

# How Modularity Changed Key Developmental Assignments for Field-Grade Sustainers

A support operations officer position was once the preferred assignment for sustainer professional development, but modularity has changed the role of the brigade S-4, making it the more suitable slot for growth.

■ By Lt. Col. Tacildayus Andrews

Much has changed in the way the Army sustains its tactical brigades. In 2005, the Army transformation plan pushed the future force design ahead of schedule to respond to Army Force Generation requirements. In the process, it created capability-based units that are independent, scalable, interchangeable, and quickly deployable.

These new formations decentralized command and control relationships, incorporated direct reporting to a four-star headquarters, and severed the ties to habitual “parent” division headquarters, drastically changing how units received sustainment support.

In the Army of Excellence and Force XXI designs, a division had direct support from its division support command and, in turn, the command’s forward support battalion was aligned with a specific brigade. In the forward support battalion, the commander was responsible for the sustainment of that brigade, and routine plans and oversight were conducted by the support operations officer (SPO). With a 15-man section, the SPO was clearly the heartbeat of the organization and, therefore, the key developmental assignment for field-grade sustainers.

In a modular formation, however, many of the critical duties and responsibilities that were inherent in

the SPO section were pushed up to the brigade logistics support team (BLST) chief and down to the forward support companies (FSCs). Under this construct, the brigade S-4 has become a bridge, performing a wide array of tasks that better prepare field-grade officers to operate at the operational and strategic levels.

The purpose of this article is twofold. The first is to assure field-grade sustainers that serving as the brigade S-4 is not a “soft” key developmental assignment but is, in fact, the right job to prepare them to be operational and strategic sustainers. The second is to highlight to senior leaders the significantly increased level of responsibility and job complexity that now falls on brigade S-4s.

The expanded portfolio of the brigade S-4 requires the officer to function completely at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels. The position is arguably a better training ground for sustainers than an assignment as the brigade combat team (BCT) SPO.

## The BLST

With the reach-back support of the Army Sustainment Command and Army Materiel Command, the BLST is critical to maintaining BCT readiness. Depending on the type of BCT, the direct support BLST typically consists of a team of eight to

10 personnel who are always ready to accomplish the following:

- Provide support and expertise for the technical logistics assistance program.
- Coordinate acquisition, logistics, and technology assistance.
- Provide technical support reach-back capability from the BCT to the appropriate Army Materiel Command agency.

In essence, the BLST serves as the go-to subject matter expert for the SPO section, filling the technical capability gap that was resident in the SPO’s duties of “chasing parts” and communicating with item managers and the division materiel management cell.

## Forward Support Company

Unlike the headquarters or the A company that operated directly under the control of the legacy forward support battalion, the forward support companies (FSCs) in the brigade support battalion (BSB) are placed in a command or support relationship with their supported combat arms battalions.

Except for professional development, FSC Soldiers rarely return to the BSB. The FSC’s approximately 140 sustainers and maintainers carrying the maneuver battalion’s

second day of supply, and possibly taking up real estate on the maneuver battalion's perimeter, ensure the battalion can execute its mission unhindered by logistics shortfalls. This company could be independent of the BSB since it may be resupplied by a combat service support battalion within the sustainment brigade that directly supports the supported division.

### The Brigade S-4

To sustain any unit and allow the maneuver commander the flexibility to conduct unified land operations, all sustainers at every level need to coordinate, collaborate, and work together. When sustainment formations were modularized, the brigade S-4's scope of responsibility increased dramatically, supplanting the BCT SPO as the brigade's principal

logistics integrator. (See figure 1.)

Just as the BLST assumed many of the SPO's traditional functions, so did the brigade S-4. The S-4 became the voice of the BCT with access to tactical, operational, and strategic enablers across the Army and in some cases the Department of Defense.

With a staff of nine, minus the surgeon cell, the brigade S-4's roles

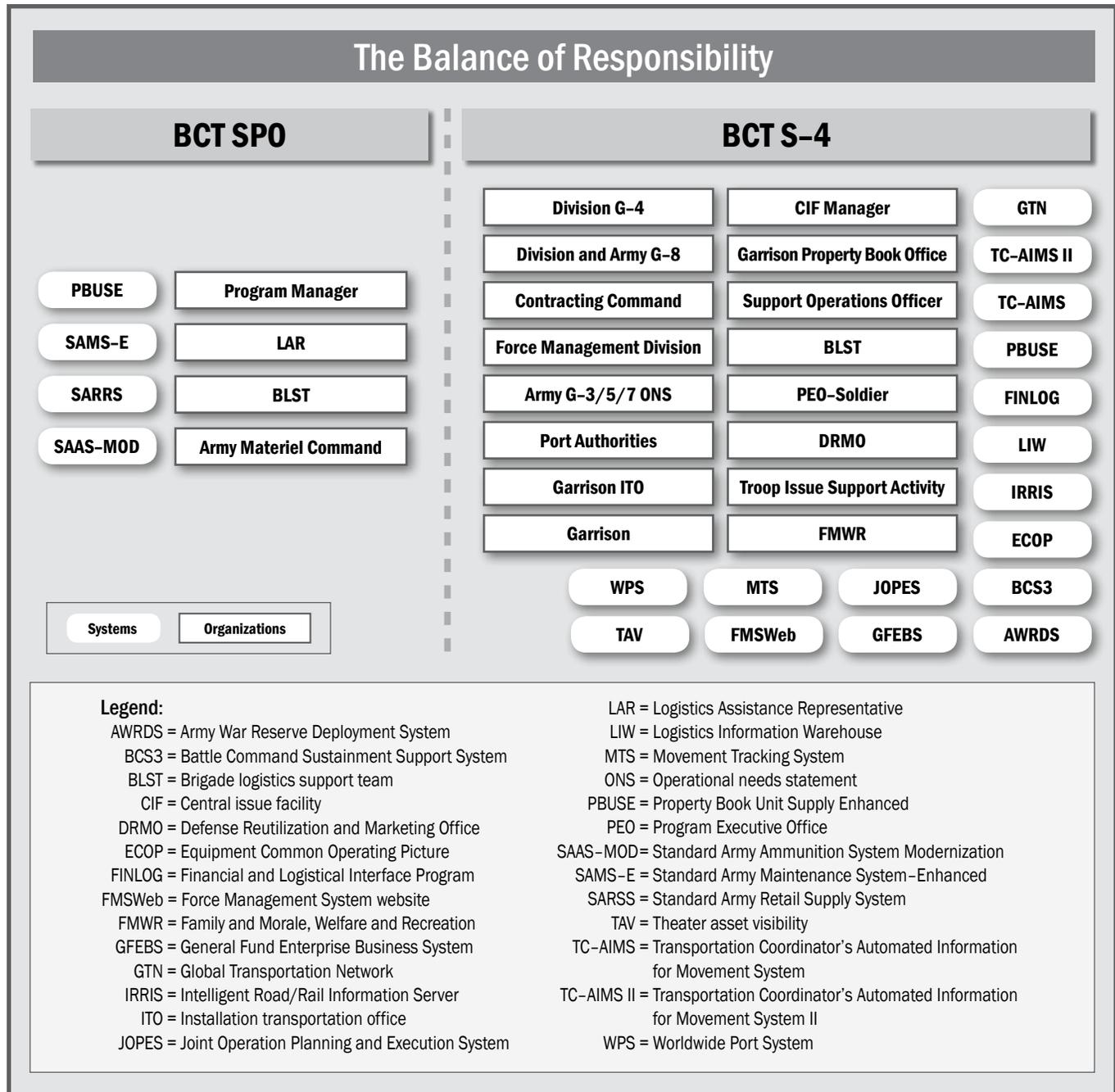


Figure 1. The balance of responsibility between the brigade combat team (BCT) support operations officer (SPO) and BCT S-4.

and responsibilities are numerous and widely varied: running the garrison dining facility, coordinating with Army-level staff for new equipment fielding, managing the Army G-8 automatic reset induction turn-in program, coordinating equipment reset, initiating contract management, and ensuring property and financial accountability.

These responsibilities and tasks are key Army Force Generation milestones. The brigade S-4's direct oversight of these sensitive and critical tasks better prepares field-grade sustainers to easily operate at the operational and strategic levels.

Leaders are creatures of habit, and it may be difficult for them to abandon their old ways and mindsets. However, lessons learned from the past 12 years of persistent conflict require a change in the culture sur-

rounding key developmental assignments for sustainment operations. If leaders change their thinking, it will filter down and throughout the Army.

The way sustainers support the battlefield has changed because of modularity, and the brigade S-4 is the synergistic bridge in this process. The intent to push warfighting functions down to the brigade to make the organization more independent, flexible, and versatile has placed the onus of external support and coordination typically provided by a higher command on the brigade S-4.

The SPO's mission is still critical to the success of the maneuver community, but the position is now less important than the brigade S-4 because of the duties and responsibilities that have been pushed up to the BLST chief and down to the FSCs. Given the weight of many tasks and

responsibilities that are valuable for professional development at the operational and strategic levels, the brigade S-4 position is now the key developmental position for field-grade sustainers.

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