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The Sustainment Brigade Staff's Critical Path



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By MAJ Richard Reeves

Preface. This article is primarily intended for Army sustainment officers and NCOs who are newly assigned to a sustainment brigade staff. Such individuals, having spent the majority of their careers (so far) down in companies or battalions, are often unaware of the processes and procedures they must undertake to successfully accomplish their mission. This article is the result of the author's own observations, both as a former member of a sustainment brigade staff, and as a sustainment observer, coach/trainer in the Mission Command Training Program (MCTP) stationed at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Since joining MCTP, he has observed expeditionary sustainment commands and sustainment brigades at seven Army War Fighters (WFXs) and conducted sustainment training at 12 mission command training (MCT) weeklong seminars.

Mission. The sustainment brigade (SB) provides support and services to enable operational reach, ensure freedom of action, and prolonged endurance to Army forces (Army Techniques Publication [ATP] 4-93, Introduction). How does the SB headquarters (HQ) staff get after this monumental task? The SB's critical path consists of several meetings that the staff must conduct (or combine) during their daily operational process battle rhythm that culminates with operations order (OPORD) production. When sequenced properly, these meetings enable the staff to conduct the mission command (MC) tasks of plan, prepare, execute, & assess (Army Doctrine Publication [ADP] 6-0, MC Logic Chart).

Sustainment Critical Path. Knowing your unit's critical path is the key to success. The SB HQs critical path has four meetings that include working groups (WG) and boards. They include the support operations (SPO) logistics synchronization working group (LOG SYNCH), the SPO movement board, the SPO distribution management board (DMB), and finally the S3's (operations officer) operations synchronization board (OPS SYNCH). Together, these meetings help the commander understand, visualize, describe, direct, lead and assess his unit's mission (ADP 6-0, MC Logic Chart). An example, or "a way", to show the SB's critical path is Figure 1.

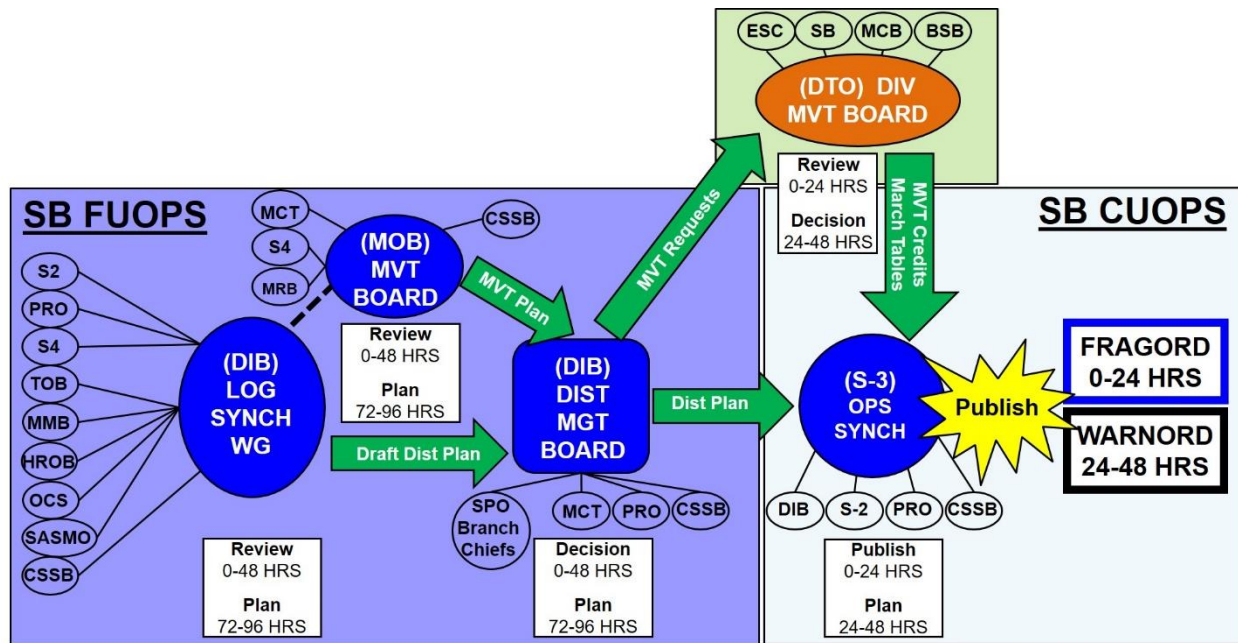


Figure 1. (Depiction of the Sustainment Brigade's Critical Path, "A Way")

Acronym Finder

DIB – Distribution Integration Branch	Dist. Plan – Distribution Plan	ESC – Expeditionary Sustainment Command	MCT – Movement Control Team	PRO – Protection Working Group
BSB - Brigade Support Battalion	DIV - Division	HROB – Human Resources Operations Branch	MMB – Material Management Branch	SASMO – Sustainment Automation Support Management Office
CSSB – Combat Sustainment Support Battalion	DIV MVT Board – Division Movement Board	LOG SYNCH WG – Logistics Synchronization Working Group	OCS – Operational Contract Services	SB – Sustainment Brigade
DIST MGT Board – Distribution Management Board	DTO – Division Transportation Officer	MCB – Movement Control Battalion	OPS SYNCH – Operations Synchronization Board	TOB – Transportation Operations Branch

SB Support Operations. The Brigade SPO typically chairs three of the four critical path meetings. The distribution integration branch (DIB) conducts two of them, while the mobility branch (MOB) conducts the other one. All three meetings focus on distribution management with the SPO building their agendas based on the commander's intent, unit priorities, supply priorities, and movement priorities.

SPO DIB's LOG SYNCH WG. Because the DIB is responsible for the SB's future operations (FUOPS) integrating cell (ATP 4-93, para. 4-46 & Figure 4-2 and shown on the next page as Figure 2), they oversee sustainment planning in the H-72 to H-96 planning horizon (H = hours) (ATP 4-93, para. 4-45). The DIB conducts the LOGSYNCH where they consolidate distribution requirements from all SPO commodity managers and create a draft distribution course of action (COA) that describes how sustainment will flow from the sustainment brigade to supported units (ATP 4-93, para. 1-77). The DIB builds the plan in accordance with supply and unit priorities. The DIB also breaks down the WG's agenda into two parts: They assess their previous plans for H-24 to H-72 (to make adjustments if necessary), and then they extend that plan to prepare the next H-96 window.

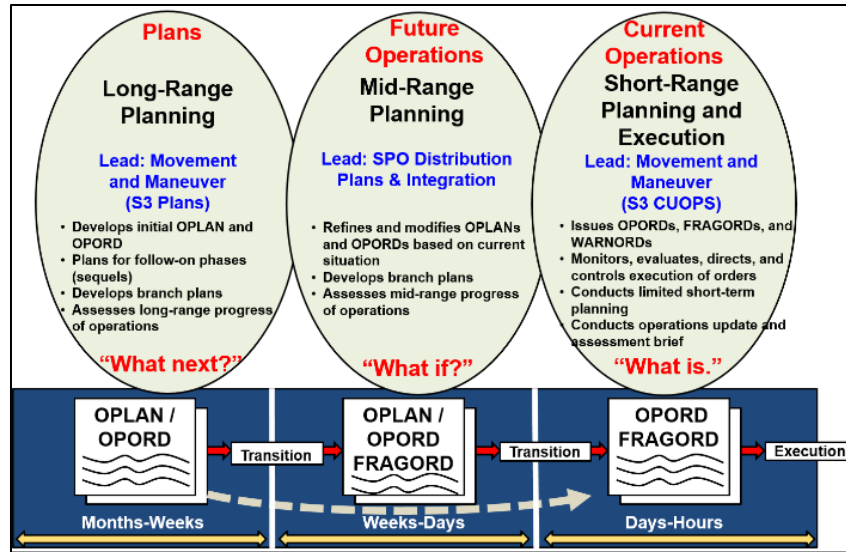


Figure 2. (ATP 4-93, Figure 4-2. Sustainment Brigade Integrating Cells)

SPO TOB's Movement Board. SPO's transportation operations branch (TOB) takes the lead for the second critical meeting in the sustainment critical path. The TOB determines the current capacity of the supply chain to deliver sustainment over the next 96 hours (ATP 4-16, para. 3-17). The board does not directly link its decisions with the DIB's distribution plan. Rather, the movement board balances available transportation capabilities with the commander's movement priorities (ATP 4-93, para. 1-78). The TOB provides its decisions to the DIB as an input to the DIB's second critical meeting, the distribution management board. (ATP 4-93, para. 1-78). Note that when the operational environment necessitates a compression of the SB staff's critical path, one option is to combine the LOGSYNCH with the movement board.

SPO DIB's Distribution Management Board (DMB). The DIB conducts the DMB. This is where the SPO marries the requirements of the draft distribution COA with the MOB's movement plan. Like the LOGSYNCH, the DMB agenda has two parts. First, the board assesses/adjusts pre-planned convoy movements for H-24 to H-48, and then it prepares new convoy movements for H-72 to H-96. Upon the board's conclusion, the DIB produces a draft fragmentary order (FRAGORD), and they pass it to CUOPS (Field Manual [FM] 6-0, para. 1-43). Finally, the DIB submits the new H-72 to H-96 movement requests to the division's transportation officer (DTO) as inputs into the division's daily movement board (ATP 3-91, para. 1-50). The DIB often utilizes a movement control team (MCT) to submit these requests to the DTO.

S3's OPS SYNCH Board. The critical path's final meeting is the current operations (CUOPS) S3 operations synchronization board (OPS SYNCH), and is arguably the most important event in the SB's critical path (ATP 4-93, para. 4-44). The S3 incorporates the DIB's distribution plan, the DTO's movement credits and march tables, and input from the other WfFs into a shared CUOPS common operating picture (COP). If the S3 determines that current conditions allow for the SPO's H-24 distribution plan to

go forward, the S3 produces a FRAGORD (FM 6-0, para. 1-59). The FRAGORD can also contain a WARNORD for convoys that will tentatively push out on H-48 hours. Figure 3 below provides a visual logic flow for the SPO's interaction with the S3's OPSYNCH board.

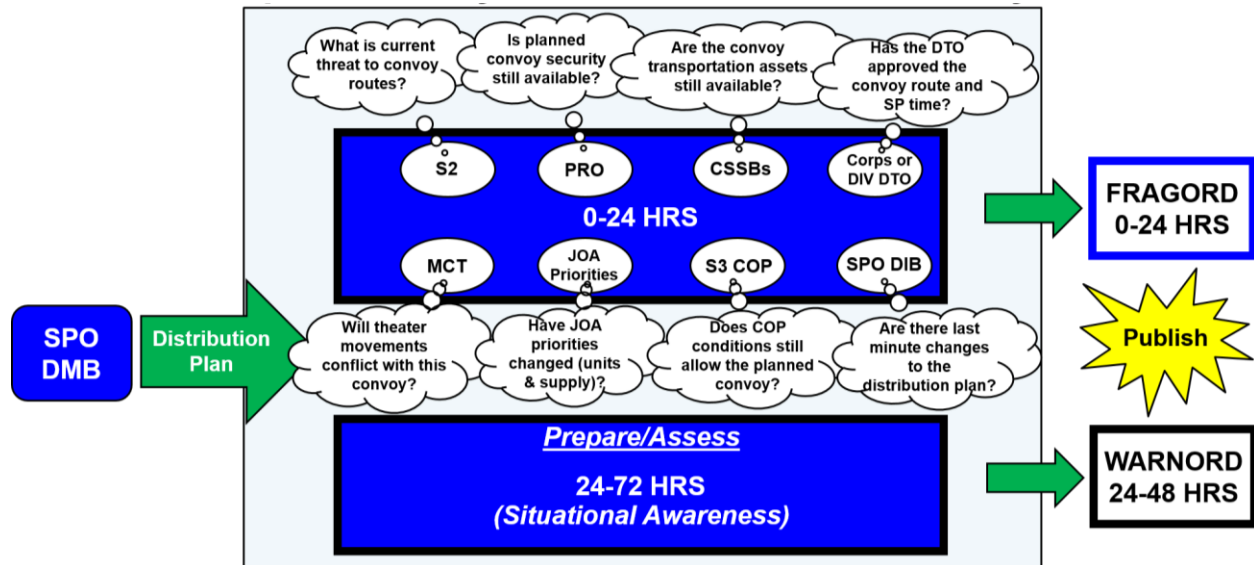


Figure 3. (SB OPSYNCH Board)

SPO DIB's Connection to CUOPS. The DIB has a role in CUOPS (as well as FUOPS). The DIB typically places personnel in the S3's current operations integration cell (COIC) where they serve as the link between the SPO and the S3. The DIB monitors current operations in the COIC and determines implications for their mid-range planning horizon (ATP 4-93, para. 4-45).

Conclusion. When the S3 produces the FRAGORD, the HQ's staff operations process has completed one full revolution, and it is ready to start again. The critical path that the HQs followed translated into a highly effective staff battle rhythm. The path was anticipatory. It met the commander's intent. It paid heed to unit priorities, supply priorities, and movement priorities. The critical path was flexible, allowing for multiple modifications along the way, and it even allowed the staff to combine meetings should the COP dictate it. Together, the SPO and the S3 can rest assured that the daily FRAGORD met the commander's intent of providing support and services to enable operational reach, ensure freedom of action, and prolonged endurance to Army forces.

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Ops Grp Sierra trains ESC and Sus BDE staffs within a Decisive Action Training Environment (DATE) against a near peer competitor.