

Revitalizing the Field Trains Concept

Some changes to the field trains concept may help ease challenges created by personnel and budget shortfalls.

■ By Capt. Lehman F. Smith III

The current field trains concept leaves much room for improvement, especially considering the tendency for company trains to fail to report properly, placing forward support companies (FSCs) in a reactionary mode.

Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 3-90.5, Combined Arms Battalion, defines a train as “a unit grouping of personnel, vehicles, and equipment to provide sustainment. It is the basic sustainment tactical organization.” The ATP goes on to describe the different types (or levels) of trains: field trains, combat trains, and company trains.

In most cases, field trains reside in the brigade support area and include the assets that are not located with the combat trains. Field trains directly coordinate between the maneuver battalion and the brigade support battalion. Combat trains, also battalion-level functions, are closer to the fight and usually consist of the unit maintenance collection point, the battalion aid station, and emergency resupply trucks (for fuel and ammunition).

The ATP explains, “Company trains provide sustainment for a company during combat operations.” This organization typically comprises the first sergeant, medical evacuation team, supply sergeant, and the armorer.

Current Doctrine

The field trains command post (FTCP) is often based on a linear battlefield and depends on mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops, support available, time available, and civil considerations.

The headquarters and headquarters company commander is placed in charge of either the FTCP or the com-

bat trains command post (CTCP) and has the responsibility of manning and organizing the work space and layout of the command post’s related trains for mission command and security. The company commander is supported by available headquarters staff for personnel support and other administrative roles.

The location of the FTCP is either within the brigade support area (BSA), where it is co-located with the brigade support battalion (BSB) for security, or outside of the BSA at a location determined by the maneuver commander who has operational control of the FSC.

It is common to co-locate the FSC and the FTCP within the BSA because of manpower issues or the inability of the FSC to protect itself. Fiscal year 2016 personnel changes to FSC modified tables of organization and equipment have significantly increased situations like this.

What Experience Teaches Us

While I was an FSC commander for a cavalry reconnaissance squadron, my company and FTCP were located within the BSA during most decisive action field training exercises. They were accompanied by maneuver supply sergeants and a Soldier from the squadron S-1 section because of the FSC’s inability to provide adequate security.

The S-1 representative was primarily responsible for tracking personnel going in and out of the theater, assisting with the flow of casualties to and from the BSA, and tracking and reporting personnel statuses. The maneuver supply representative (usually the supply sergeant) was there to provide accurate

head counts for meals and to jump in on tactical convoy operations to provide forward-requested supplies.

The CTCP was generally located five to six kilometers in front of the field trains. It was home to the maneuver S-4 and other battalion staff along with the FSC first sergeant or executive officer, who supervised sustainment operations from the FTCP to the company trains.

During my time as the FSC commander, I saw the benefits of emplacing with the CTCP emergency class III (petroleum, oils, and lubricants) with a heavy expanded-mobility tactical truck fuel tanker and class V (ammunition) with a load-handling system or on pallets. These supplies fostered freedom of maneuver during decisive operations.

However, by emplacing this emergency stock, we often encountered the issues of a lack of supervision and misuse of the supply. Maneuver elements were more likely to use the emergency supply as the primary resupply method rather than requesting and waiting for resupply through traditional methods.

Changing Combat Trains

Because the fiscal year 2016 changes to modified tables of organization and equipment reduced the number of personnel in the FSC’s distribution section, a more efficient way of executing the field trains concept must be considered.

Using a co-location approach within the BSA, units can eliminate the FTCP and create tactical sustainment nodes (TSNs) for each maneuver battalion or squadron. (See figure 1 on page 49.) The TSN would consist of the FSC executive officer or commander and a sustainer (staff sergeant

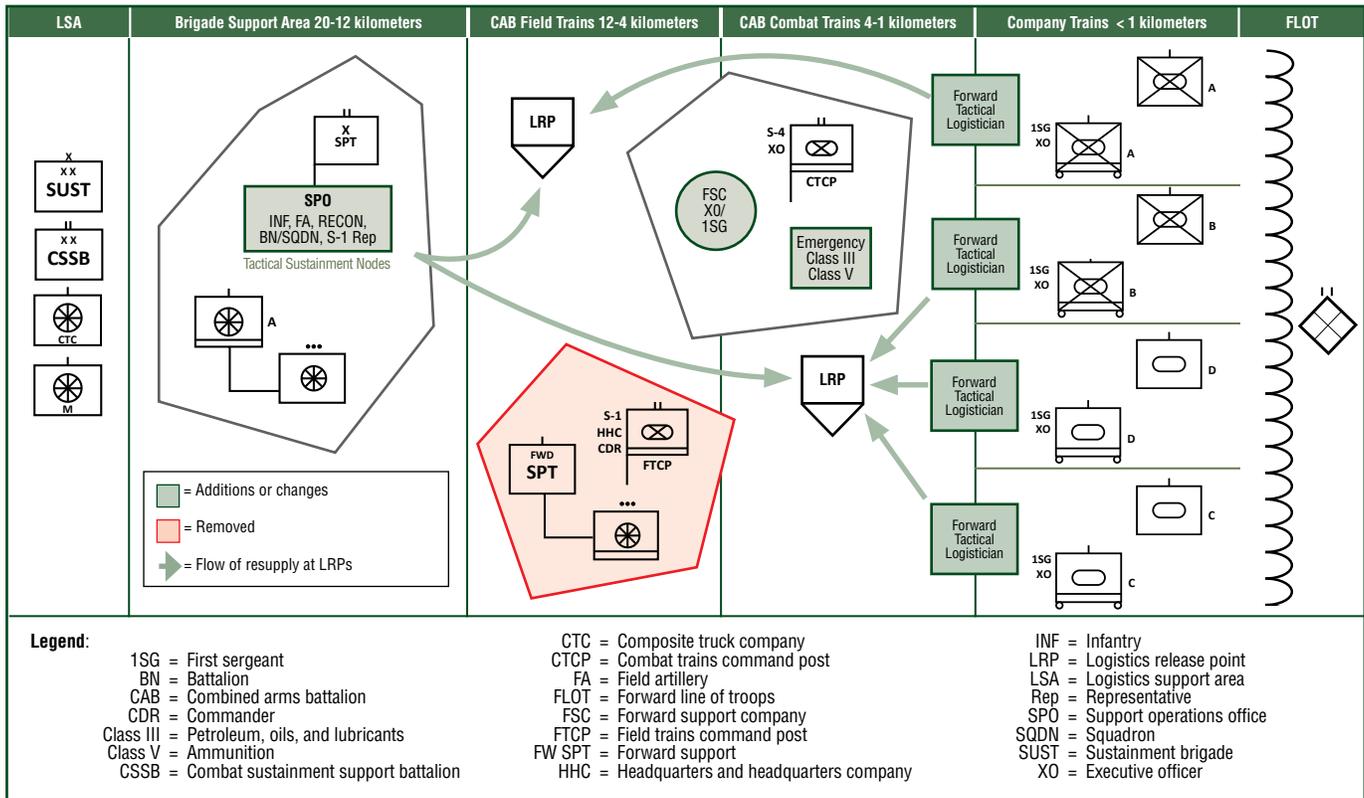


Figure 1. A depiction of the field trains concept proposed by the author to mitigate personnel and security shortfalls in the forward support companies.

or above) who is trained in logistics applications and systems.

The TSN noncommissioned officer would have a support relationship with the support operations officer (SPO). The maneuver commander would retain operational control of the FSC and TSN, but this command relationship would provide the SPO with general oversight for sustainment requirements. The SPO would also be able to shore up connectivity issues faced by standalone FSCs.

The SPO could easily and rapidly communicate with all TSN representatives from infantry, artillery, engineer, and reconnaissance units to accurately manage consumption rate estimates and provide the proper amounts of supplies.

To keep sustainers proficient in the science of logistics, TSNs should plan for consumption rates using the Operational Logistics Planner 8.0 and Student Text 101-6, Combat Service Support Battle Book, or other related sustainment publications found on ei-

ther the Army Publishing Directorate website (<http://armypubs.army.mil>) or the Quartermaster Corps website (<https://www.quartermaster.army.mil>).

Forward Tactical Logisticians

A forward tactical logistician (FTL) in the company trains should assume the first sergeant's role to drive accurate reporting of resupply requests. At the company-trains level, a sustainer in the rank of staff sergeant or above should manage the logistics requirements of the maneuver unit.

FTL training should include consumption-rate planning and the use of data transfer equipment. Additionally, the FTL should be equipped with a system capable of interfacing with a global network to submit sustainment requests using a developed logistics 10-line report.

Still, the question remains of how the Army could mitigate inaccurate information received from the company trains to accurately reflect consumption rates. This responsibility

would fall on the FTLs.

The FTL in a field environment with an electronic data transfer system would be able to forward a 10-line logistics report, calculate requirements, and forward real-time sustainment requirements to the SPO, TSNs, and other need-to-know staff as directed by the commander.

Following these recommendations would eliminate unnecessary, time-consuming convoys to logistics release points. It would provide genuinely necessary supplies by allowing the FSC to plan for real-time sustainment requirements. This ultimately fosters faster response and delivery times throughout the resupply process.

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