

Brigade Special Troops Battalions

Part I: All the Way In

By Lieutenant Colonel Thomas H. Magness

Consider the case of the brigade special troops battalion (BSTB). There is no approved doctrine and no distinct approach to growing a leader for its ranks. No single branch currently owns it nor populates its leadership roles. Across the Army, it is considered a collection of “specialists” with no clear task and purpose—a battalion in search of a mission and a meaningful role within the brigade combat team (BCT). Few understand it. Fewer still have seen what happens when you unlock the vast potential that resides within the assemblage of this seemingly unrelated group of maneuver supporters.

Simply put...you must be “all the way in.” To really “get” the BSTB, you must fully embrace transformation and the new paradigms associated with the Army redesign. You cannot just dip your little toe in the water—you have to take off the harnesses, shed completely the old way of doing business, and fully immerse in the transformation “pool.” Doing so reveals this battalion as a truly powerful enabler of maneuver, *synchronizing* and *synergizing* effects across the brigade’s area of operations (AO), and *delivering* for its respective BCT in ways that are orders of magnitude greater than what was possible without it. More importantly, the BSTB is a battle-tested battalion that exists to address some of our most challenging combat missions, to include execution of intelligence and communications functions, assured mobility, reconstruction and essential services project management, and military police operations. It is a battalion whose success is directly linked to the success of its supported brigade. It is a battalion whose every leader and every Soldier had better, themselves, be all the way in.

What follows, then, is a collection of findings and observations that describe what “all the way in” might look like. It is a combination of lessons learned at the National Training Center and regular dialogue with BSTB commanders and leaders in various stages of the deployment cycle. This article reflects the growing body of knowledge and understanding about the capability of this powerful organization and the new operational paradigm that must exist to fully leverage it. Finally, I believe it reflects the vision of our Army leadership in creating modular, capabilities-based units that are able to fight and win on a full-spectrum battlefield. But to understand this vision...you *must* be all the way in!

Background

The decision to create a new BSTB was made after several...observations of the newly fielded Stryker brigade combat team (SBCT) revealed a need to bring the many separate, enabling combat support units under the control of one commander. The span of control in the SBCT organizational design proved to be too extensive for effective C2 [command and control] of these many enabling echelons. The BSTB organizational design allows the BCT commander...to concentrate [his] focus on the battle in all threat environments, without the added direct responsibilities that these small units require.¹

The Army recognized a challenge in its modular design with respect to the command and control of small (company and below) maneuver support units. The brigade commander needs to focus on fighting his respective battalions. The brigade staff identifies subordinate unit tasks, the completion of which will enable the accomplishment of the commander’s intent, while synchronizing and resourcing subordinate battalions for success. A brigade commander and his staff simply are not resourced—and frankly do not have the time or energy—to command and control, let alone resource, prepare, train, or provide administrative oversight to these disparate units, dozens of which may be present within a deployed BCT formation.

The nearly 40 BSTBs in the Army exist to help solve this problem. BSTBs *command* and *control* attached and organic units—period. They execute the tasks assigned to them. They leverage the full “team of teams” to accomplish the mission according to the BCT commander’s intent. They receive the tasks assigned to them by the brigade, translate the tasks into synchronized mission orders, and complete them in a way that adds value to the brigade.

What kind of missions? Generally the BSTB executes missions that extend across the BCT AO. These are missions that exceed the geographic boundaries of a maneuver task force and for which oversight and command and control responsibilities reside at the brigade level (i.e., the BSTB). These missions might include intelligence and communication operations, route reconnaissance and clearance, civil affairs missions, or essential services management—the execution of which generally requires the crossing of task force

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boundaries and often reaches across the full width and depth of the BCT AO.

Command: The authority and responsibility for effectively using available resources for planning the employment of, organizing, directing, coordinating, and controlling military forces for the accomplishment of assigned missions.

Control: The regulation of forces and other battlefield operating systems to accomplish the mission in accordance with the commander's intent.

FM 1-02, *Operational Terms and Graphics*

The New Paradigm

There is a new way of doing business, a new paradigm, consistent with being all the way in. Tasks that were formerly assigned directly by the BCT to each of its small maneuver support units are now formally assigned to the higher headquarters uniquely responsible for the execution of those tasks—the BSTB. All tasks are assigned by the brigade commander (through the S-3) to the BSTB. It is the responsibility of the BSTB to determine how best to leverage its specialized units to accomplish the mission and meet the commander's intent.

Implicit within this new paradigm is the understanding that commanders and specialized unit leaders do not “work for” staff officers. Gone are the stovepipes and shortcuts whereby BCT staff officers reach down into these small units and issue “fire missions.” Staff officers assign tasks to the BSTB. The BSTB commander and his staff translate these tasks into fully planned, synchronized, and resourced missions—and are held accountable for mission accomplishment!

Resistance to this new paradigm (What new organization or design does not come without its naysayers?) comes in two forms: The first is the concern that the BSTB introduces an additional layer of bureaucracy between specialized units and the brigade staffs assigning them tasks. On the contrary, the BSTB exists to translate the tasks into simple, executable mission orders while resourcing subordinates for success. More importantly, the BSTB implements necessary measures to prepare units to execute all tasks beyond the traditional capability of staff elements—and then monitors their completion. This concern is further alleviated by BSTB commanders who leverage warning orders, provide dedicated liaison officers, and encourage cross talk between staff sections (brigade – battalion) and between brigade staff elements and the specialized units under their command.

The second resistance to this new approach is from those who feel that the old way was working fine, negating the need for change. (They are **not** all the way in!) What they cannot possibly know (until they see it in action) is...compared to what? Compared to the deliverables possible when a *battalion*,

with all of its resources, is put on the mission for which we used to ask a staff section at one or two persons deep? Not even close. Compared to the synergy possible when a *battalion*, all the way in, focuses all of its resources on the planning, preparation, and execution of tasks to meet the brigade commander's intent? It is an order of magnitude difference.

BSTB Doctrinal Key Tasks

Key to accepting the premises implicit within the new paradigm is an understanding of the doctrinal tasks and functions now provided by the BSTB. These are the value-added functions that must be routinely provided to address the problems associated with the command and control of small units. They are among the limiting factors that prevent staff officers from being able to do more than assign tasks, and the type of deliverable for which the BSTB is now responsible. They are the critical details that are often the difference between good...and great.

- *Exercise command and control over BSTB units during the preparation and execution of BCT-directed missions.* BSTB commanders are held accountable for both.
- *Ensure that BSTB commanders and leaders conduct precombat inspections and rehearsals focused on the execution of assigned BCT tasks.* Think about this: Who performed these roles for small units before their assignment to the BSTB?

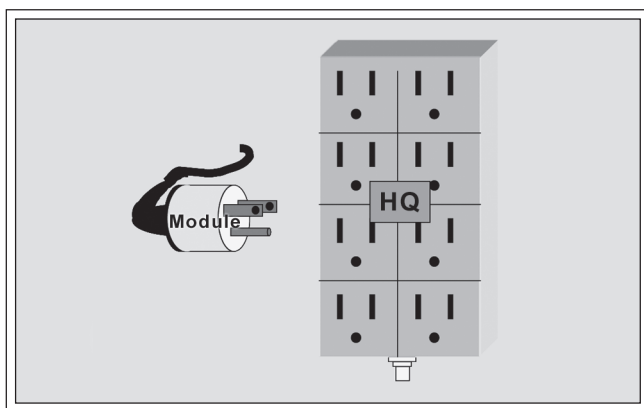
The BSTB is an integral component of the modularized BCT. I rely on them every day to lead my low-density unique units and keep their specialized equipment operational.

BCT Commander, 3d Infantry Division

- *Ensure that BSTB unit assets are positioned to execute their assigned tasks.* For the sake of clarification, this requirement is neither to determine the tasks nor to determine the required positioning. Those tasks are accomplished at the brigade staff level. Consistent with the new paradigm, the BSTB ensures that the tasks are accomplished in order to meet the BCT commander's intent.
- *Coordinate to ensure that combat service support, force health protection, and security are provided for BSTB organic and attached units positioned throughout the BCT AO.* The BSTB does not have the capability to resource every one of its subordinate units across the width and depth of the BCT AO. Its mission is to coordinate resources and, when required, to provide the resources themselves.
- *Coordinate or provide security for organic and attached units moving throughout the BCT AO.*² Small units cannot generally secure themselves. The BSTB is responsible for coordinating security through the supported unit or, if

required, providing the security itself. It's no surprise—there are no “security units” within the BSTB. The combined resources in the team of teams must work together to provide necessary security assets.

A critical function woven throughout each of these tasks is the requirement of the BSTB to capably address attachments and detachments. The capacity of the brigade to receive modules is directly related to the ability of the BSTB to serve as the “socket” for the incorporation of any number, form, and function of modular “plugs.” The BSTB must have adequate standing operating procedures (SOPs) to address the receipt of attachments—to include logistical, administrative, and tactical issues—in order to facilitate their rapid integration into BCT operations.



The final doctrinal role for the BSTB is perhaps the one upon which most BCT commanders rely—*perform roles as dictated by the BCT commander*. These are generally the missions that cross task force boundaries and extend across the full reach of the brigade's AO. Note the heavy *maneuver support* focus in these missions. They include (but are certainly not limited to) the following:

- *Command and control of detainee operations.* Current Army doctrine on detainee operations highlights the criticality of “green tab” leaders at every echelon of detention. BCTs often leverage the BSTB as a natural fit for this role. Who better than the higher headquarters for military police (detainee proponents) and military intelligence (interrogation experts) (i.e., the BSTB) to effectively oversee this vital mission?
- *Forward operating base (FOB) defense.* BSTBs either receive augmentation forces or coordinate between tenant units to provide all elements of base defense, command and control, and life support. This is a “current fight” extension of the rear area headquarters mission envisioned for this battalion during its original design. This critical mission must be planned, resourced, rehearsed, and executed incorporating all elements of base defense.
- *Route reconnaissance and clearance/assured mobility command and control.* BSTBs leverage the unique capabilities of subordinate military intelligence, military police, engineer, and explosive ordnance disposal units to

address threats to mobility such as improvised explosive devices (IEDs). This is clearly one of those “cross-boundary” issues in which the synergy of putting all enablers under one common headquarters (assigned the mission and provided with the resources) can have powerful results.

- *Reconstruction headquarters and essential services project management.* BCTs routinely rely on the BSTB (reorganized at the staff level for this mission) to provide oversight for critical infrastructure repairs. Not surprisingly, this mission often becomes the BSTB main effort and ties directly to most of the BCT operational priorities.

In-Theater Validation

BCT commanders continue to rely on their BSTB commanders for some of the brigade's most critical functions. In a recent, informal query of fourteen BSTB commanders, only three responded with battalion missions (specified or implied) that read anything like “force provider.” Most common among the respondents was service in the mission areas of base defense (8/14); detainee operations (8/14); and reconstruction/essential services (11/14). Interestingly, rather than force provider, BSTB units are assuming the form and/or function as “nonlethal effects task force,” “maneuver support task force,” “combined arms effects battalion,” and “nonlethal fires battalion.” True combat multipliers and value added, indeed.

The BSTB command team not only executed millions of dollars worth of reconstruction but also aggressively worked with media to get the message out. They offered me a headquarters that could focus on an area that influenced millions of people and influenced the core of the insurgency. They were an invaluable asset to this combat brigade. I wouldn't leave home without them.

BCT commander, 3d Infantry Division

Deployed commanders find that there is simply too much to do and too many critical functions that cross task force boundaries without the synchronization of effects made possible through the BSTB. The stakes are too high to ask small, over-tasked, brigade-level staff sections to *command and control* subordinate units. Successful execution is made possible by putting a battalion headquarters (a BSTB) on those things that require battalion-level resources and effort. Mission accomplishment and the best practices in-theater point to the value added, many times exponentially, of this approach.

Parting Shots

Some mistakenly view the BSTB as a large headquarters company, a force provider of trained and resourced specialized units back to the brigade for tasking and

employment. Listen...the Army does not centrally select battalion-level commanders and command sergeants major for those kinds of roles. And with a war going on...it certainly does not need them. That type of approach is not grounded in either combat training center or theater lessons learned and reverts back to the problem that Army leaders felt existed when they created the BSTB! This is a unit designed to “command and control attached and organic units” for missions that reach across the BCT AO.

One word appears repeatedly in any discussion about the BSTB: *execution*. The combining of units under a common headquarters must translate into results. The new paradigm must, in fact, be better. Separate units that were previously unfocused, unsynchronized, poorly resourced, and challenged during execution must now deliver. Simply put, the BSTB—like any other battalion—must accomplish its assigned missions.

Successful execution is made possible through leaders who create synergy. (See note at right.) The combination of maneuver support units that seemingly have nothing to do with each other (military intelligence, signal, military police, engineer, explosive ordnance disposal, civil affairs, chemical) must produce a total that is greater than the sum of its parts. Mathematically: $1+1+1>3$. The bulk of the missions provided

by BSTBs (reconstruction, assured mobility, detainee operations) are made possible by units that think outside of themselves, that knock down old stovepipes, and that work together for the common good. This is only made possible through branch-immaterial, selfless, team-centric thought and action. That is what being “all the way in” is really all about.



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The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or positions of the Army, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.

Endnotes

¹ Field Manual Interim (FMI) 3-90.61, *Brigade Troops Battalion Operations*. March 2005.

² Ibid.

Note: “Brigade Special Troops Battalions, Part II: Synergy” will be published in the October-December 2006 issue of *Engineer*.