

Sustainment Synchronization: Key to Supporting Operational Units

An observer-coach/trainer from the Joint Readiness Training Center explains some of the common areas that cause units to fall short in sustaining operational units.

■ By Capt. David A. Wallace

Synchronizing the sustainment of an operational unit is difficult since it encompasses so many different focus areas. Because of the complexity of this subject, sustainment must be looked at holistically and rationally. In order to understand unified action, units must build a common operational picture of what it takes to sustain unified land operations in an austere environment.

As a cavalry squadron forward support company (FSC) senior observer-coach/trainer at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, La., I have observed certain shortfalls in meeting the sustainment requirement. These shortfalls come from a limited understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the key players in sustainment operations, a lack of synchronization between the battalion sustainment cell and the brigade support battalion (BSB) support operations officer (SPO), and a failure to integrate the sustainment cell with current and future operations.

The attitude has been that sustainment is not important—until the supported unit depletes a critical class of supply during a mission. By that time, it is entirely too late to emphasize sustainment.

To better set conditions for success, units need to clearly define roles and responsibilities of the key sustainment players. Each sustainer must understand and perform specific roles and responsibilities in order to ensure the supported battalion is postured for mission success.

Lack of Sustainment Synchronization

During past rotations, my team observed that one key to success for sustainment is often executed incorrectly: the logistics synchronization meeting. Most battalion combat train command posts (CTCPs) do not properly synchronize sustainment operations, current and future operations, and regularly scheduled logistics synchronization meetings.

They often fail to have the appropriate leaders and staff members attend the meetings. Often, organizations conduct logistics synchronization meetings without the battalion executive officer (XO) attending. The XO needs a clear understanding of the importance of the logistics synchronization meeting and what his responsibilities are in sustaining the organization. Without the appropriate leader chairing the meeting, emphasis on accurate and timely reporting is not enforced.

Logistics Synchronization Meeting

The attendees for the logistics synchronization meeting should include the battalion XO, S-4, S-1, supported unit representatives, FSC key leaders, an S-3 representative, and an S-2 representative. The results of the meeting should be a logistics common operational picture and a logistics synchronization matrix. These items should be based on the battalion concept of support and synchronized with the operations plan.

During the meeting, logistics status numbers should be verified, unit representatives should gain a clear understanding of what resupply to

expect and when to expect it, and the FSC should learn exactly what resupply missions will be executed over the next 24 to 72 hours.

Output from the logistics synchronization meeting is meant to provide the battalion S-4 with accurate data to properly analyze the supported unit's logistics requirements. This synchronization allows the development of running estimates and historical data.

Additionally, current operations and future operations can connect with logistics requirements to ensure the battalion is receiving the correct supplies at the right time and at the right locations. However, based on combat training center observations, the battalion S-4 often ends up collecting and analyzing inaccurate data. This usually leads to the FSCs communicating directly with supported elements to consolidate requirements and develop a plan without synchronizing their actions with the battalion.

Experience Is Key for the Battalion S-4

Another friction point that my team observed is some units' inability to adequately and accurately synchronize sustainment efforts because of the battalion S-4's lack of experience. The battalion S-4 billet in a maneuver battalion is often filled by an officer who has not attended a captains career course and has no experience or training in logistics.

In some cases, the battalion S-4 position is used as a temporary or transitional position for a pre- or post-company command maneu-

ver officer, often pending a permanent change of station to another duty assignment. This modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) construct is unfair to an organization; it causes a lack of logistics continuity.

I recommend changing the battalion S-4 billet in the MTOE to a logistician position. This could minimize inaccurate reporting and facilitate proper forecasting for future logistics requirements.

Maneuver battalion S-4s and FSCs often do not effectively gather and communicate requirements to the

ing combat fatigue over the course of a deployment are often common.

Two efforts will significantly assist in improving these conditions. First, co-locating the CTCP and tactical operations center (TOC) will create, to some degree, a synergistic effect that significantly improves information sharing. It will enable cross-talk, situational awareness, and an overall understanding of operations. The improved communications resulting from co-locating the CTCP and TOC will also assist in clearly identifying requirements and the subsequent actions needed to respond to those requirements.

“You will not find it difficult to prove that battles, campaigns, and even wars have been won or lost primarily because of logistics.”

—*Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower*

SPO and BCT S-4. This lack of accurate information gathering, when coupled with poor reporting, reduces productivity. As a result, units often execute unnecessary tactical convoy operations or emergency resupply from the brigade support area, rather than allowing the BSB to use its logistics systems.

Consequently, the FSCs experience an increased workload (delivering supplies forward) with a reduction in the efficiency of the operation. Furthermore, the fatigued Soldiers and their equipment are then exposed to increased, imprudent risks.

Co-locating the CTCP and TOC

With the design of the BSB and FSCs tailored for a distribution-based system, except under specific types of operations (such as forcible entry operations) or geographic conditions, performing supply point operations adds unnecessary and increased requirements for the FSC. In a theater of operations like Iraq or Afghanistan, especially when geographic distances are significant, increased exposure to risk and hasten-

Second, the battalion S-4 and the FSC commander must capture requirements on a designated information system, such as the Battle Command Sustainment Support System, and describe the context for future requirements to the BSB SPO and BCT S-4. This way, the nature and timing of the resupply mission are clearly understood. The result will be a more efficient operation where the workload is properly distributed and the delivery of supplies and personnel are synchronized with battlefield operations.

Operations Center Integration

Traditionally, the CTCP elements (S-1, S-4, and the medical officer) and the S-3 work in distinct, compartmentalized areas, which results in a mutual lack of situational awareness. As a result, operations suffer and typically force FSCs to be reactive rather than predictive when providing critical and synchronized logistics support to units.

Effective battalion operations require sustainment operations to work together with ongoing and future maneuver operations. A simple solu-

tion is to place an S-4 noncommissioned officer (NCO), an S-1 NCO, and a medical NCO in a hybrid administrative and logistics operations center cell in the TOC. This cell can then better understand current and future operations, evaluate the impact of logistics on the operation, and provide critical and timely feedback to the concept of operations.

Having an administrative and logistics operations center cell in the TOC improves efficiency in communicating with FSCs in order to synchronize logistics. It also ensures that the S-3 recognizes, plans for, monitors, and responds to ongoing logistics missions and calculates their effect on operations.

Sustaining the warfighter is a difficult task to synchronize. Units may find it necessary to assess how well they do a few things in terms of sustainment.

First, does the unit clearly define the roles and responsibilities for the key players in sustainment operations? Second, is there synchronization between the battalion S-4 and the FSC commander? Finally, is the reporting to the BCT S-4 and BSB SPO accurate?

This last question is probably the most critical piece to the sustainment puzzle. All these areas of sustainment operations will not be complete without being nested within a common operational picture on a continuous basis. Battalion operations require integration of sustainment operations with ongoing and future maneuver operations.

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