

# The CSSB Challenge: Doing More With Less

BY MAJOR THOMAS W. HAAS

The modularity of a combat sustainment support battalion limits its ability to follow the Army Force Generation cycle, and the demands on the battalion are greater than the capabilities it is authorized through its modified table of organization and equipment.

**M**any demands are placed on a combat sustainment support battalion (CSSB) headquarters in today's Army. As a modular battalion, the CSSB is not habitually under a brigade and has no organic subordinate units. The CSSB is capable of deploying independently and providing mission command for assigned and attached sustainment units in order to provide full-spectrum sustainment support as required.

The 17th CSSB, stationed at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, provides mission command for 12 individual companies and detachments spread over 360 miles between Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson and Fort Wainwright, Alaska, with a total of more than 1,300 Soldiers authorized. In the last 5 years, the battalion deployed twice: once in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) for 15 months from 2007 to 2009 and once in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) for 12 months from 2010 to 2011. During those 5 years, the battalion served under 6 different brigade headquarters and provided mission command for 43 Active Army, Army National Guard, and Army Reserve units totaling more than 5,300 Soldiers.

On order, the 17th CSSB deploys and provides mission command of assigned and attached units, sustainment and general support commodity hub operations, distribution of all classes of supply, area support maintenance, central receiving and shipping point operations, and contractor oversight.

Using the 17th CSSB as an example, this article will examine the unique challenges facing CSSBs and provide recommendations in the areas of manning, equipping, and training against the backdrop of garrison sustainment operations, modularity, and overseas contingency operations in today's high operating tempo Army.

## Manning

The size of the organization and modularity are indisputably the biggest factors in determining proper manning levels for a CSSB. These factors also significantly increase the staff's workload, and deployment adds to

the challenges. The 24-hour operations required during deployments justify depth of manning, as do the non-standard missions that inevitably come up. For example, the 17th CSSB had to split its headquarters to man a forward logistics element and had combined action training responsibilities with its Afghan military partners.

Of course, nonstandard missions are not unique to a CSSB; all battalions work through similar challenges while deployed. However, several examples of increased workload are unique to the CSSB. For example, the S-1 section of an average-sized, organic battalion with 500 to 700 Soldiers will process 500 to 700 end-of-tour (EOT) awards during a deployment. That requirement is more than double for a CSSB. During the recent OEF rotation, the 17th CSSB's S-1 section processed more than 2,100 EOT awards since 5 subordinate units redeployed during the battalion's tour. During the 17th CSSB's 15-month OIF deployment, the S-1 processed more than 2,000 EOT awards.

Awards are not the only administrative actions that significantly increase in a CSSB. The number of personnel administrative actions, including officer and noncommissioned officer (NCO) evaluations, records updates, and promotion packets, is at least double, and in some cases triple, the norm.

The fact that a CSSB becomes a multicomponent headquarters while deployed creates additional stress and workload since the Active component human resources specialists have to learn all the differences within the National Guard and Army Reserve personnel systems.

## MTOE Shortfalls

The S-1 authorization for the 17th CSSB was nine Soldiers according to the battalion's fiscal year (FY) 2011 modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE). The FY 2012 MTOE decreased the S-1 section authorization to eight, yet the workload remained the same.

The additional workload that comes with the CSSB's

size and modularity also applies to other staff sections. The S-3, S-4, and S-6 sections all have significant workload increases. The S-3, in addition to having twice the normal S-3 workload since the CSSB is twice the size of an average battalion, is busy with continuous planning and staff synchronization because of the constant turnover of subordinate units.

In the S-4 section, having double or triple the number of subordinate units leads to an exponential amount of equipment and supply actions. Because of the high number of subordinate units and the frequent turnover of those units, the size and scope of the battalion's command supply discipline program is immense. The S-6 section is responsible for all of the battalion's network users, automation equipment, and network trouble tickets. The FY 2011 authorizations for the 17th CSSB S-4 and S-6 sections were seven Soldiers each. For FY 2012, the S-4 authorization decreased to five and the S-6 decreased to six, yet the workload remained the same.

The MTOE changes to the support operations (SPO) and S-3 sections offset each other since the only change was to move the plans section from under the SPO to the S-3. In the SPO section, the biggest workload increase was not necessarily because of size or modularity but because of the addition of a new responsibility: contract oversight. During the OEF deployment, the SPO section provided 8 full-time contracting officer's representatives to evaluate 12 contracts and the performance of over 500 contractors.

In the past 5 years, the 17th CSSB has been the size of a brigade minus, whether forward deployed or in garrison. Yet some key staff sections have remained the same size as those of a much smaller battalion. In garrison during the summer of 2009, the 17th CSSB was manned at 80 percent—despite the fact that the battalion had 12 units and 1,323 Soldiers—since it was not on the patch chart to deploy. It was a significant challenge to establish staff processes and manage a battalion that large with 80 percent of a staff organized to command a battalion half that size.

### **Professional Development and Training**

A large modular battalion encounters several professional development challenges. Developing leaders is more difficult when the whole battalion is not on the same Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) cycle. Invariably, dwell-time issues occur when moving officers and NCOs between companies and headquarters, which must be done to ensure the professional growth and development of those personnel.

Another problem is the fact that many junior leaders will serve under three to five different battalion commanders during a 3-year tour. This makes mentorship from the battalion command team inconsistent and, in some cases, very minimal because of the short amount

of time those junior leaders serve with a particular battalion headquarters.

Training a CSSB in garrison is very challenging when the battalion's subordinate units are on different ARFORGEN cycles. In order for a sustainment battalion headquarters to train for its wartime mission, there must be a sustainment mission to perform and sustainment units on hand to execute it. This training can be accomplished through field training exercises (FTXs) built to rehearse all the capabilities of the battalion or through daily garrison support requirements.

In the 17th CSSB's case, the customers in garrison are the 17th CSSB's higher headquarters, the 3d Maneuver Enhancement Brigade (MEB), which lacks an organic brigade support battalion (BSB), and U.S. Army Alaska (USARAK). As the only EAB sustainment battalion in USARAK, the 17th CSSB supported the 3d MEB in a direct support role and USARAK in a general support role. However, because of the ARFORGEN cycles of subordinate units, the support requirement never matched the 17th CSSB's capabilities between the 17th CSSB's OIF and OEF deployments.

For example, the 3d MEB needed sustainment-level maintenance support, but the 98th Maintenance Company was deployed. USARAK needed transportation support between Fort Wainwright and Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, but both of the transportation companies were deployed. By the time the maintenance and transportation companies returned, the headquarters was deploying again. Even though the support requirements were there, the 17th CSSB missed out on garrison training opportunities because of modularity.

### **National Training Center Rotation**

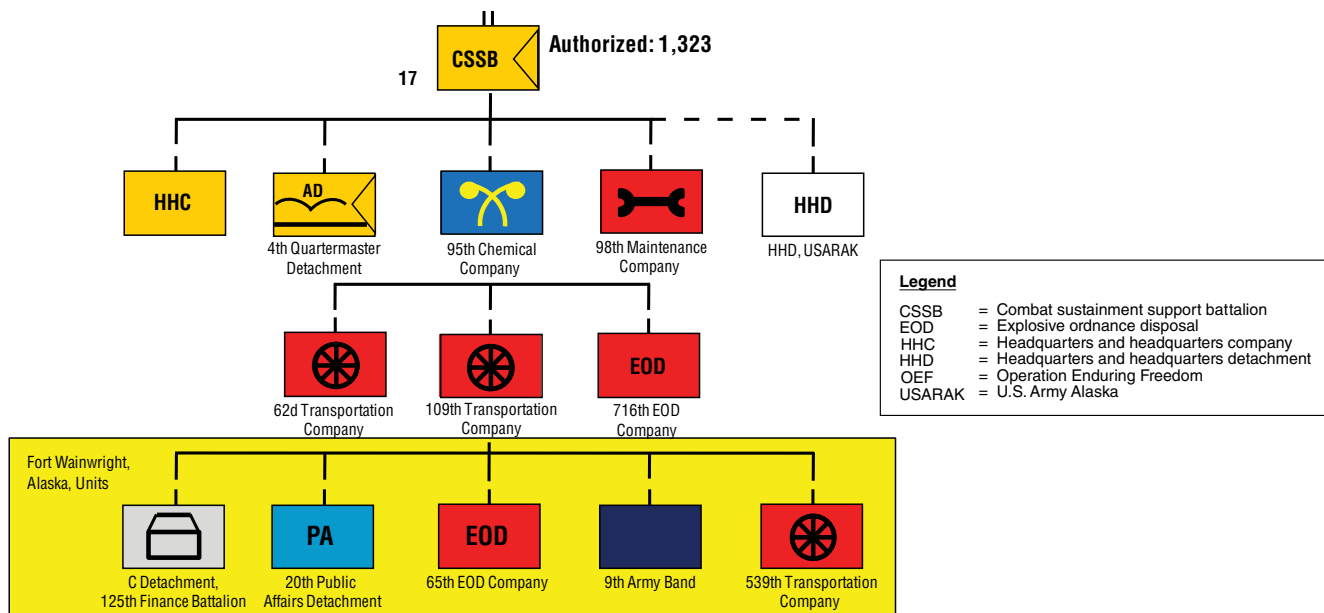
Before deploying to OEF, the battalion conducted three staff exercises and a National Training Center (NTC) rotation at Fort Irwin, California. With 12 units spread across 360 miles to command and each with its own unique training requirements, the CSSB faced a significant challenge to develop and execute a meaningful battalion-level training exercise.

Before the OEF deployment, the 17th CSSB did not conduct any battalion collective training exercises. One staff exercise was conducted in December 2009, and 2 of 12 companies participated. The staff was distracted by the other 10 units throughout the exercise. It was not until after a provisional staff stood up in January 2010 and the transfer of all subordinate units was complete that the 17th CSSB headquarters completed the bulk of its predeployment training.

The constant deployment, redeployment, activation, and inactivation of units—caused by the battalion's units being on different ARFORGEN timelines and having individual and unique training requirements—hindered the CSSB's ability to have a meaningful battalion-level training exercise. The 17th CSSB's two staff exercises

# 17th CSSB Home Station Task Organization

as of January 2010



and NTC rotation that were conducted after the provisional staff stood up proved to be exactly what was required to prepare for the OEF deployment.

While it was still a very valuable training event, the NTC rotation presented some training challenges, mostly in regard to command structure and mission command relationships. For the 17th CSSB's NTC task organization, the battalion was fortunate to have the 109th Transportation Company (TC), a home station unit. The 109th TC was separated by only 1 month from the CSSB headquarters in its ARFORGEN cycle, so the timing of the NTC rotation worked for both units. The 109th TC was the only unit commanded by the 17th CSSB headquarters during the NTC rotation. Had it not gone to NTC with the headquarters, the headquarters would not have had any units to train with.

Sourcing a CSSB with subordinate sustainment units for combat training center rotations and then matching the CSSB's capabilities with the rotating brigade combat team's (BCT's) requirements is a significant challenge. In the 17th CSSB's case, the 2d BCT, 25th Infantry Division (a Stryker BCT [SBCT]), was more than willing to make the 17th CSSB a part of the team and incorporate it into the overall concept of support to ensure tough, realistic training for all.

Even with incredible support from the SBCT, there were still challenges with the mission command structure. The 916th Support Brigade is garrisoned at Fort Irwin and provided mentorship and guidance during the rotation. That said, the mission of the 916th Support Brigade is to provide "Joint, Interagency, Intergovern-

mental, Multinational (JIIM), contracted support, and rotary-wing aviation sustainment to rotational units, NTC customers, and other government and civil agencies," not to command, mentor, and train rotational CSSBs. That left the SBCT to command a battalion it is not designed to command and limited the training value of the rotation for the CSSB.

Another challenge during the NTC rotation was observer-controller (OC) support. Although the Gold Miner OC team did its best to provide the 17th CSSB with the world-class training support it is known for, the CSSB was not its priority. The rotating BSB was its priority. The Gold Miner team simply does not have enough OCs to sufficiently cover both a BSB and a CSSB during a rotation. USARAK was tasked to provide OC augmentees. However, those augmentees lacked logistics experience; one was a second lieutenant fresh out of the officer basic course.

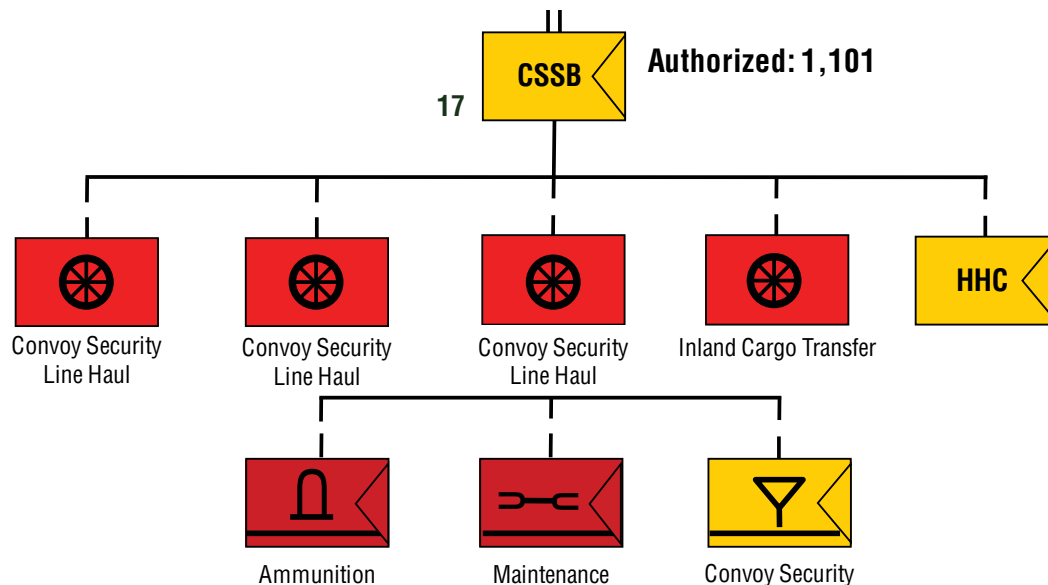
## Equipping

One shortfall that the staff exercises and the NTC rotation highlighted was a lack of authorized MTOE equipment necessary to train the 17th CSSB headquarters and subordinate units adequately for deployment. The lack of key equipment created a complete dependence on the local battle command training center for facilities, Army Battle Command Systems, and network connectivity. Once the 17th CSSB got to NTC, its dependence shifted to the SBCT, which supported the battalion in any way it could.

The biggest support requirement was network con-

*While in garrison in early 2010, 1,323 Soldiers served under the 17th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion. During Operation Enduring Freedom 10-11, 1,766 Soldiers served under the battalion.*

## 17th CSSB Task Organization for OEF 10-11



nectivity. The 17th CSSB was fortunate to be able to stay in the rotational unit bivouac area, and it benefited from the battalion tactical operations center's clamshell tent being wired for network connectivity. If the headquarters had been pushed forward into the training area, it would have inevitably pulled from the SBCT's limited signal company capability, potentially hindering other units' ability to train.

Being a battalion headquarters not habitually under a brigade requires a CSSB to be as independent as possible and ready to deploy as an expeditionary force to an immature theater with no theater-provided equipment or as a follow-on force in a well-established theater. The addition of the Command Post Node will require a military occupational specialty 25N (nodal network systems operators/maintainer) Soldier to be added to the MTOE.

In the past 5 years, the 17th CSSB has been the size of a brigade minus, whether forward deployed or in garrison, yet the staff has remained roughly the same size as its smaller support battalion counterparts. In October 2011, some key staff sections actually became smaller than comparable non-CSSB support battalions. The size of the battalion and the diversity of the subordinate units, together with MTOE equipment constraints, make it impossible to conduct a simple FTX without relying completely on outside organizations to assist.

It is unrealistic to continue to build the MTOE of a CSSB to fight an insurgency in a mature theater with plenty of theater-provided equipment on hand. If the trend is not reversed, critical skills will continue to be lost and CSSBs will become incapable of expeditionary operations. CSSB MTOEs should be changed in six ways.

First, modularity and size should be considered. In order to maintain the pace at which CSSBs operate, whether forward deployed or in garrison, MTOE manning should not be reduced in the aggregate.

Second, E-7 and above positions should be manned at no less than 90 percent, regardless of where the CSSB is in the ARFORGEN cycle, to account for the increased workload.

Third, a contracting NCO should be added to the MTOE under the SPO section to act as the subject-matter expert and handle all contract administration requirements.

Fourth, the CSSB MTOE should be equipped for the worst-case scenario, which is an expeditionary capability designed to hold up in a force-on-force, high-intensity conflict.

Fifth, the number of OCs on the Gold Miner team should be increased, and mission command, mentorship, and training of the rotating CSSBs should become a primary focus of the 916th Support Brigade.

Sixth, a war trace alignment of National Guard and Army Reserve units with active CSSBs should be developed so that the units have some level of familiarity before deployment. This would allow multicomponent CSSBs to conduct training events, including FTXs and combat training center rotations, during Army National Guard and Army Reserve annual training.

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