension and set conditions for massive echelons-above-brigade (EAB) backhaul by pushing multiple (more than two) convoys from the BSB's distribution company daily.

A way

While we do not have all the answers – and what worked for our brigade may not work in all situations – what follows is our honest assessment of how the BSB's core companies and FSCs might be employed to maximize the sustainment WfF within most BCTs in most situations.

First, the BSB should have a formal, established relationship with the FSCs, regardless if FSCs are attached to maneuver units for short or longer durations. At the command level, this means FSC commanders clearly understand their logistics professional development and guidance for employment comes from the BSB commander, thereby preventing them from seeing their companies as subordinate to the maneuver battalions they support. At the staff level, this means FSCs communicate frequently with the BSB's SPO and actively participate in key planning and coordination meetings, including LOGSYNCH and the brigade maintenance meeting.

Second, in nearly every instance, maneuver units should co-locate a portion of their battalion trains (with a competent leader and most of the FSC's distribution assets) inside the BSA while co-locating their CTCP, UMCP and battalion aid station (BAS) forward in their unit area. Doing so ensures the supported unit has a strong, credible proponent in the BSA who presumably will stop at nothing to make sure his/her unit's needs are met.

This also has the following benefits:

- It eliminates the voice and digital communication issues often present between BSBs and FSCs;
- It enables a true and far more accurate and robust logistics common operating picture;
- It ensures some logistics capability and most of its maintenance and medical assets are located as far forward as possible;

- It ensures the BSB has organic distribution-company assets on hand to receive and temporarily store commodities as EAB LOGPACs arrive at the BSA;
- It increases security and force protection for the FSC; and
- It enables the BSB's distribution company to provide up to two well-planned, well-resourced, independent LOGPACs daily if required. These two elements could be standard LOGPACs to units unable to co-locate their trains in the BSA, emergency resupply operations, FLEs or any combination.

Figure 1. 299th BSB's BSA setup during NTC Rotation 15-06 at Fort Irwin, CA. Depicted in the photo are elements from all four core companies and four of the six FSCs supporting 2nd ABCT, 1st Infantry Division. *(Photo taken by Eagle (Aviation) Team pilot, NTC Operations Group)*

Third, each brigade should plan and execute a logistics leader-development program, followed by a logistics exercise (LOGEX) – ideally conducted on terrain that enables doctrinal distances between support areas – to build foundational logistics competence within the BCT. The former creates shared understanding and expectations on how BCT logistics and medical support will be executed. The latter provides a visual and mental frame of reference for each logistics leader, maintenance manager and medical representative when considering how best and where to best employ LRPs, ambulance exchange points, trains, UMCPs, BASs, the BSA and the like.

In 1st Infantry Division at Fort Riley, our former commanding general, MG Paul Funk, provided guidance, time and space for both events prior to our NTC rotation, and we were able to capitalize on Fort Riley's robust capability to support a BCT-level movement-to-contact operation to demonstrate these support functions while the BCT simultaneously conducted gunnery and company-level live-fire exercises throughout the training area. By positioning elements of 1st Infantry Division's Sustainment Brigade in the logistics support area (LSA) at Smoky Hill Army Airfield near Salina, KS (about 90 kilometers from Fort Riley); deploying 2nd ABCT elements throughout Fort Riley's large northern training area; and positioning the BSA in the southern training area, we were able to extend LOCs to meet or exceed doctrinal distances between support areas and LRPs.

The results were undeniable: leaders, maintenance managers and medical personnel at all levels quickly understood how and when to report LOGSTATs, LOGSYNCH and brigade maintenance meeting requirements. They also knew how to execute LRPs, time- and distance-planning factors, and what various logistics nodes look like and consist of in terms of capability. While time- and resource-intensive, the foundational competence and logistics understanding these two events built across our formation cannot be overstated.

Figure 2. LTC C.J. King, 299th BSB's commander, explains LRP operations to logistics and maintenance representatives from units across Fort Riley. Before its NTC rotation, 2nd ABCT, 1st Infantry Division, executed a robust LOGEX demonstration for leaders, emphasizing the functions, placement and capabilities of critical logistics nodes across the BCT footprint. *(Photo by COL Robert A. Law, 1st Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade commander)*

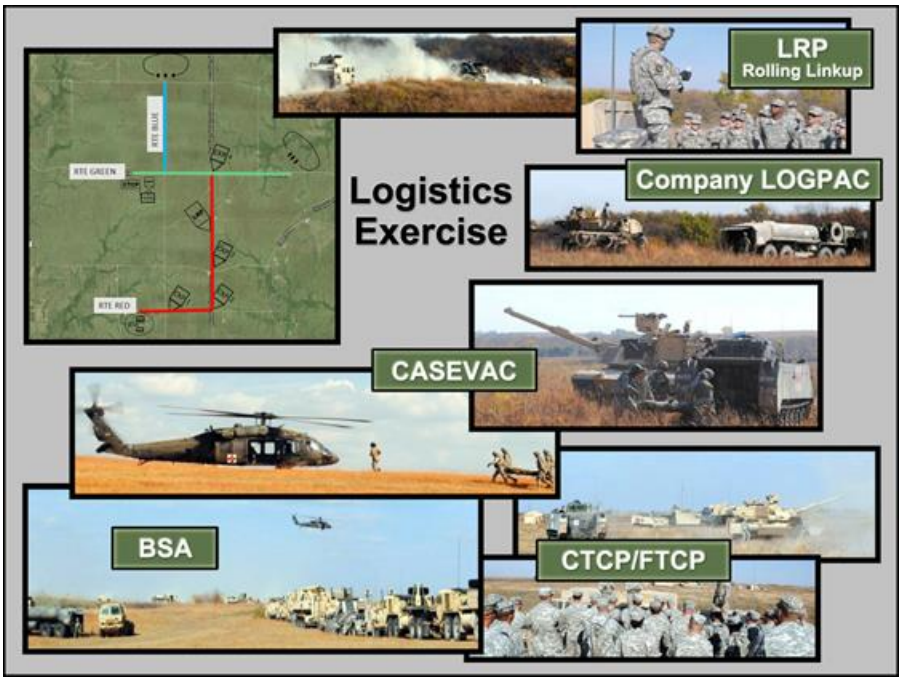

Figure 3. Concept of the LOGEX. While the BCT simultaneously conducted gunnery and company-level live-fire exercises throughout the training area, 1st Infantry Division's Sustainment Brigade positioned elements in the LSA about 90 kilometers from Fort Riley; deployed 2nd ABCT elements throughout Fort Riley's large northern training area; and positioned the BSA in the southern training area, extending LOCs to meet or exceed doctrinal distances between support areas and LRPs.

Fourth, every unit in the BCT must understand the importance of a LOGSTAT. While multi-page, complex LOGSTATs are a method, simple and to-the-point LOGSTATs designed to provide just enough detail to ensure that Class I (food and water), Class IIIB (fuel), Class IIIP (petroleum products), Class IV (barrier material) and Class V (ammunition) requirements are known and understood more than 24 hours out is often far less laborious and far more effective. Also, ensuring the entire BCT understands what *green* (greater than 75 percent), *amber* (50 percent to 75 percent), *red* (25 percent to 50 percent) and *black* (less than 25 percent), or GARB, means is important. The whole BCT also needs to know when cross-leveling within organizations is appropriate rather than calling for an emergency resupply and why that's critical; it minimizes the number of unplanned (emergency) missions that can desynchronize the BCT's logistics plan. Keeping those definitions the same for all classes of supply is highly recommended, and it simplifies reporting as well.

Fifth, units must plan and execute LOGSYNCH meetings with appropriate players over appropriate mediums well before a CTC rotation or combat deployment. While LOGSYNCH players can vary, there is no substitute for "representation by committee" when time and location allow; having the battalion executive officer, logistics officer (S-4) and/or FSC commander represent the supported unit at these meetings virtually ensures all friction points will be identified and deconflicted with the SPO. Also, executing the meeting over multiple mediums – face-to-face, Defense Connect On-line, frequency-modulation radio, Joint Capabilities Release Chat or Secure Voice-Over-Internet Protocol – ensures the unit not only has a primary, alternate, contingency and emergency communication plan, but it also sets conditions for those mediums to be sequentially reverted to and employed should the need arise.

It is important to note that co-locating trains in the BSA enables successful LOGSYNCHs, maintenance meetings and sustainment rehearsals, as there is no substitute for face-to-face communication. Doing so negates any potential voice or digital connectivity challenges so often experienced at the CTCP and tactical-operations center and tactical command posts forward of the BSA. On the flip side, any risk maneuver commanders might assume by placing FSC elements in the BSA is marginal at best, with heavy FSC representation in the CTCP, maneuver commanders retain the ability to communicate quickly and efficiently with supporting elements.

Figure 4. Battalion-level logistics planners and managers from across 2nd ABCT, 1st Infantry Division, conduct a face-to-face LOGSYNCH meeting at NTC. Standing is CPT Sean A. McFarling, 299th BSB's medical planner. At the table, left to right, are CPT Joseph M. Bower, commander, Delta Company, 299th BSB; SFC Michael A. Lewis and CPT Bobby T. Hundemer, both from Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 299th BSB; and SFC Damon K. McCullough, Alpha Company, 299th BSB. *(Photo by SGT Jin Nakamura)*

Finally, when most or all these conditions are met, the BSB should take a far more active role in helping maneuver commanders shape maintenance plans for each supported battalion within the BCT. While BSBs stay busy

managing organizational maintenance for core companies, NTC quickly reinforces that the more combat power generated across the formation, the more combat-effective the BCT is, which results in less Class IX (parts), Class IIIP (petroleum products) and emerging distribution requirements. This ultimately benefits the distribution company and the FSCs. In other words, by taking more ownership in a supported units' maintenance program, the BSB can directly help the BCT while indirectly helping itself simultaneously.

In summary, as logisticians and BCT logistics/maintenance managers, our job is to ensure our concept of support and the sustainment WfF enable the BCT's momentum and freedom of maneuver. Given the complexity of this task and the personnel and equipment required to achieve success, co-locating a portion of each FSCs' trains in the BSA when ground LOC distances are negligible is a critical measure to that end. Also, employing some or all of the recommendations cited in this article may help units who struggle with development and execution of their maintenance plans.

LTC C.J. King commands 299th BSB, which supports 2nd ABCT, 1st Infantry Division. Previous assignments include chief, G-3 Operations Division, Human Resources Command (HRC), Fort Knox, KY; executive officer to HRC's commanding general, Fort Knox; strategic-initiatives officer, Officer Personnel Management System Task Force, HRC, Fort Knox; logistics observer/controller/trainer (Goldminer Team), NTC Operations Group, Fort Irwin, CA; and executive officer, 610th BSB, Fort Riley, KS. LTC King's military schooling includes Intermediate-Level Education (ILE), Joint Course on Logistics, Support Operations Course, Combined Logistics Captain's Career Course, Combined-Arms Services Staff School, Bradley Fighting Vehicle Commander's Course, Infantry Officer Basic Course and Ranger, Air Assault and Airborne schools. He holds a bachelor's of science degree in criminology from the University of Missouri-St. Louis and a master's of science degree in administration from Central Michigan University.

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Acronym Quick-Scan

ABCT – armored brigade combat team
ATP – Army techniques publication
BAS – battalion aid station
BCT – brigade combat team
BSA – brigade-support area
BSB – brigade-support battalion
CTC – combat training center
CTCP – combat-trains command post
EAB – echelons above brigade
FLE – forward logistics element
FSC – forward-support company
FTCP – field-trains command post
GARB – green, amber, red, black
HRC – Human Resources Command
ILE – Intermediate-Level Education
LOC – lines of communication
LOGEX – logistics exercise
LOGPAC – logistics package
LOGSYNCH – logistics synchronization
LOGSTAT – logistics status
LRP – logistics release point

LSA – logistics support area
NTC – National Training Center
SPO – support operations
UMCP – unit maintenance-collection point
WfF – warfighting function