Vital Brigade Combat Team Logistics Readiness Link: Improving Supply-Support-Activity Operations

by LTC Charles L. Montgomery

The supply-support activity (SSA) represents the epicenter of logistics within a brigade combat team (BCT) regardless of tactical-formation composition. The SSA serves as the critical link between tactical- and national-level supply echelons; this link is vital to the overall level of unit readiness. This fact mandates comprehensive system effectiveness, combined with an in-depth knowledge of Global Combat Support System-Army (GCSS-A), to navigate the supply architecture effectively.

The reference to "strategic private" does not solely apply to tactical operations. Strategic privates and specialists at the battalion-clerk level represent the origin of the supply/demand signal for the entire Army. If these Soldiers are not trained properly, the entire supply-chain management system will be adversely affected over time.

This creates enormous ramifications within BCTs, so these Soldiers' level of proficiency truly makes them strategic during the execution of tactical and home-station operations. Organizations must wholeheartedly invest in data-entry clerks to ensure the right supplies are ordered and arrive at the right time to sustain operations. The SSA must operate at the highest level of efficiency from origin (supply clerks at the battalion), to brigade/division ("ZPARK" managers) and, finally, the supply entry/exit point (SSA). The SSA accountable officer (AO) is the linchpin during the execution of this entire operation.

Leaders within a BCT must search for ways to maximize logistics platforms and Soldiers with the explicit intent of improving operations holistically. This article explores lessons-learned as 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team (ABCT), 1st Armored Division, Fort Bliss, TX, developed multiple solutions to increase operational productivity. These solutions include implementing a "Touch It Once Campaign," express-lane creation, daily forward-support-company (FSC) logistics packages (LOGPACs) and overaged, repairable-item listing (ORIL) management.
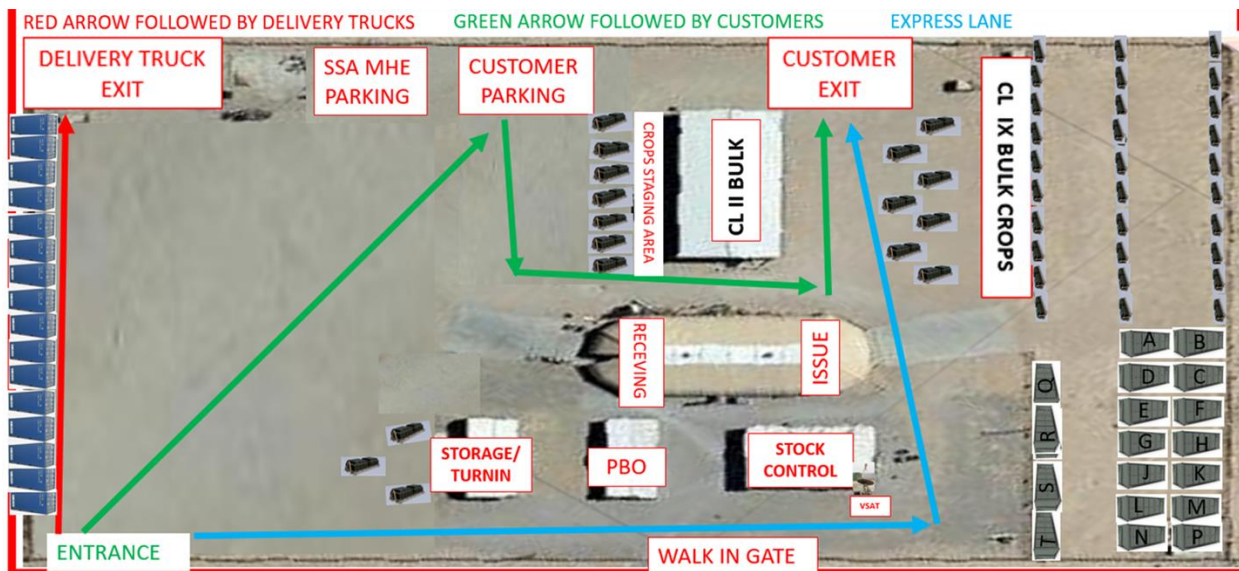

Figure 1. 123rd Brigade Support Battalion's SSA model.

'Touch It Once Campaign'
The "Touch It Once Campaign" focuses on the arrival of supplies at the SSA.

Military-occupation specialty (MOS) 92A, Automated Logistical Specialist, Soldiers process supplies and place them in supported-battalion lanes. MOS 92A Soldiers once touched the supplies a second and third time during the outload process after placing them into specified unit lanes, and this meant the entire process required 2.5

manhours per document number. To alleviate strain on material-handling equipment (MHE) and SSA Soldiers, 3rd ABCT implemented a container roll-on/-off platform (CROP) exchange program that reduced manhours by an aggregated 1.3 hours.

FSCs and the brigade-support battalion (BSB) base companies were assigned specific geographical areas within the SSA. Each company was tasked to place three CROPs at the SSA, which were controlled by the SSA AO for property accountability and management purposes. This system allows SSA personnel to load unit CROPs once with required MHE, increasing the SSA's efficiency and overall unit throughput.

Also, once FSCs transport CROPs back to their area of operations to facilitate supply downloading, ORIL items are backhauled to the SSA for processing on the same CROPs. The BSB distribution company is responsible for transporting ORILs to the logistics-readiness center (LRC) and for bringing empty CROPs back to the SSA to start the cycle over again.

The "Touch It Once Campaign" has increased efficiency tremendously within 3rd ABCT, and it represents a method that can be replicated in field environments to enable Soldiers to train as they will fight.

Express-lane creation

Categorically the SSA has two types of customers: those picking up bulk items from an external area, and those securing smaller Class II and Class IX items from internally controlled areas. Securing those smaller items is based on the premise of potential pilferage.

Third ABCT increased efficiency through the implementation of dedicated battalion pickup timeframes to focus on detailed requirements for all customers, not just combined-arms battalions. Although this increased proficiency by 19 percent overall, especially in the area of time-on-station, there remained an opportunity to improve operations.

To make improvements, "express lanes" were created. Express lanes operate daily with no specific battalion assigned to daily pickup windows. The only management mechanism attached is that units can only use this lane if they have 10 documents or fewer at the SSA.

To use the express lane, units employ four distinct methods of coordination:

- Telephonic;
- Very Small Aperture Terminal (VSAT);
- Home station (HS); and
- Non-classified Internet protocol network (VSAT/HS).

Each coordination measure has an associated tactical version to replicate the same sight picture during the execution of tactical operations in field environments. Once the unit makes contact with the SSA, the 92As pull that specific unit's 10 documents (or fewer) to expedite the process. The creation of this lane allows units to pick up supplies multiple times daily.

The immediate impact of creating this lane was a decrease in customer wait time of 17 percent, which placed supplies in the warfighters' possession faster, contributing to sustained high operational-readiness (OR) levels. Continuous improvements targeted to increase OR, directly contributing to greater lethality, remains the overarching goal of all 3rd ABCT leaders.

Figure 2. CPT Michael Hills (right), commander of FSC J, 4th Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment, 3rd ABCT, uses the express lane to pick up Class II and IX supplies at the 3rd ABCT SSA. *(U.S. Army photo)*

Daily FSC LOGPAC

The ultimate test of any tactical-level organization is to have established systems that transfer with ease between HS and field environments. However, the comfort and convenience of HS operations directly contribute to atrophied field-craft skills that are required to defeat the enemy in severely degraded technological environments. The key mitigation measure is to train at home station as we fight; this type of training will transfer with tremendously less friction.

Third ABCT implemented daily LOGPAC operations from unit motorpool areas to the SSA to replicate tactical operations. This also applied to all four companies within the BSB.

However, the BSB's distribution company (Company A) assumed a dual role. Company A has the responsibility on a rotating schedule to deliver supplies to supported battalions just like the company delivers supplies in field environments.

The implementation of daily unit LOGPACs produced the following effects:

- Significantly decreased CWT;
- Increased FSC ability to execute convoy operations;
- Allowed more LOGPAC repetitions (which increased Soldier's confidence in execution);
- Enhanced logistic-release-point operations through daily coordination between the BSB and FSCs (which directly supports brigade-support-area execution); and
- Established a firm foundation for the execution of field-trains combat post and combat-trains command post operations.

ORIL management

Sustainers and warfighters have an undeniable obligation to increase ORIL management effectiveness, which directly impacts the Army enterprise and sustainable OR from a limited parts-production perspective. To this end, 3rd ABCT implemented a deliberate process targeted at reaching the Army's ORIL turn-in standard of 10 days (per Army Regulation 750-1, *Army Materiel Maintenance Policy*) while holistically improving the efficiency of SSA

operations. It's our responsibility to get recoverable items back into the Army system to ensure the organization as a whole continues to operate at a high level of readiness.

One improvement measure in the process is aggressive attention to the Defense Working Capital Fund (DWCF). The DWCF – established under Title 10 of the U.S. Code, Section 2208 – allows the Army to repair and purchase requirements for all supplies, maintenance, transportation and the other financial needs required to operate a professional organization. The generated ORIL credit helps the DWCF and our organization remain fiscally responsible to American taxpayers.

In addition to the financial revenue generated, critically required parts that may not be on the assembly production line are repositioned into the Army system for refurbishment and returned to the warfighter. A myopic approach to returning repairable parts into the system produces detrimental effects to readiness over time.

Secondly, for a BCT, the return credit is essential to operate an armored formation. To illustrate, an M1 Abrams engine costs $903,498 and the return credit is $361,781, representing a 40-percent return on investment of the entire cost.

The final improvement measure concerned sending our MOS 92A Soldiers directly to maneuver battalions to process and approve recoverable items on-site. From that point, FSCs delivered the items to the SSA, and the transportation platoon delivered the items to the LRC.

This entire process, with support from all leaders within the BCT, has improved ORIL management immensely.

The SSA within any organization represents the nucleus of sustaining and increasing OR to engage and destroy the enemy during a prolonged period of time. This endeavor demands engaged leaders at all echelons to ensure our formations remain committed to the execution and overall effectiveness of sustainment operations. The key is to design and implement systems that transfer without friction to field or austere environments and to replicate the environment where we will engage our enemies.

Low-density training for all MOS 92A Soldiers within the BCT is essential; this investment will mitigate skill atrophy over time. Leader professional development – combined with rotating the brigade maintenance meeting to the SSA footprint to increase the overall importance of the SSA among BCT leadership – represents another good technique to improve operations.

The success or failure of an organization lies within the will of its leaders. Engaged leaders must develop viable solutions within the system of record (GCSS-A) to keep our organization operating at a high level of readiness postured to engage any enemy force within the world.

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Acronym Quick-Scan

ABCT – armored brigade combat team
AO – accountable officer
BCT – brigade combat team
BSB – brigade-support battalion
CROP – container roll-on/-off platform
CWT – customer wait time
DWCF – Defense Working Capital Fund
FSC – forward-support company
GCSS-A – Global Combat Support System-Army

HS – home station
LOGPAC – logistics package
LRC – logistics-readiness center
MHE – material-handling equipment
MOS – military-occupational specialty
OR – operational readiness
ORIL – overaged, repairable-Item listing
SSA – supply-support activity
VSAT – Very Small Aperture Terminal