

# CSSBs Must Prepare for Expeditionary Sustainment

■ By Maj. Gen. Gary Brito, Lt. Col. Michael LaBrecque, Lt. Col. Hughie Eugene Fewell Jr., and Capt. Joseph Langlinais







*Soldiers from the 189th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion prepare aerial resupply for onward distribution to units at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, La., in October 2017. (Photo by Gunther Wagner)*



## Combat sustainment support battalions must integrate subordinate units and follow a deliberate training path to prepare for a training center rotation.

At the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Polk, Louisiana, the role of a combat sustainment support battalion (CSSB) within the decisive action training environment (DATE) continues to evolve. Previously, CSSBs operated from relatively secure logistics bases. Now the units deploy forward into the training area, which shortens the lines of communication and provides more responsive sustainment to brigade combat teams (BCTs).

The change to the way CSSBs provide support aligns with the Multi-Domain Battle concept. In Multi-Domain Battle, near-peer adversaries have the ability to target and interdict friendly forces anywhere.

This paradigm shift has thrust the CSSB into a competitive environment where it must balance force protection and sustainment. This shift also highlights the CSSB's significant challenges, which include the modular nature of the battalion, the associated issues of incorporating new formations, and the ability to synchronize warfighting functions.

In order to overcome these challenges and provide effective and timely sustainment, the CSSB must prepare for its DATE rotation by focusing on force integration and home-station training.

### Integration Challenges

The CSSB's mission is to provide mission command of attached units and to synchronize and control the execution of logistics operations. Approximately 73 percent of all echelons-above-brigade sustainment formations now reside in the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve.

Accordingly, most CSSBs supporting BCTs during DATE rotations are multicomponent. This configuration complies with the Department of Defense Directive 1200.17, Managing the Reserve Components as an Operational Force, which requires the Army Reserve and National Guard to be managed as operational

forces in order to maintain readiness with increasingly scarce resources during an era of continual conflict.

While most BCTs will train, deploy, and fight as a cohesive element, CSSBs normally do not benefit from this level of preparation. Often, CSSBs and their subordinate elements arrive at JRTC with varying degrees of readiness, lacking a common tactical or planning standard operating procedure (SOP), and possessing varying generations of mission command systems (MCSs). These conditions coalesce to create significant challenges in providing timely sustainment.

To overcome these challenges, the CSSB must aggressively prepare for training rotations. Upon notification of an upcoming training rotation, the CSSB headquarters must engage sustainment rotational planners to identify subordinate formations that will fulfill force requirements in support of the rotation.

The CSSB must coordinate with these elements immediately to begin preparations and create shared understanding of reporting requirements and methods, unit systems, and SOPs. Units can accomplish this coordination through teleconferences, video teleconferences, and virtual and constructive training at home-station mission training centers. Despite having a year to prepare, both Army Reserve and National Guard elements will be challenged to follow these recommendations because of the limited number of training days leading to the rotation.

Additionally, CSSBs and subordinate formations should coordinate with the supported BCT to attend its leader training program (LTP) approximately three months before their rotation. This program focuses on mission command and the associated elements of planning, coordinating, integrating, synchronizing, and executing combat operations.

The LTP will refine the CSSB's military decisionmaking process, validate its planning SOPs, focus its information products, and solidify

a home-station battle staff training program. Ultimately, close collaboration with both the LTP coaches and the BCT will allow the CSSB and the BCT to create a shared understanding of the BCT's efforts, the CSSB's challenges, phases of the operation, transitions, the sustainment concept, and the threats the units will face at JRTC.

## **MCS and Signal Support**

Because of the CSSB headquarters' organization and authorized equipment, the unit relies on external formations to provide administrative, medical, and signal network support. The CSSB is required to integrate these capabilities, synchronize the seven warfighting functions, and operate under austere conditions, which creates a significant challenge. In order to be successful, the CSSB must develop a training path to incorporate key enablers and build proficiency in both individual and collective tasks before the training rotation.

The CSSB often relies on either the sustainment brigade's signal network company or an expeditionary signal unit for upper tactical internet (UTI) capability. In addition to UTI challenges, many CSSBs struggle with effectively employing systems such as the Command Post of the Future, Joint Capabilities Release (JCR), JCR Logistics (JCR-Log), and Joint Battle Command-Platform (JBC-P).

Varying generations of these systems are still in use, further complicating mission command operations because of their incompatibility with JRTC's pre-positioned vehicle fleet. Additionally, units lacking home-station experience in establishing expeditionary command posts often struggle to conduct mission command during JRTC rotations.

To effectively prepare for these challenges, each CSSB must develop a training path to ensure organizational proficiency with MCSs at echelon. With limited JCR, JCR-Log, and JBC-P systems, Soldiers must be proficient in FM radio communications in order to communicate

effectively during convoy operations and while operating in the vicinity of a logistics base.

Units should develop and execute a radio telephone operator course focused on junior leaders and incorporate the course into individual training plans. JRTC observer-coach/trainers routinely observe convoys with one JCR system in the convoy commander's vehicle and no communications capability in other vehicles, despite available radios and appropriate mounting systems.

Additionally, the CSSB should coordinate CPOF, JCR, and JBC-P training for battalion-level staff elements and, whenever possible, company-level leaders. The unit should integrate these systems into a battalion-level tactical operations exercise in order to validate proficiency and knowledge management procedures.

The CSSB should also incorporate signal network support into an externally evaluated battalion-level certification training exercise prior to the rotation in order to exercise UTI systems. This step will improve situational awareness of the CSSB as it operates across the division and brigade areas of operation.

## **Protection Considerations**

Army Training Publication 4-93.1, Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, says that a CSSB is capable of defending itself against a level I threat, but it relies on external units for protection against threat levels II and III. Prior to a JRTC rotation, the CSSB should execute a collective training event focusing on occupying a logistics base and providing area defense.

In order to build proficiency, CSSBs should validate quartering party and site occupation SOPs and rehearse these activities at home station. CSSBs should develop a training path focused on individual qualification and team proficiency with crew-served weapons. They should also conduct a series of leader professional development events focused on area defense operations including

engagement area development.

This should be followed by applicable collective training that culminates with a battalion-level event in which the CSSB occupies a site, establishes a base defense operations center, and constructs individual and crew-served fighting positions and obstacles to validate proficiency. These efforts will ensure the survivability of both personnel and key commodities while providing critical support to maneuver elements during a combat training center rotation.

The CSSB faces many unique challenges in supporting maneuver elements during combat training center rotations. Many of these issues relate to force design, but the CSSB can mitigate these problems and associated risks by aggressively training and working to incorporate external units and resources prior to arrival at JRTC. This deliberate approach will build a responsive and adaptive sustainment organization capable of ensuring the success of supported maneuver formations.

---

Maj. Gen. Gary Brito is the commanding general of JRTC and Fort Polk.

Lt. Col. Michael LaBrecque is the senior logistics trainer at JRTC. He holds a master's degree in administration from Central Michigan University and a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from the United States Military Academy.

Lt. Col. Hughie Eugene Fewell Jr. is the senior trainer for CSSBs at JRTC. He holds a bachelor's degree in political science from Tuskegee University and is nearing completion of a master's degree in security management from Webster University.

Capt. Joseph Langlinais is a sustainment observer-coach/trainer at JRTC. He holds a bachelor's degree in organizational development and is nearing completion of a master's degree in organizational development from the University of the Incarnate Word.