



Soldiers with the 1st Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment, 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, conduct a sustainment rehearsal in preparation for Decisive Action Rotation 15-02 at Fort Irwin, Calif., on Nov. 8, 2014. (Photo by Spc. Ashley Marble)

Logistics, Maneuver Commanders, and the Customer Experience

Focusing on the customer experience helped a forward support company to provide responsive support to maneuver units.

■ By Chase Wilson

What can the Army logistics community learn about customer satisfaction from the private sector? Logistics has to be more than just the right product at the right place at the right time. If forward support companies (FSCs) want to excel and take support to the next level, they must be truly customer-focused.

In a combined arms battalion, FSCs can achieve optimal results by focusing on the maneuver company commander as the customer. Service can be elevated and relationships and trust can be improved by filtering everything the FSC does through the context of the maneuver company commander's experience. This will lead to a

more adaptable, aligned, and lethal fighting unit.

The 64th Brigade Support Battalion's H Company, an FSC supporting the 1st Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment (1-66th AR), 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, focused on customer service while delivering supplies to supported units. The FSC

delivered supply classes I (subsistence), III (petroleum, oils, and lubricants), and V (ammunition) to forward fighting units during field training exercises, during a rotation at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, and while deployed to Kuwait in support of Operation Spartan Shield.

Class III

Distribution platoon leaders noticed early in 1-66th AR's training cycle that each supported maneuver company had different requests and requirements. Rath-

er than push back these requests and force companies into a specific mold, the FSC looked for ways to accommodate the commanders and their companies. This attitude, combined with a commitment to responsiveness, led to more trusting relationships between the FSC and the maneuver companies.

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Class V

Ammunition delivery during gunneries and situational training exercises were other opportunities

maintaining flexible and remembering that the mission was to enable and reinforce the effectiveness of the maneuver commander and his team. Did this flexibility require extra effort for some of the petroleum supply Soldiers? Absolutely, but it also enhanced the commander's experience when interacting with logistics support elements.

Class I

Similar flexibility was used for the distribution of rations. Oftentimes extra food was prepared by the culinary staff in an effort to better support fighting forces that were not co-located. For example, mermite containers were sent out in the evenings to the combat trains command post, the tactical operations center, the tactical command post, and to the scouts, mortar-men, and medics.

This flexed the capabilities for distribution, but it also had far-reaching effects by demonstrating to the battalion the lengths the FSC was willing to go to provide support. In return, the supported units worked hard to stick to the FSC's timelines so that it could provide effective sustainment across the battalion.

The private sector has raised the stakes and set the bar higher than ever before when it comes to customer experience. Soldiers and commanders have come to expect more from the civilian companies that they do business with, and the Army logistics community would be wise to adopt this same customer-focused mindset.

By being flexible and focused on the experience of customers (the company commanders), sustainers can improve service, strengthen relationships, and better support maneuver units. At the end of the day, the FSC's job is to unequivocally support the warfighter.

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For example, the two infantry companies in the battalion had very different refueling requirements than the two armor companies. Depending on their mission requirements and their tactical positioning, the infantry companies preferred a service station method while the armor companies preferred to use a tailgate method.

The tailgate method allowed fuel trucks to move to tanks near the defensive perimeter. This proved beneficial for the armor companies because tanks, once set in place, are less maneuverable than infantry fighting vehicles.

What was important was re-

to demonstrate the FSC's commitment to the customer experience. There were two methods for off-loading and distributing ammunition to the maneuver companies, depending on the size of the ammunition being delivered, the location, and the time allotted.

Armor companies preferred to drive their tanks up to the supply trailer and unload the high-explosive anti-tank warheads and armor-piercing, fin-stabilized, discarding sabot rounds directly from the trailer into their fighting platforms. The infantry companies preferred that a supply trailer be dropped off in their tactical assembly area so that they could distribute their own rounds to their vehicles. Sometimes a combination of both methods was used.

Explicit instructions were always attached for how dunnage should be prepared for turn-in to the FSC. This streamlined the turn-in process and helped to ensure