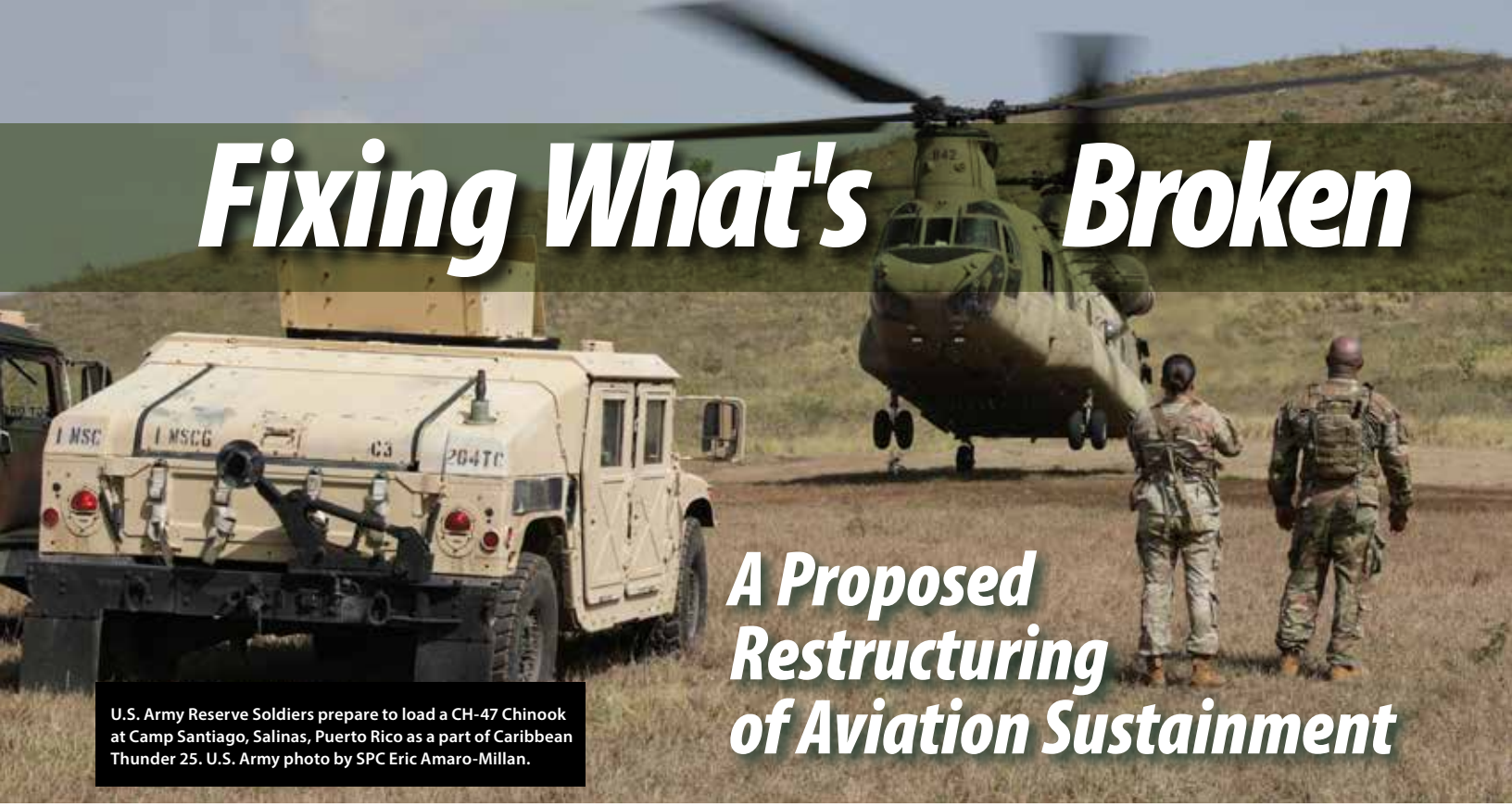
Fixing What's Broken

A Proposed Restructuring of Aviation Sustainment



U.S. Army Reserve Soldiers prepare to load a CH-47 Chinook at Camp Santiago, Salinas, Puerto Rico as a part of Caribbean Thunder 25. U.S. Army photo by SPC Eric Amaro-Millan.

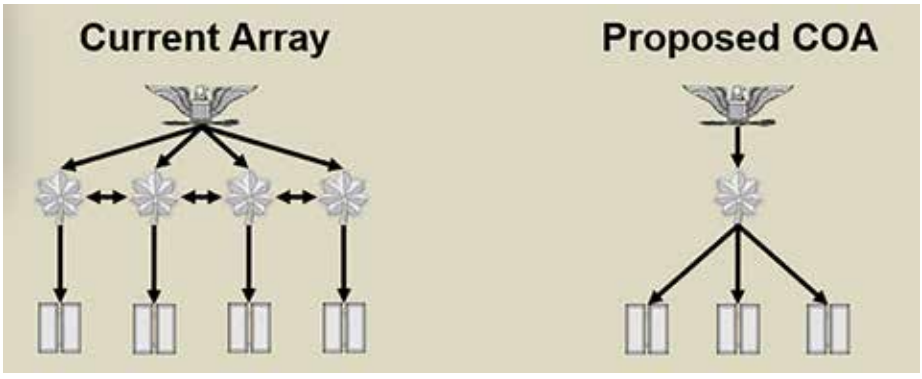
By CPT Gene S. Thagard, LTC Billy D. Blue, MAJ Oziel Rodriguezgamez, and CPT Coty M. Ruether

Imagine a modern battlefield with intense combat spanning the entire close area. The combat aviation brigade (CAB) is employed throughout the division's area of operations. The attack battalion disrupts an enemy advance in the east, while lift assets are preparing for a large-scale air assault, enabling the division to regain the initiative. Each battalion distributes its forward support company's (FSC) fuel assets to support its assigned mission. As operations begin, senior leaders are puzzled. Despite the brigade commander prioritizing the lift mission, the battalions deployed their forward arming and refueling points inefficiently and in close proximity, creating a potential hazard and hindering fuel availability as the air assault progresses. Sixteen AH-64Es, 15 UH-60Ms, and six CH-47Gs are airborne and now must adjust on the fly. Risk to force and mission dramatically increase due to preventable sustainment shortfalls.

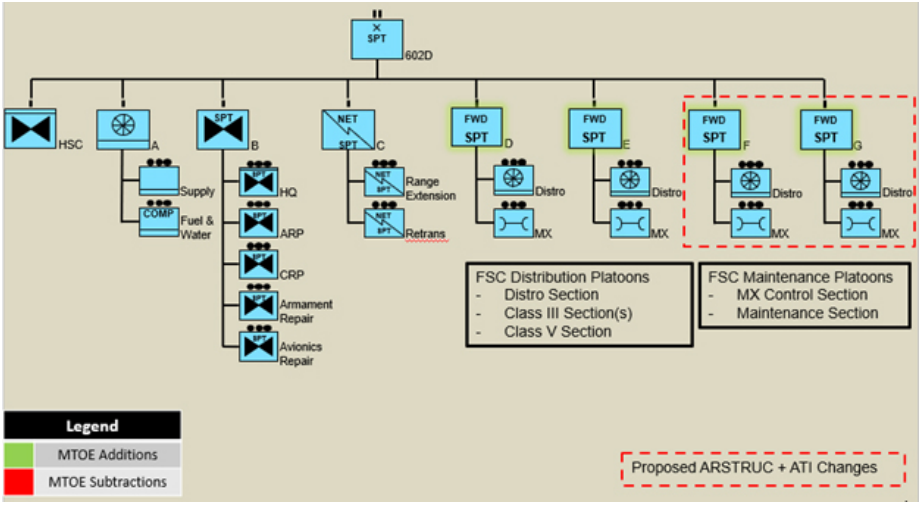
These risks mirror observations from a recent Warfighter Exercise conducted by the 8th Army, 2D Infantry Division (2 ID), and the 2D CAB (2 CAB). These sustainment hurdles consistently threaten operational success. In the 602D Aviation Support Battalion (ASB), we believe the greatest risk in large-scale combat operations (LSCO) is the requirement for simultaneous, complex operations without centralized sustainment command and control. This results in inefficient and ineffective resource allocation that is misaligned with the CAB commander's priorities. At its core, this is an organizational issue depicted in Graphic 1.

In the CAB's current construct, bureaucratic friction arises when a CAB commander expresses sustainment priorities requiring collaboration across FSCs. Battalion commanders must figure out how to meet the intent while accomplishing their own vital mission. A collective action problem is at play: Who will relinquish sustainment capabilities to support a separate mission and potentially jeopardize their own? How will this be coordinated across the dispersed battalion tactical assembly areas required in LSCO? Collective sustainment in LSCO is a public good, and mismanagement carries significant consequences.

Recent articles in *The Aviation Digest* support this assessment. The October–December 2024 issue highlighted the need for rapid sustainment task organization and contended "the current MTOE [modified table of organization and equipment] for the sustainment units within the CAB is clearly designed to support battalion-level operations,



Graphic 1. Current vs. proposed array (Thagard et al., 2025a).



Graphic 2. Phase I example (Thagard et al., 2025b).

not CAB-level efforts" (Sevigny & Chandler, 2024, p. 32). Another article in the same issue detailed sustainment shortcomings during National Training Center Rotation 24-03, highlighting consistent issues with command and control of logistical distribution, as well as commenting on the complications of redirecting assets for independently planned missions (Westrick et al., 2024). An author in the January-March 2025 issue criticized the convoluted organization of sustainment assets in the CAB and the resultant challenges to manning and training (Turner, 2025).

The common thread is a call to consolidate sustainment assets under the ASB, often in the likeness of a brigade support battalion (BSB). These calls for change demand action.

In this article, we offer a two-phase solution to address aviation's sustainment shortcomings and maximize effectiveness through reorganization. Phase I consolidates the FSCs into the ASB under the BSB model. This step solves many of the CAB's LSCO sustainment problems. Yet, this step alone is insufficient and necessitates a Phase II, in which assets are redistributed within the ASB by sustainment function. This consolidation of specialties will enhance training and command and control.

Phase I

Phase I is a widely accepted solution. It offers benefits in task organization, training, and resource management.

By simply consolidating all sustainment assets under the ASB, the brigade commander can now prioritize missions and entrust sustainment assets will be allocated accordingly via the ASB commander. Most importantly, this phase can be executed rapidly (Graphic 2).

Phase I provides a valuable adaptation period as the FSCs integrate into the ASB, allowing for refinement of relationships, systems, and processes. This transition enables experimentation with new methods while leveraging the proven structure of the BSB. The BSB model, which has been effective in the Army for more than 20 years, minimizes risk and maximizes the potential for improved sustainment capabilities in the CAB during this period of change.

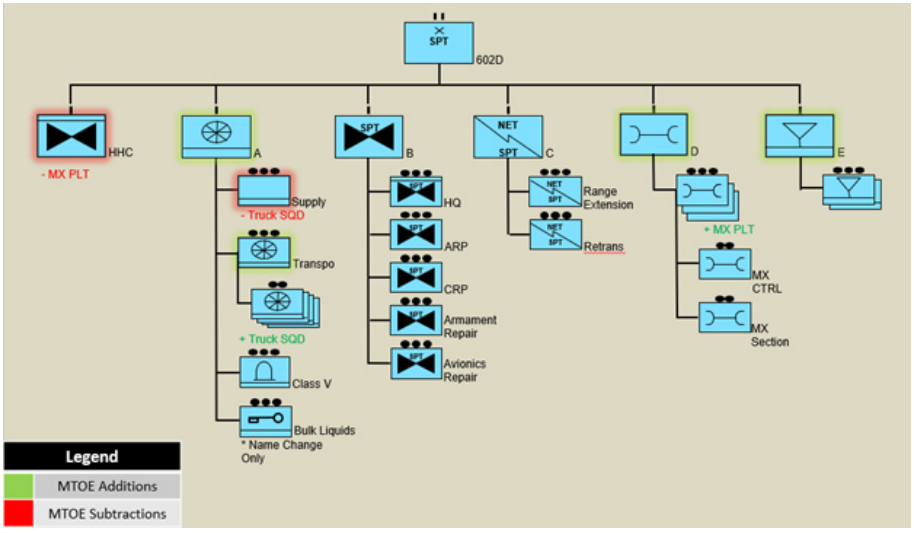
However, simply folding the FSCs under the ASB does not solve some of the underlying issues. A support company—a jumble of fueling, maintenance, and distribution capabilities—is Frankenstein's monster. It is complex, inefficient, and built for battalion-level operations. If the ASB is to truly own the CAB's sustainment mission, can we afford to maintain a fragmented structure with fueling, maintenance, and distribution capabilities dispersed across five different companies? Is there a better way?

Phase II

We argue a more effective approach is reorganizing sustainment personnel and equipment by function and specialty, thus creating a cleaner and more efficient ASB command structure. Our proposal is outlined in Graphic 3.

By realigning personnel and equipment, we trade breadth for depth and create companies with a narrow sustainment focus. Company Alpha owns the CAB's distribution practice, Company Delta owns ground maintenance, and Company Echo owns refueling. Phase II significantly enhances collective training, flexibility, and modularity within the CAB.

Company Alpha becomes the CAB's distribution workhorse. It manages distribution across all classes of supply (sans Class III [petroleum, oils, and lubricants]). The supply platoon maintains supply support activity operations (i.e., receiving, managing, storing, and issuing all classes of supply (sans Class I (W) [water]), II [general support items], V



Graphic 3. Phase II example (Thagard et al., 2025c).

[ammunition], and VIII [medical materiel/medical repair]). The transportation platoon combines distribution platoons from each FSC and the truck squad originally found in the supply platoon. The Class V platoon owns the reception, management, storage, and issue of the CAB's ammunition. Finally, the bulk liquids platoon retains both its structure and mission.

Companies Bravo and Charlie both maintain their current mission, composition, and structure.

The new Company Delta consolidates ground maintenance by combining the ground maintenance platoons from each FSC and the ASB's headquarters support company. The current platoon format is maintained to enable direct support to battalions and facilitate preventative, scheduled, and unscheduled maintenance. However, each battalion will still own its own rolling stock fleet.

Finally, Company Echo becomes a fueling powerhouse, with two platoons of 92F petroleum supply specialists. This consolidation enables a comprehensive and focused training plan that develops mastery at refueling any aircraft by any method. Tasking a single commander with preparing the CAB's 92Fs for LSCO ensures our refuelers are adaptable experts in, perhaps, LSCO's most important sustainment function.

This new structure offers a streamlined command, increased focus and proficiency, and the modular capability to match sustainment assets to specific requirements. This restructuring creates a vertically integrated ASB, fully prepared to meet the CAB's sustainment demands in LSCO.

Risks to Mission

While the benefits of reorganization outweigh the risks, several areas will require special attention.

First is the need for new garrison systems and processes. Structural changes may require relationship changes. Do direct support relationships continue in garrison, or do battalions submit requests through the support operations (SPO) section? Do refueling platoons rotate between a "on-off" cycle of garrison fueling support and training exercise support? How do we implement changes without threatening readiness? Experimentation and a phased approach will be crucial.

The second risk is battlefield geometry. How will the ASB and CAB organize in its area of responsibility and distribute its sustainment assets within that space? What risk does consolidation pose to mobility and survivability? While these questions remain, we should not let uncertainty prevent innovation. We cannot retreat to the comfortable sanctuary of a known, yet deficient, solution. We must experiment and iterate because while different CABs and installations *may* require different solutions, different theaters will *certainly* require different solutions. Accordingly, our two-phase solution offers an advantage: heightened focus. Consolidation by sustainment function allows commanders to focus on solving one sustainment problem at a time.

Looking Ahead

As outlined in the *Army Transformation Initiative*, GEN Randy George and Secretary Daniel Driscoll challenge us "to maintain our edge on the battlefield" by leaning into changes that "transform [us] to a leaner, more lethal force by adapting how we fight, train, organize, and buy equipment" (Driscoll & George, 2025). We strongly believe this organizational change definitively improves our ability to train sustainment, creates a more coherent sustainment command structure, and finally, postures aviation sustainment to meet the speed and scale of LSCO. There may be uncertainties; however, these pale in comparison to the risks posed by remaining aligned with a structure we are confident no longer serves its mission. As GEN George and Secretary Driscoll preach, "adaptation is no longer an advantage—it's a requirement for survival" (Driscoll & George, 2025). Aviation sustainment must adapt, for the risk is too great to fail.

Biographies:

CPT Gene Thagard is an AH-64E pilot currently serving as Production Control Officer-In-Charge (OIC) for Company B, 602D ASB, 2 CAB. His prior assignments include Gray Eagle Executive Officer (XO) and Platoon Leader for Company B, 1-101 Aviation Regiment, headquartered at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

LTC Billy Blue, III is the Commander of 602D ASB, assigned to the 2 CAB forward deployed in the Republic of Korea. His prior assignments include serving as a Production Control Officer, Aviation Maintenance Company Commander, Brigade Assistant Operations Planner (AS3), Brigade AS3, Naval War College Student, General Support Aviation Battalion (GSAB) S3, GSAB XO, and North Atlantic Treaty Organization Mission Command Training Program Lead Evaluator.

MAJ Oziel Rodriguezgamez is a 90A Logistics Officer currently serving as the SPO for 2 CAB. His prior assignment includes Battalion XO for 602D ASB, Supply and Services OIC for 2D ID G4 in U.S. Army Garrison-Humphreys, South Korea; Observer Coach/Trainer with 2-395 BSB, 1st Army Division West; and Company Commander for Echo FSC with 4-2 Attack Battalion, 2 CAB.

CPT Coty Ruether is a Logistics Officer currently serving as the Company Commander for Company A, 602D ASB, 2 CAB. He previously served as the 2 CAB SPO Ammunition Officer, as well as the 8th Army G4 Plans and Exercises Planner as the XO for Company A, 3D BSB, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 3D ID.

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