

Will the Real Logistics Integrator Please Stand Up?

Reflections for the Brigade XO

by Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey S. Wilson and Major Michael W. Snow

The brigade executive officer is the most overworked and underappreciated officer in the brigade. No other job in the brigade requires the level of interpersonal communication ability, conflict resolution skill, resource management talent, and leadership via personality force as that of the brigade executive officer. Because he is responsible and accountable for so much and has absolutely nothing in the way of institutional infrastructure to support him, the key to the brigade executive officer's success is the initiation, development, and maintenance of an interactive and participatory staff-working environment that includes both coordinating staff group and special staff group officers.

The executive officer must understand and appreciate the contributions of the nonmaneuver battlefield operating systems (BOS) to the brigade's success, and possess the intellectual agility to leverage their capabilities to maximum effect in the brigade scheme of maneuver. Our combined 24 rotations as logistics observer controllers at the National Training Center (NTC) show us inductively that logistics BOS integration presents particularly troublesome problems for brigade executive officers, stemming primarily from a misunderstanding or the neglected role of the forward support battalion support operations officer (FSB SPO) as a member of the brigade special staff group.

U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) FM 3-90.3, *The Mounted Brigade Combat Team*, specifies supervising the brigade logistics posture as a specified task for the brigade XO.¹ To fulfill this responsibility, the brigade XO must understand what his own logistics staff officer (the S4) ought to do during the brigade planning process, and how the FSB SPO facilitates the S4's success via direct planning participation. FM 3-90.3 outlines the S4's role as that of "the principal staff officer for coordinating the integration of supply, maintenance, transportation, and services for the command. He is the link between the support unit and his commander plus the rest of the staff."² Among his

specific duties are coordinating all classes of supply, less medical services and equipment recovery. The S4 "develops the logistic support plan to support operations" and produces the logistics estimate and service support annex to brigade plans and orders.³ One might wonder what we need the FSB SPO for if the S4 can do all this. The fact of the matter is the S4 depends on the division G4 for certain logistic products and services and on the FSB SPO for products that directly effect tactical operations.

Although FM 3-90.3 calls the FSB commander "the BCT commander's chief logistician," he is not a direct participant in brigade planning as is the direct support artillery battalion commander in his role as the brigade fire support coordinator. The support operations officer is the de facto link between the brigade combat team and the echelon above brigade logistics infrastructure that will ensure the brigade is logistically postured for the fight. The best way to illustrate this is to clearly delineate how well a brigade level concept of support will likely satisfy the Army logistics characteristics defined in FM 3-0, *Operations*, as "responsiveness, simplicity, flexibility, attainability, sustainability, survivability, economy, and integration," with and without the intimate involvement of the FSB SPO at the brigade S4's side.⁴

This article illuminates for the brigade XO what the S4 *cannot* do for the brigade without the SPO, thereby enhancing the brigade XO's appreciation for the necessity of initiating and developing a relationship with the SPO as a brigade special staff officer.

Because the FSB's own capstone manual, FM 63-20, *Forward Support Battalion*, does not specify SPO planning responsibilities, by directing the SPO to provide "input to the brigade S4 on the brigade logistics estimate and service support annex," one cannot entirely blame the brigade XO from seeing him (and the FSB SPO from seeing himself) as an executor, rather than a planner. The SPO and the brigade XO together

may share the belief that the SPO should receive a completed plan for future combat operations to help write Annex I. The SPO, more often than not, hesitates to force himself into a brigade planning process in which he feels neither needed nor especially welcome. In most cases, this results in a concept of support that is not synchronized with the maneuver plan and lacks triggers to effectively transition from one phase to the next. The bottom line is that the brigade S4 is not truly the primary combat service support (CSS) integrator for the brigade, no matter what the FM says. Although he can integrate the efforts of CSS operators below the brigade level, he alone cannot integrate the echelons above brigade CSS assets that he does not control, but that are essential components of a successful operation. True, the S4 can identify requirements in the course of planning and pass those requirements to the FSB SPO after the fact; however, passing requirements is not the same as integrating CSS.

One might argue that CSS integration happens at the brigade level, whether or not the FSB SPO is involved in the planning process. While it is demonstrably true that the brigade S4 can and often does select tentative ambulance exchange points and brigade support area locations, and might even tentatively determine where and when a forward logistics element from the FSB might deploy to support the operation, the S4 will not truly integrate CSS into the plan. The FSB SPO will finalize the dedication of FSB and higher level CSS assets to satisfy brigade requirements, work with the FSB medical company leaders to finalize the most fruitful distribution of medical assets, and determine the dynamics of resupply to the FSB to posture the brigade for follow on missions. If we accept that CSS must be fully integrated into brigade plans and orders, and if we accept that the brigade S4 is unequipped by virtue of position to be a true CSS integrator (regardless of the technical and tactical expertise of the officer in the position), then we accept that the effectiveness of the brigade S4 will be directly propor-

tional to the level of participation of the FSB SPO during the planning process. In a very important sense, the FSB SPO is the true logistics integrator in the brigade, even though the brigade S4 is the staff officer formally charged to make integration happen.

The FSB SPO brings to the fight the ability to synchronize the current fight with future operations. Using CSS synchronization matrices, he has the ability to foresee the logistics battlefield and modify current and future operations based on decisions made during the brigade military decisionmaking process — true logistics integration. Not participating in the process will result in the FSB SPO focusing on the next 24 hours, the execution period for the FSB. The FSB SPO is unable to visualize the battlefield 48 to 72 hours in the future, which limits his ability to influence future brigade fights. The FSB SPO cannot reallocate direct support assets within the FSB, and lacks key information to make necessary coordination with echelon above brigade organizations to maximize available time to provide required support. Traditionally, we fail to accomplish these tasks, resulting in the FSB being out of position to effectively support critical brigade events. For example, the FSB attempts to move during a key period in the fight and is unavailable to support the brigade, and the FSB SPO receives an emergency request that he will have to depend on others to execute on short notice.

FSB SPOs repeatedly argue with NTC logistics trainers that they are simply too busy managing current operations to spend many hours at the brigade tactical operations center in planning sessions. We think the only way to circumvent the pressures of current operations is for the FSB commander to enable the SPO to build a team within the support operations section that can manage current operations, follow up on key issues, and even issue instructions in the SPO's name.

Doctrine writers in schoolhouses provide the rubric for success. It falls to individuals in the field to translate doctrinal guidance into specific tactics, techniques, and procedures that address recurring concrete practical problems. Sustainment doctrine tells us that brigade plans and orders must satisfy the logistics characteristics — foremost among them integration. Hopefully, this article has served to assist the brigade XO in fulfilling his responsibility to

oversee the brigade logistics posture by clarifying the limits of the S4's role and illuminating the perhaps underappreciated role of the FSB SPO during brigade planning.

Notes

¹U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 3-90.3, *The Mounted Brigade Combat Team*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1 November 2001, Figure 11-4, p. 11-8.

²Ibid., Figure 11-8, p. 11-13.

³Ibid.

⁴FM 3-0, *Operations*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 14 June 2001.

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