

Validating the Operations Officer in the BSB

The 601st Aviation Support Battalion used troop reductions in Afghanistan as an opportunity to validate a concept proposed in an *Army Sustainment* article.

■ By 1st Lt. Joshua R. Scott

While deployed to Operation Enduring Freedom, the 601st Aviation Support Battalion (ASB), 1st Combat Aviation Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, Task Force Guardian, faced a problem that provided the opportunity to validate recommendations made in the article “The Operations Officer in the BSB [brigade support battalion],” which was published in the March–April 2013 issue of *Army Sustainment*.

The Premise

In “The Operations Officer in the BSB,” Lt. Col. Michael McCulley, Maj. Will Arnold, and Maj. Tony Stoeger explain two operational struggles that BSBs typically face at the National Training Center. These issues stem from the BSB modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE), which authorizes a major as the support operations officer (SPO) and a captain as the battalion S-3.

The first problem is that the SPO and S-3 sections typically establish separate common operational pictures (COPs), forcing the battalion commander to draw information from two different sources in order to build situational understanding. The second issue is that the BSB S-3 could be the rater of two other captains, with all three being in the same year group.

McCulley, Arnold, and Stoeger recommend that by “combining the two sections into one operations section, the commander could cre-

ate a one-stop COP and achieve greater synergy in mission command. By reorganizing the BSB operations under one section with one major in charge, ... the BSB can achieve this unity of effort.” (See figure 1.)

Validating the Idea

Theaterwide troop reductions forced the 601st ASB to make tough decisions on how to meet manning requirements in the theater of operations. Each section in the ASB redeployed Soldiers to meet requirements while trying to maintain the battalion’s support capability.

Companies, platoons, and staff sections were combined as the task organization was restructured. By the end of the reductions, over 40 percent of the battalion’s personnel redeployed to home station and were reassigned to the rear detachment.

In order to maintain control of such a large formation, the ASB S-3 redeployed to assume command of the rear detachment and the SPO assumed responsibility of both the SPO section and the S-3 section. This position, referred to as the “operations officer,” was created to provide synchronous oversight of both the S-3 and SPO sections.

With ad hoc restructuring, the operations officer empowered the deputy SPO to make decisions in his absence, granting him a large amount of autonomy. This trusting relationship allowed support operations to continue without slowing in the absence of that section’s pri-

mary officer.

Overseeing the SPO section is a significant responsibility and generally requires substantial logistics experience, which poses a challenge for many organizations. One asset unique to the ASB that made this structure possible is the operations sergeant major.

Because of its immense geographical footprint and technical expertise required for aviation support operations, the ASB is the only type of sustainment support battalion that is authorized a sergeant major. The sergeant major’s experience, knowledge, and leadership were crucial to the smooth operation of the SPO section during the restructuring.

In overseeing both the S-3 section and the SPO section, the operations officer was able to stay ahead of the battalion commander on brigade-level support issues. This, in turn, allowed him to direct the S-3 section to address issues before being told to do so. This foresight streamlined the entire brigade support process and had a huge impact on the ASB’s efficiency.

The other benefit was that as sustainment issues were called in to the tactical operations center, the operations officer addressed concerns on the spot or directed the issue to the SPO section without working through an intermediary. This process prevented the confusion that arises when commanders outside the sustainment battalion are unsure of which section is

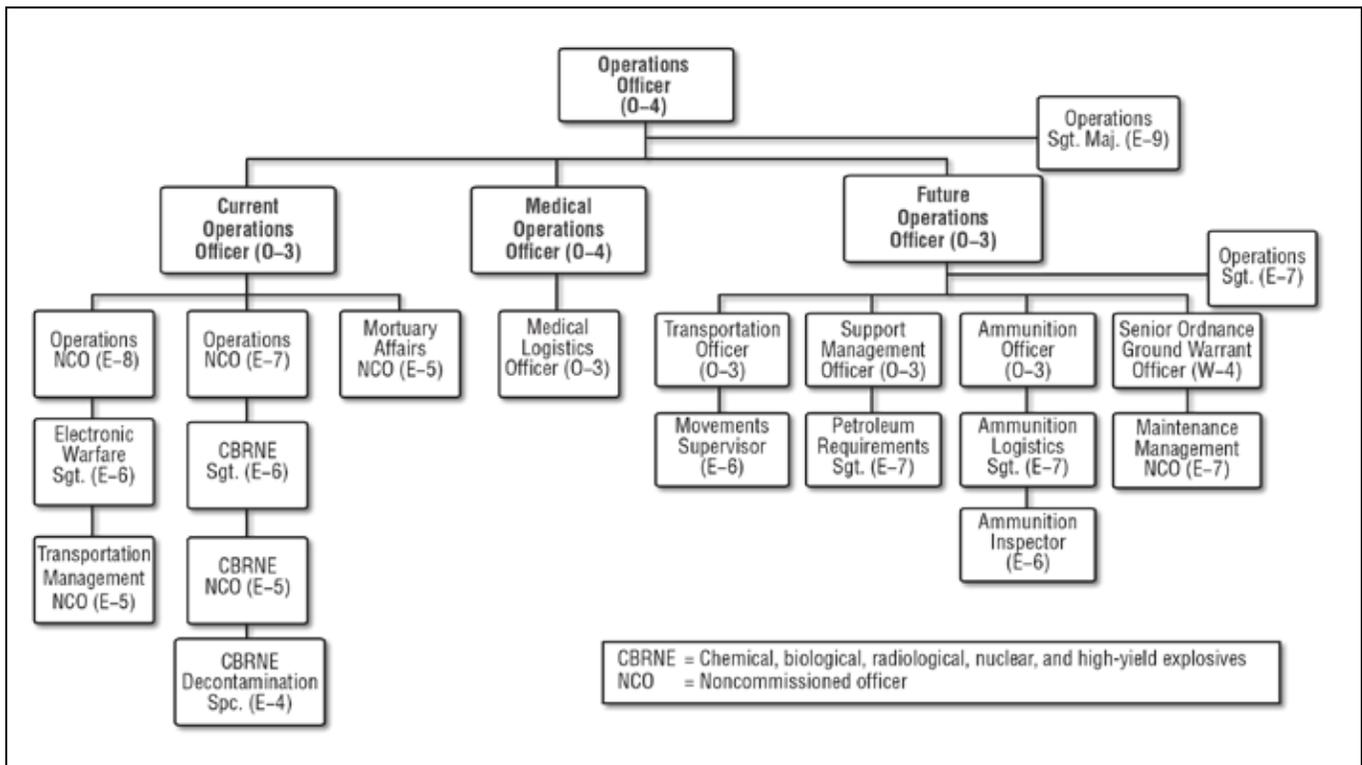


Figure 1. This chart depicts the combined brigade support battalion S-3 and support operations section recommended by Lt. Col. Michael McCulley, Maj. Will Arnold, and Maj. Tony Stoeger in "The Operations Officer in the BSB," published in the March–April 2013 issue of Army Sustainment.

better suited to support them on a given issue. Having one point of contact also prevented the S-3 and SPO sections from being unaware that they were both working the same issue.

The operations officer's ability to manage both sections created a synergy that lasted throughout the deployment and provided a model that the battalion plans to use in garrison.

Recommendations

Since the operations officer of the proposed combined sections would be responsible for typical battalion operations along with all brigade-level sustainment, the volume of information directed toward that officer could be overwhelming.

The operations officer must be able to multitask and must be comfortable delegating responsibilities to both sections. This position should be given only to the most capable officers.

Both the deputy SPO and the S-3 operations officer should be post-command captains since they will be expected to operate independently and exercise sound judgment.

The operations sergeant major is critical to the SPO section and should be authorized by MTOE for all BSBs. Additionally, depending on existing configurations, it may prove difficult to create a footprint that houses both sections. While not essential to the success of the organization, co-locating the sections would improve the synchronization of the COP.

Ultimately, the battalion found that the proposed restructuring of the BSB was an improvement over the current MTOE. Having a single person in charge of both sections established a more synchronous COP and streamlined planning efforts between the S-3 and SPO sections.

Previously, line commanders have had trouble discerning whether their issues were best addressed by the SPO or the ASB S-3 section. Often this caused both sections to begin planning support or to spend time determining which section was best suited to address the problem.

With a single point of contact for both organizations, issues can be worked simultaneously and responsibility can be clearly delineated. Overall the new organization provides a more streamlined and effective method of responding to sustainment issues.

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