

Objective Supply Capability

by Major James C. Bates and Gregory W. Kropp

The objective supply capability (OSC), fielded by the Army in 1992, is an important technological advance that offers the supply community a significant increase in responsiveness of the supply system. OSC uses a centralized computer data base known as the *gateway* to store current asset records for most supply support activities (SSA's) in the Army. The gateway, located in St. Louis, Missouri, tracks items in stock and the number on hand at each SSA. OSC does not replace the current standard Army management information systems (STAMIS); instead, it augments these supply systems and improves their responsiveness.

The concept for OSC was developed in 1987 by Jeffrey Crisci and Gregory Kropp, co-author of this article, at the Strategic Logistics Agency (SLA) in Alexandria, Virginia, in an effort to improve supply responsiveness. (At that time, SLA was a staff support agency of the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics, Department of the Army. Its functions have now been combined with those of the Logistics Evaluation Agency, New Cumberland Army Depot, Pennsylvania, and the new activity has been designated the Logistics Integration Agency.)

According to the OSC Commander's Guide, the objectives of OSC are to—

- Reduce the order segment of the order and shipping time.
- Provide for lateral distribution of assets.
- Provide visibility of assets within a geographical area.
- Provide near real-time status to the user.
- Improve automation and communications.
- Create the image of a single supply system.

Current STAMIS supply software, such as the standard Army retail supply system (SARSS), direct support unit standard supply system (DS4), and standard Army intermediate level supply system (SAILS), depends on information batch-processing. Generally, each of these

STAMIS programs takes at least 1 day to process a batch of information. The STAMIS software is based strictly on organizational supply hierarchy. If a divisional unit needs a repair part, it sends a request to its forward support battalion (FSB). If the FSB does not have the part, the FSB contacts its main support battalion (MSB). If the MSB does not have the part, it relays the request through the division materiel management center to its corps support command.

To access the new OSC, company-level units use the unit-level logistics system (ULLS), and direct support-level units use the standard Army maintenance system (the unit- and shop-level version known as SAMS-1). The ULLS and SAMS-1 operators bypass SARSS, DS4, and SAILS automation and send their supply requests, usually once a day, through a modem to St. Louis, where the gateway computer processes them. (Those SSA's that have received the new standard Army retail supply system-objective [SARSS-O] software have not been linked to the gateway yet but will be able to interface soon with a program currently being written.)

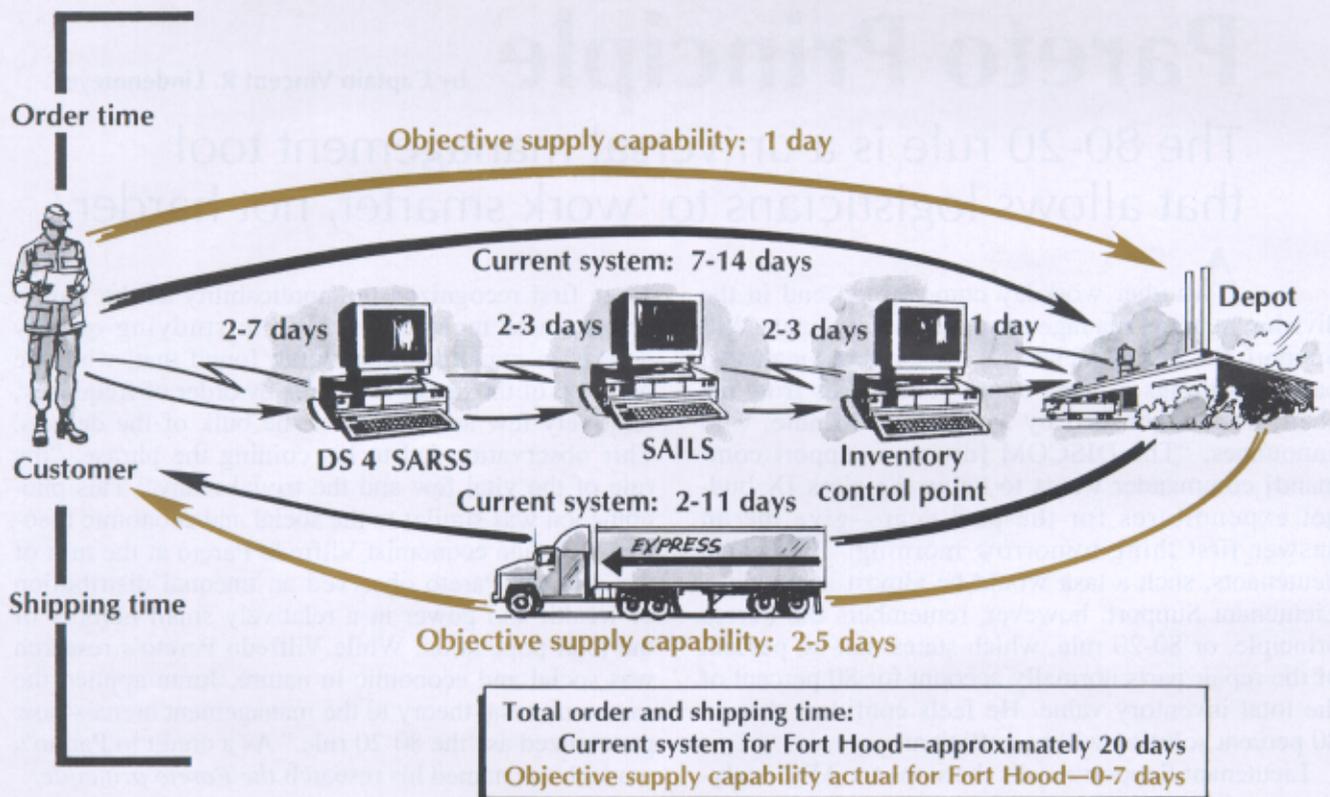
The requisitioner receives a near real-time response from the gateway (17 seconds on average) on whether the item is available at the SSA's in the surrounding area. Based on organizational and geographical considerations, parameters in the gateway establish which units are supported by each SSA.

For each repair part request, the gateway provides one of the following responses—

- "The item is in your normal supply support chain; go there to obtain it."
- "The item is not in your normal supply support chain, but it is available at another SSA located near your unit." (In this case, the gateway computer would instruct that SSA to produce a materiel release order authorizing transfer of the part to the requesting unit.)
- "The item is currently not available at an SSA in your area." (In this case, the gateway would pass the requisition to the wholesale item manager.)

Before OSC, a requester wouldn't know for days if his SSA had the part unless he hand-carried his request to the SSA, nor would he be able to get the part from an SSA outside of the established supply chain of support. Without access to a centralized data base, a nondivisional SSA located in the same vicinity as the requesting unit would not be tasked to provide the part even if it had it on hand. Using earlier supply systems software, it could have taken weeks for a requisition for a part unavailable at a nearby SSA to be submitted to the wholesale supply system.

With OSC, units are able to get parts from all the SSA's within a specified geographical area regardless of the existing supply chain of support. A unit using OSC receives almost immediate feedback on the



□ **Comparison of flows between current system and objective supply capability**

desired part's availability. The requester knows quickly if the part is available at his supporting SSA or at another SSA nearby. If the part is not available, a repair part request is submitted to the wholesale level the same day.

OSC and the SSA computer systems communicate data on a daily basis. The SSA computers inform OSC about their stockage levels, and the gateway updates the SSA's computers on requisitions processed outside of the normal supply chain.

The near real-time feature of OSC allows soldiers operating the ULLS and SAMS-1 computers to receive editing feedback at the same time their data are being transmitted. The gateway informs the soldiers of duplicate requisition numbers, invalid stock numbers, invalid unit-of-issue codes, and dollar thresholds, and tells them if an item must be procured locally. Without OSC, a soldier would not know that some of his requisitions were invalid until after a day or two of careful analysis of numerous coded reports.

OSC has decreased the time a unit must wait to receive a nonstocked item (order and shipping time) by nearly 2 weeks. The chart above compares requisition flow at Fort Hood, Texas, with and without OSC. With OSC, a customer can submit a requisition directly to the depot in as little as 1 day. Without OSC, the customer had to submit his requisition to SARSS and DS4, which took as long as 7 days. Another 7 days

were required to send the requisition through SAILS to the inventory control point (ICP) and on to the depot.

Although there is no improvement in the time required to actually ship the item, OSC reduces the "order" portion of order and shipping time by up to 14 days. The improved responsiveness of the supply system and the resulting enhanced effectiveness of the soldiers on the battlefield have proven OSC a remarkable success.

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