What BCS3 Can Do for You

■ By Maj. Mark A. Folkerts

The Battle Command Sustainment Support System (BCS3) has been around the Army since 2004 and has many stigmas associated with it. As the Army has evolved, BCS3 has been upgraded.

From the beginning, BCS3 was recognized as a good in-transit visibility tool. Today, BCS3 offers more features and tools for in-transit visibility and a new reporting tool that is easy to use and flexible in the ever changing operational environment.

The 45th Sustainment Brigade executed a BCS3 implementation plan over a two-month period while deployed to Kandahar, Afghanistan, to assist with logistics management. The end state was to provide a single interface for commanders to maintain visibility of their logistics posture in any decisive action.

The Logistics Reporting Tool

The Logistics Reporting Tool (LRT) in BCS3 allows commanders to see their units' logistics reports from anywhere in the world using a Microsoft Windows-based computer with Java installed. A BCS3 computer is not required. LRT allows company commanders to input their on-hand status for any supply class, including different types of rations, bottled and bulk water, and even blood products. LRT also allows the commander to input personnel numbers, including for contractors and civilian employees.

LRT is easy to use for commodity management; entering data is as easy as using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Once the unit representative sets up the BCS3 system in the operations center, any S–6 specialist can install LRT on any computer in the brigade. It is important to assign user names in the BCS3 system so that managers can see who makes updates.

All LRTs will connect to the BCS3 Internet Protocol address and provide information that the companies input under the "Log Data Input" tab. Commodity managers and personnel managers can then use the "Log Data Output" or "Rollup" tab to manage their commodities.

Using LRT, staff sections and support operations branches can see logistics data from any unit in the Army in any part of the world. After selecting the task organization and creating a list of supplies that they want to track, commanders and staffs can refine and filter out unnecessary information to give them a picture of what's important. Higher headquarters will mandate basic loads or authorizations, and subordinate commanders will input quantities on hand.

LRT calculates statuses using a set logistics factor file and other values in the spreadsheet. Managers no longer have to receive files from subordinates, copy and paste them into a consolidated report, and email the final report to their higher headquarters. LRT aggregates and calculates the needed information at the push of a refresh button.

Now that LRT feeds information into BCS3, operations centers can build a common operational picture that shows units by location and status. This displays as a map-based picutre that can be used to quickly access LRT from BCS3. BCS3 also allows you to turn on a feature that shows each unit's aggregate logistics status color (green, amber, or red).

BCS3's Time-Saving Features

If you were to investigate the management of class IIIB (bulk petroleum, oils, and lubricants) in Afghanistan, you would find several personnel working a full day to produce a Microsoft Excel document called the REPOL (bulk petroleum contingency report). With an order from the top to use the LRT, units can input class IIIB at the fuel site in 10 minutes and allow every manager all the way up to Department of the Army headquarters to see their status immediately. This would eliminate the countless personnel hours needed to put together these spreadsheets.

A tool in BCS3 allows managers to quickly reconcile requisition numbers and document numbers without the need to track down each one through other systems. The RON/DON (request order number and document order number) tool that maintenance Soldiers in the 117th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion used saved two to three hours of work a day over the old way of obtaining the numbers. And the tool produced a spreadsheet that they could easily copy to the battalion's O26 report, which lists deadlined equipment.

Implementing BCS3

Now that you have seen a glimpse of the many benefits to BCS3, you may ask, "How can a unit implement this system into its battle rhythm among all the other requirements?" With command emphasis, you can implement BCS3 in two months based on the 45th Sustainment Brigade's three phased implementation plan. Remember that the more staff work (such as overlays, task organizations, and tracked items lists) that is completed at higher levels, the less that

is required at lower levels.

Foundation phase. In this phase, the 45th Sustainment Brigade's S–3 set up the unit task organization (UTO) with help from the field service representative. The UTO allows the LRT operator to report the right logistics status for the right unit. It also allows the LRT and BCS3 to aggregate logistics data so brigade managers can quickly see the brigade's status or drill down to the data of a specific company.

At the same time, the S–4 set up the tracked item list (TIL). This list allows staff sections to identify the items that the commander wants to see in a report. It is essential to create the UTO and TIL in order to manage the right information. Operators at all levels will use the UTO and TIL to set up their systems on their office computers.

Next, the S–6 worked with the field support representatives to install LRTs on the computers of all officers-in-charge, noncommissioned officers-in-charge, and supply and personnel managers. The field service representatives assisted with setting up a BCS3 server for the LRTs and local access portals and then set up a username and password profile for each user.

Lastly, the BCS3 coordinators started a working group to analyze issues and synchronize efforts.

Reporting phase. In this phase, the brigade started entering data into LRT. Because the S–4 had set up the TIL in the previous phase, inputting rows in LRT was simpler for the subordinate units. As the units reported more data, the S–4s worked to fix the discrepancies in the TIL, which in turn made it easier for the subordinate units.

The brigade quickly realized that it was easier to break out the categories over several weeks. This plan took a total of five weeks:

- ☐ Week 1, personnel and class VII (major end items).
- ☐ Week 2, class I (subsistence) and class III.
- ☐ Week 3, class V (ammunition).
- ☐ Week 4, class IV (construction and barrier materials) and class II (clothing and individual equipment).
- ☐ Week 5, class IX (repair parts) and class VIII (medical materiel).

This plan also allowed the S–4 to continue to update the TIL and validate the data entered without overloading its shop.

Another part of the reporting phase is building logistics common operational pictures (LCOPs). BCS3 and LRT are great tools, but what they collect is just data without a way to depict the information for the commander. An LCOP formulates data into a relevant information package that a commander can use to make a decision.

Relevant LCOPs include locations of containers and equipment during deployment and redeployment, status and locations of supply points, route statuses, and convoy management. None of these LCOPs are outdated PowerPoint slides briefed days or hours after the fact; they are live and constantly updated within minutes. Units, sections, and operations centers can build these LCOPs as OpViews and send them to all BCS3s so that everyone can use them. [OpViews is a tool in BCS3 that takes a picture of the map, icons, and data that you want to allow another user in the BCS3 system to see. It keeps the operator from having to build the same picture himself.]

Assessment phase. In this phase, the 45th Sustainment Brigade used the working group to analyze the amount of time that BCS3 took subordinate units away from their missions before LRT implementation. The 45th Sustainment Brigade found that reporting took 10 minutes for a company clerk to input his status in LRT, which precluded the need to have extensive email traffic because only certain people could access the report on their computers. Anyone in the brigade or battalion who had LRT on his computer could immediately access LRT to view the logistics posture. Staff sections did not need to copy and paste over data into a higher unit rollup.

Additionally, the brigade found that companies no longer submitted logistics reports for several supplies without an accurate picture of their status. One significant issue was how much ammunition the companies had on hand. Several companies had excess ammunition that a commander could transfer to another unit or turn in as excess for retrograde.

The goal of any staff is to give its commander the best and most accurate picture of the operational environment so that the commander can command his subordinate units and make timely and accurate decisions. A commander can choose to enforce outdated systems that cause his subordinates to spend more time providing that picture, or he can use the best systems available. I believe that BCS3 provides that system with timely, accurate, and efficient reporting.

The 45th Sustainment Brigade wanted to implement this system into daily operations. I believe we accomplished the basics and hope that you can learn from our efforts to do the same in your unit.

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