# Logistics and Sustainment in the Stryker Brigade Combat Team: Logistics-Support Team or Forward Support Company?

**by CPT James H. Fortune and LTC Christopher L. Budihas**

After 2nd Cavalry Regiment returned from deployment to Afghanistan in Spring 2011, it spent more than a year preparing for and executing the Decisive-Action Training Environment in October 2012. This marked the first time any Stryker brigade has extensively executed conventional war operations; in the DATE, 2nd Cavalry Regiment faced an adversary that fought not with just counterinsurgency tactics but also with the conventional forces of a true national military.

Stryker brigade combat teams were fielded after the recent wars started. Consequently, although a decade of counterinsurgency has tested their modified table of organization and equipment, SBCTs have not yet participated in conventional-war training. Therefore the DATE and the yearlong preparation that preceded it offered a unique opportunity to evaluate the SBCT against the metric of conventional war. In this article, we will look at a subsection of that – we will look at sustainment abilities at the squadron level. Specifically, we will look at this through the lens of 4th Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment, the reconnaissance squadron for the regiment.

Logistics support to squadrons in SBCTs is not robust enough to meet the demand of conventional war. A reconnaissance squadron in an SBCT has no MTOE support assets. The regimental support squadron provides all support to each squadron in the regiment. Traditionally, RSS provides 40- to 50-man logistical-support teams to each squadron for maintenance, transportation, supply, field services and distribution support.

Proponents of the LST concept like to use words such as "adaptive," "tailorable," "plug-and-play" and "creative."[1] These words give the reader the false impression that LSTs are like an adjustable wrench that can fit any need. This is hardly the case. Army Doctrinal Publication 4-0, ***Sustainment***, states that sustainment consists of maintenance, transportation, supply, field services, distribution, operational contract support and general engineering support. It lists integration, anticipation, responsiveness, simplicity, economy, survivability, continuity and improvisation as principles of sustainment.[2]

In this article, we will evaluate the LST against the components of sustainment and the principles of sustainment. We will find that the LST is not robust enough an organization to fulfill the requirements of Army sustainment. Finally, we will discuss the adoption, implementation and proof in other brigades of the proper way to address this: the forward support company.

## LST failings: sustainment components

Since the SBCT has no MTOE support assets, the method 2nd Cavalry Regiment used to conduct maintenance and distribution operation was through the creation and employment of LSTs built out of the RSS to each squadron. These LSTs are not MTOE creations in themselves – they are merely ad hoc assemblages from various paragraphs of RSS. For example, 4/2 Cavalry Regiment's LST consists of a combat-repair team from maintenance troop MTOE, fuel and supply vehicle assets from distribution troop MTOE and a field-feeding team from RSS HHT, all led by a maneuver lieutenant from 4th Squadron (a non-MTOE position filled out-of-hide).

The CRT consists of about 20 maintenance technicians, including a warrant officer, two load-handling systems with forward repair systems and two M984A2 wreckers. The distribution section consists of seven to 10 Soldiers, two M978A4 fuelers and two M1120A4 LHS. The FFT consists of around 10 Soldiers with one refrigerated unit and one containerized kitchen. These numbers can vary by squadron but are generally the same across the regiment.

Upon deployment to the field, this LST further organizes into field trains, combat trains and a transport section. Field trains consist of the command and control, most of the dedicated maintenance assets and the FFT. The combat trains consist of recovery, expedient repair and emergency resupply. The transport

section consists of the two fuelers and two LHS. This is the LST.

To assess the LST, we will evaluate it against, first, the components of sustainment and, next, the principles of sustainment. The first component of sustainment is maintenance. Army ***Tactics, Techniques and Procedures***, 4-33, defines the purpose of maintenance as "to generate/regenerate combat power … to enable mission accomplishment." By this definition, LSTs are undermanned. The chief warrant officer for 4/2 Cavalry Regiment performed the maintenance-allocation chart analysis for the squadron and found that 4/2 Cavalry Regiment's MTOE currently requires 63,003.54 annual manhours.

With 4/2 Cavalry Regiment's current "tailorable" package, the CRT can only support 36,192 manhours. "Plug-and-play" indeed; 4/2 Cavalry Regiment is operating at 57.44 percent MTOE vs. MAC. According to the paragraphs 4/2 Cavalry Regiment uses, the CRT needs five more 91Bs, two 91Ds, two 91Fs, nine 91Ses and one 94F.[3] The Army (via the MAC) is clearly telling us what is required to perform the job for maintenance; the LST is performing only 57.44 percent of it.

Because the CRT has such a small amount of maintenance support, it is unable to provide field-maintenance teams to the individual troops (company-size formations). Upon deployment to the field, this means that maintenance cannot be fixed forward but instead must be brought to the combat trains and combat posts – or even the field trains and combat posts. This takes combat power out of battle.

Part of this problem is due to the "drying up" of the civilian contractors who used to perform much Stryker maintenance. Indeed, one early article touting the strengths of the LST concept stated, "The LST's assets include LHSs with trailers, fuel trucks, medical personnel, Department of the Army logistics-assistance representatives and civilian Stryker mechanics" and again "a typical LST consists of one lieutenant, one [CRT] of 20 personnel, including a chief warrant officer 2 and five embedded contractors."[4] Those singing the early praises of the LST clearly did not take into account a situation where contractors would not be able to help with a significant load, such as in conventional warfare. Indeed, 4/2 Cavalry Regiment encountered this during the DATE when it operated entirely without contractor support.

Next we turn to transportation, distribution and supply. Transportation is the process of moving sustainment to the point of need.[5] Distribution is "the operational process of synchronizing all elements of the logistics system to deliver the right things to the right place at the right time to support the geographic combatant commander."[6] LSTs can ***transport*** bulk supplies; however, they lack the ability to ***distribute*** supplies. Previous assessments of SBCT logistics have tended to reference SBCTs in counterinsurgency operations. These assessments found no problem with the transport and distribution of supplies; indeed many had high accolades for it.[7] In COIN (typical Iraq/Afghanistan operations), LSTs are normally consolidated on forward operating bases. This allows them to deliver sustainment "in series."

As 4/2 Cavalry Regiment found during the recent decisive-action combat training center rotation, during conventional warfare, sustainment must often occur "in parallel."[8] During conventional war, there are many more simultaneously occurring "points of need." There are usually no issues with transporting and distributing Class I and Class V because each troop has one family of medium tactical vehicles and one water buffalo per MTOE. These travel with the logistic package to support the troops individually. However, where these "parallel" sustainment opportunities harm the squadron is with Class IIIB; the LST has just two M978A4 fuelers.

A reconnaissance troop uses on average 600-800 gallons of fuel every 24-36 hours during zone and area reconnaissance missions. One M978A4 fueler holds 2,500 gallons for a total squadron Class IIIB capacity of 5,000 gallons. Simple math shows us that the LST can support the troops ***if it resupplies each one in series***.[9] The LST is not capable of resupplying more than two troops at one time. In the case of a zone recon or screen, the squadron could be operating on a very wide front. Several times during the DATE, the squadron width was well over 25 kilometers.[10] Doctrinally, the SBCT is supposed to be able to screen a width of 20-30 kilometers and a depth of 10-15 kilometers. This means that the SBCT LST may have to support troops in an area as large as 450 kilometers.[11] As 4/2 Cavalry Regiment found during the DA CTC rotation, this is not feasible with just two fuelers. Frequently, the squadron had to adjust its tempo to fit its logistics.

## LST failings: sustainment principles

As demonstrated, on three of the critical components of sustainment according to ADP 4-0, the LST is at a great disadvantage. It encounters similar issues with the principles of sustainment. The first principle of sustainment is Integration, defined as "combining all the elements of sustainment … to operations assuring unity of command and effort."[12] With its ad hoc assortment from two squadrons and various troops within those squadrons, who often do not have the opportunity to train with each other, the LST lacks integration as to unity of command. Too often, the squadron had to request support packages from RSS that had never trained with the squadron before, limiting performance.

Another principle of sustainment is simplicity, defined as "clarity of tasks, standardized and interoperable procedures, and clearly defined command relationships."[13] The LST fails the simplicity test for the same reasons as it does integration – the organization is too composite.

Two further principles are responsiveness and improvisation. Although LST proponents claim that it is both of these, this is not the case. ADP 4-0 explains responsiveness as "[t]hrough responsive sustainment, commanders maintain operational focus and pressure, set the tempo of friendly operations." As has been demonstrated, the inability of the LST to distribute supplies simultaneously derailed the squadron's tempo.

Finally, the LST has limited ability to improvise. Because its organic resources are very limited, whenever there is another sustainment requirement, the support-platoon leader or the Headquarters and Headquarters Troop executive officer must go to the regimental-support area and request more resources from support-operations officer. Due to the competing requirements of other squadrons and SPO's natural inclination to hoard resources in the case of uncertainty, it usually is difficult to convince them to release resources.

As we can see, the LST fails many of the Army's requirements for the principles of sustainment.

## FSC advantages

With what should the Army replace this LST concept? A ready solution already exists: the FSC. Armored and infantry BCTs incorporate FSCs into their support-battalion MTOE. A common rebuke is that SBCTs are supposed to be light, mobile and readily deployable. Opponents claim that FSCs would hinder the SBCT's mobility. If FSCs are light and mobile enough for brigades of 101st Airborne and 173rd Airborne,

why can the Army not make them light and mobile enough for an SBCT? It can. In fact, as 4/2 Cavalry Regiment found during the DA CTC rotation, nothing makes an SBCT more sluggish and immobile than lack of sufficient logistics and sustainment resources.

A typical FSC includes a five-person headquarters section, a 12-person FFT, a 21-person distribution platoon, a 41-person field-maintenance section, an eight-person recovery section and three field-maintenance teams of 10 persons each that are normally assigned to each line troop. This creates a cohesive company of 117 maintenance, support and recovery personnel – much more robust, integrated, simple and responsive.[14]

The FSC's maintenance section is much larger than the LST's. The additional personnel would allow the unit to achieve its MAC goals. Also, the addition of field-maintenance teams that can be assigned to each line company would allow more maintenance to occur forward rather than in the rear. Finally, the FSC brings superior leadership to the battlefield; just in the company headquarters, there is an O-3, O-2 and E-8 – all in the Logistics Branch.

The LST concept relies too much on having one stellar maneuver lieutenant. The 4/2 Cavalry Regiment had such a lieutenant, but in war people die. The LST leadership structure is too precarious. The redundant leadership structure of the FSC fixes this and adds sustainment experience.

As the Army considers this, it may become necessary or desired to decrease the FSC slightly to retain the freedom of maneuver the SBCT prides itself on. For example, one can argue the FFT is unnecessary in a rapidly deployable SBCT battalion. Soldiers can live on Meals Ready to Eat – hot meals are a luxury, not a necessity. FFTs can consolidate in RSS.

The 4th Squadron and 2nd Cavalry Regiment also found that Class I and Class V distribution assets incorporated into the LST concept are enough. The FSC brings the much-needed extra fueler.

The FSC would solve many of the LST's problems. If the Army concludes that a traditional FSC is too large, there are ways to decrease its size while retaining its utility.

## Conclusion

The 2nd Cavalry Regiment's unique training since redeploying from Afghanistan in Spring 2011 tested the SBCT-logistics concept against unified land operations – specifically in the realm of the more conventional side of warfare – for the first time since the SBCT concept was developed. Some have praised the LST's adaptability, but these opinions are formed on the consolidated and immobile FOBs of Iraq and Afghanistan.

The LST fails when tested against the constant operations, movement and sustainment demands of conventional war. Its maintenance section lacks the numbers to repair equipment quickly; its ability to distribute "in parallel" is limited; its organization is ad hoc; and its leadership is too dependent on one outstanding personality. The FSC fixes all these problems while remaining light, mobile and readily deployable. The Army should immediately incorporate FSCs into the Stryker brigade design in an effort to take away the current logistical and maintenance handicap its MTOE design is providing.

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## Notes

[1] Butler, Dwayne M. MAJ, and Van De Hey, Eric J. CPT, "The Logistics Support Team: SBCT Combat Multiplier," ***Army Logistician***, 2005.

[2] ADP 4-0, ***Sustainment***, July 31, 2012.

[3] MAC analysis performed by CWS Shawn Burns Jan. 9, 2013.

[4] Butler and Van De Hey.

[5] Army Doctrinal Reference Publication 4-0, ***Sustainment***, July 31, 2012.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Butler and Van De Hey. Also, Butler, Dwayne M. LTC, Bradford, Kenneth C. MAJ, and Schwentz, Juliane C. CPT, "Successful Implementation of Logistics Support Teams in an SBCT," ***Army Logistician***, 2008.

[8] Phrases coined by MAJ John Horning, squadron executive officer, 4/2 Cavalry Regiment, in conversation Jan. 7, 2013.

[9] From a conversation with 4/2 Cavalry Regiment's squadron S-4, CPT Van Ingen, Jan. 7, 2013. Van Ingen kept calculations of this metric each time the squadron deployed to the field over the course of a year.

[10] Field Manual 3-20.96, ***Reconnaissance Squadron***, Sept. 20, 2006.

[11] ADP 4-0.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] FM 4-90, ***Brigade Support Battalion***, Aug. 31, 2010, and analysis of FSC MTOE documents from https://fmsweb.army.mil/unprotected/splash/.

### Acronym Quick-Scan

**ADP** – Army doctrinal publication
**BCT** – brigade combat team
**COIN** – counterinsurgency operations
**CRT** – combat-repair team
**CTC** – combat training center
**DA** – decisive action
**DATE** – Decisive-Action Training Environment
**FFT** – field-feeding team
**FM** – field manual
**FOB** – forward operating base
**FSC** – forward support company
**HHT** – headquarters and headquarters troop
**LHS** – load-handling system
**LST** – logistical-support team
**MAC** – maintenance allocation chart
**MTOE** – modified table of organization and equipment
**RSS** – regimental support squadron
**SAMS** – School of Advanced Military Studies
**SBCT** – Stryker brigade combat team
**SPO** – support-operations officer