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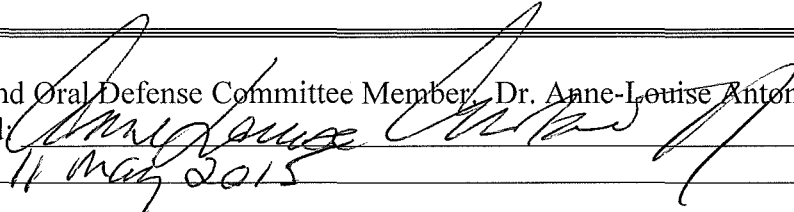
**Rediscovering the Role of Logistics as a Critical Element of Operational Art:
Resolving the Current Dilemma Facing Marine Corps Logisticians**

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OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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Executive Summary

Title: Rediscovering the Role of Logistics as a Critical Element of Operational Art: Resolving the Current Dilemma Facing Marine Corps Logisticians

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Thesis: Accustomed to the mature, land-based and tactically-focused operating environment of the past dozen or more years, the Marine Corps must increase the breadth of logistics planners capable of employing the full range of logistics capabilities in support of expeditionary operations and reduce the complexities of expeditionary logistics coordination.

Discussion: In the past decade or more, there is a large population of Marine Corps logisticians who have had multiple deployments to both Iraq and Afghanistan. The demand and immediacy in which units were required to composite, train, and deploy to those areas of conflict required a mature end-to-end logistics architecture. Though the mature logistics system in place enabled tactical success on the battlefield, it risks the prospect of an institutional void of logisticians unexposed to the intricacies in coordinating the larger spectrum of logistics. Illustrating that void in a historical framework of Napoleon's experience in 1812 against the Russians, the British experience in 1982 against the Argentineans, and the Soviet experience in their development of operational art provides a starting point in addressing this dilemma. Furthermore, this dilemma facing Marine Corps logisticians is troubling when challenged with the operational complexities depicted within *Expeditionary Force-21*.

Conclusion: Resolving the current dilemma facing Marine Corps logisticians is twofold. First, logisticians must refocus on expeditionary, maritime, operational logistics planning. Second, the Marine Corps must capitalize on geographically positioning logistics enablers who are capable of bridging the tactical and operational levels of logistics in support of their units. The Marine Corps, through agencies such as the Marine Corps Logistics Operations Group, has made great headway in addressing the first focus area, just as 2nd Marine Logistics Group has done addressing the second. However, the Marine Corps must do more. Planners must reconnect with the theory of operational art so as to influence full awareness of the need for operational logistics capabilities; increase the frequency of wargaming emerging logistics concepts in support of large scale exercises; and build upon the Distribution Liaison Cell concept to make it fully capable of meeting the needs of a flexible, mobile, dynamic force meeting 21st century challenges of highly distributed, yet rapidly aggregated operations within a theater and around the globe.

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Preface

The long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have created the prospect of an institutional void of Marine Corps logisticians unexposed to the complexities of supporting forces in austere, expeditionary environments. The mature logistics infrastructure that has supported the long wars has enabled Marine Corps logisticians to excel at the tactical level of support, but it has also allowed their skills to atrophy in planning the broader spectrum of logistics. As the Marine Corps re-focuses its efforts towards supporting the concepts within *Expeditionary Force-21*, the role of logistics in sustaining those concepts is critical.

I became interested in this topic following my second tour with a Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU). I learned that supporting units such as the MEU required extensive knowledge and forethought in coordinating inter-theater, Joint, and multi-national logistics support in sustaining operations abroad. Additionally, the experiences I gained with the MEU made me appreciate the importance of logistics in operational planning.

The value in this research illustrates the need for Marine Corps logisticians to refocus on the topic of logistics as a critical element of operational art in supporting future war. The time and space needed to establish a mature operating environment is not likely to resurface in the 21st century because conflict in multiple theaters is a possibility. Likewise, the rapid onset of global conflict will not afford the time to re-learn the art of operational logistics planning.

I want to thank Dr. Anne-Louise Antonoff for her undivided attention in guiding me through this project. Her mentorship and patience has allowed me to stay focused and energetic even through tremendous personal hardship with the loss of my mother to cancer midway through the academic year. Greatest thanks and praise to my wife, Lesa, and my daughter, Emma, for their loving support.

Introduction

As the United States Marine Corps redirects its attention to the Asia-Pacific and its expeditionary roots, the Marine Corps logistics community faces a dilemma. Accustomed to the mature, land-based and tactically-focused operating environment of the past dozen or more years, Marine Corps logistics planners must turn back to expeditionary, maritime, operational logistics planning. Yet mid- and senior level logistics planners who might normally guide younger ranks in the necessary skills have themselves either not developed those skills or have allowed them to atrophy. Mature operating environments have enabled tactical success in supporting the war fighter, but have also obviated the need for coordinating the larger spectrum of logistics in support of operations in austere conditions. This dilemma facing Marine Corps logisticians is troubling when challenged with the operational complexities depicted within *Expeditionary Force-21*. In resolving this dilemma, the Marine Corps must increase the breadth of logistics planners capable of employing the full range of logistics capabilities in support of expeditionary operations and reduce the complexities of expeditionary logistics coordination.

Operational Logistics: A Critical Requirement in Support of Expeditionary Operations

At the outset of this analysis it is appropriate to illustrate the defining characteristics of expeditionary operations and the role of operational logisticians because it assists in reviving the fundamental skill set necessary in overcoming the dilemma facing Marine Corps logisticians.

According to Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication³, *Expeditionary Operations*,

The defining characteristic of expeditionary operations is the projection of force into a foreign setting. By definition, an expedition thus involves the deployment of military forces to the scene of crisis or conflict and their requisite support some significant distance from their home bases...Logistics, the movement and maintenance of forces-the “mounting” of the expedition-is thus a central consideration in the conduct of expeditionary operations.¹

The long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have severely narrowed the breadth of logisticians exposed to the complexities in planning for and supporting expeditionary operations. The demand and immediacy in which units were required to composite, train, and deploy to those areas of conflict necessitated a mature end-to-end logistics architecture. Furthermore, the mature logistics infrastructure narrowed the requirement for logisticians to coordinate the larger spectrum of logistics planning needed for true expeditionary operations.

The skill set needed in coordinating the larger spectrum of logistics lie within the operational level. Operational logisticians, defined by Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 4-12, *Operational Logistics*,

Coordinate the apportionment, allocation, and distribution of resources within theater. They coordinate closely with tactical operators to identify theater shortfalls and communicate these shortfalls to the appropriate theater or strategic source and/or ration supplies to support operational priorities.²

Though the overall responsibility in planning, coordinating, and supervising operational logistics matters resides at the force provider level (depending on the task organization), the requirement generator (using unit) must possess the requisite skills to leverage logistics at the operational level.³ The availability of logisticians capable of coordinating at the operational level, which is becoming more of a need due to increased deployments of smaller and disaggregated units, is an absolute requirement in supporting emerging concepts such as those depicted in *Expeditionary Force-21*.

Analysis Roadmap

In tackling the overall problem facing the Marine Corps logistics community as explained in the introduction, this analysis further dissects the contemporary root causes that form the current dilemma, and then nests the problem within historical context. The historical relevance of the current dilemma reveals the evolution of logistics as an element of operational art and

establishes the case for what it means and why it matters for mitigating potential logistical inadequacies for the success or failure of *Expeditionary Force 21*. Without a sound operational logistical concept at its core, that capstone concept for the Marine Corps cannot succeed. It is from that point that a solution to the current dilemma emerges.

Root Causes that Form the Current Dilemma

Beginning in 2003, changing national strategic priorities coupled with personnel requirements to meet theater demands from United States Central Command caused a paradigm shift within the Marine Corps. The urgency of the need for mass deployment over time sent a powerful demand signal across the institution, which had a favorable effect on tactical level training and education. From a force management, training, and readiness perspective, the Marine Corps diligently focused on preparing units for tactical level operations. Due to the focus on tactical level readiness, however, the logistics community suffered efficiency loss in its ability to coordinate logistics across the wider spectrum.

The first noticeable impact on the logistics community began when the Marine Corps transitioned the capstone pre-deployment requirement from the one set forth within the Combined Arms Exercise (CAX) to Mojave Viper, held aboard the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC) at Twentynine Palms, California. From an operational perspective, prior to the onset of Mojave Viper, CAX demanded that units perform force deployment and sustainment planning. Units stationed on the East Coast, for example, mobilized for CAX utilizing a Time Phased Force Deployment Data model, coordinated with U.S. Transportation Command entities via the (then called) Force Movement Control Center (FMCC) for trans-continental rail and surface transportation of vehicles and other equipment, and coordinated for both tactical and commercial airlift. Additionally, units were required to pre-plan for the

requisite classes of supply at the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) and service provider levels, which included: packaged operational rations, fuel, construction materials, ammunition, repair parts, and major end items. As equipment and personnel traversed the country consolidating at MCAGCC, planners at and above the battalion level planned for and coordinated supporting concepts, just as they would while deployed in an expeditionary environment. The supporting concepts included making changes to their supply sourcing logic, managing cargo routing and expediting, as well as planning a distribution network that efficiently bridged the operational and tactical levels. This arduous planning process not only forced Marine logisticians to coordinate at all levels within the Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF), but also introduced a wide set of logisticians to the operational levels of logistics coordination.

As logistics preparation and training shifted to the Mojave Viper model, much of the operational considerations for supply, theater level transportation, and distribution were replaced with an “event in a box” model training concept. This shift in concept was driven by a few factors that included deployment training tempo, cost efficiency, and an institutional demand for excellence at the tactical level of employment in the areas of command and control, tactical level distribution, force protection, counter improvised explosive device mitigation, and basic fire and maneuver. Simultaneous with the shift in the pre-deployment training model was the maturation of the logistics infrastructure within both Afghanistan and Iraq. Operational level enablers, such as the US Army’s Theater Sustainment Command(s), along with various ad hoc elements from the Marine Corps Logistics Command, and other joint logistics agencies dispersed within these theaters, thereby alleviating many of the operational burdens Marine logisticians would normally face in an expeditionary environment. In light of this dilemma it is paramount that Marine Corps

logisticians refocus on the skills necessary to regain competency with expeditionary, maritime, and operational logistics planning.

Logistics as an Element of Operational Art: Practice and Theory

The following two abbreviated historical cases provide a theoretical framework for this analysis and nest the current dilemma within historical context. Napoleon's 1812 Russian Campaign when juxtaposed with the 1982 Falklands War, otherwise known as Operation CORPORATE, illustrate the spectrum of extreme consequences in logistics unpreparedness and the criticality of logistics capacity in sustaining expeditionary operations. The ensuing discussion of interwar Soviet operational theory ties the lessons learned together in revealing the evolution of logistics as an element of operational art. Building on the US doctrinal definition offered above, this discussion establishes a broader context for understanding what operational logistics means and why it matters.

Napoleon's 1812 Russian Campaign

Up until the 1812 Russian Campaign, Napoleon's concept of supporting his Grand Army heavily relied upon foraging and less upon robust logistics trains tied to fixed magazines. This strategic shift in supplying the army was ambitious for the time, yet it proved effective during the French Revolution as early as 1794 with the campaigns led by Pichegru and Jourdan.⁴ The practice of foraging allowed Napoleon's army to break free from fixed areas of support, which increased its speed and ability to maneuver. Though this method in sustaining the Grand Army proved efficient in many ways, it negated French army commissariats (supply officers) from the arduous responsibility of developing operational concepts of support, which caused their skills to atrophy. Furthermore, repeated success of Napoleon's campaigns leading up to his invasion of Russia gave both him and his commissariats a false sense of security.⁵

In planning for the Russian campaign, Napoleon recognized that the terrain and availability of resources needed to supply the French Army required him to reinstate the practice of relying upon the old magazine and train system of support.⁶ In recognizing the deficiency in his logistics support architecture, Napoleon invested an enormous amount of effort in arranging a network of magazines, procuring draft horses, wagons, and supplies to sustain his 449,000 man army for his expedition east towards Moscow.⁷ Napoleon clearly placed a tremendous amount of effort in establishing the logistics framework for the expedition east, but the logistics support system he created failed in action. For example, at the outset of the expedition, heavy rain affected both wagon transports and the surrounding fodder, which caused an immediate separation between the infantry and their logistics support. Napoleon was unwilling to reduce the operational gains he had made at the sacrifice of his logistics trains, which further exposed his rear leaving it vulnerable to attack by the Russian Cossacks.⁸ Eventually the entire logistics distribution system proved completely inadequate, which forced the Grand Army back to living off the land. The situation eventually forced the army to retreat from Moscow following a devastating winter, and it cost the French forces thousands of lives.⁹ Had Napoleon addressed the inefficiencies of his supply system and recognized the critical role logistics has in operational sustainment, the French Army would not have experienced such devastating losses.

1982 Falklands War (Operation CORPORATE)

The 1982 Falklands War is an interesting case study when analyzed from an operational logistics perspective because it illustrates contemporary issues related to expeditionary operational planning, specifically lessons learned in distribution planning and the consequences of logistics unpreparedness, as was the case for the British Army's 5th Infantry Brigade.

The Falklands War, which occurred between April 2nd and June 14th, 1982, was a British initiated response to re-take the territory seized by the Argentines. The 8,000-mile distance between the British mainland and the Falklands Islands presented an enormous challenge to Britain's operational reach capability mainly due to the fact that its main effort defense commitment to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), coupled with neighboring country agreements in defense support, no longer required a robust long-range sustainment capability as it once needed during World War II through the end of the 1960s.¹⁰ This reduction in operational reach over time proved to be institutionally damaging in responding to a non-NATO contingency. Furthermore, the lack in operational reach affected the institutional focus in preparing for and sustaining expeditionary operations. The lessons learned in logistics distribution planning and execution as experienced at Ascension Island as well the cognitive dissonance demonstrated by Britain's 5th Infantry Brigade bring to light two relevant issues Marine Corps logisticians face today.

Distribution planning and execution in support of expeditionary operations are arguably two of the most important skills necessary in sustaining forces abroad. Not only does the action of distribution require logisticians to conduct a thorough physical network analysis, at the tactical and operational levels, it also requires the requisite administrative routing actions along with an adequate, tailored support structure in place to facilitate distribution operations. The hasty nature in which Task Force 317 was composited and deployed, coupled with an understaffed and quickly overwhelmed intermediate logistics base at Ascension Island, illustrated a chaotic logistics environment as well an obvious disconnect with senior leadership in the operational logistics considerations that must be in place in supporting expeditionary operations. Compounding the issues at Ascension Island was that many of the ships that departed the

mainland were loaded administratively vice combat loaded and under prepared, which overwhelmed the understaffed Naval Party at the island.¹¹ As a result, the Naval Party aboard the island did its best to route the needed stores to the correct ship, but most of the supplies were not properly marked and, as explained by Julian Thompson in his book, *The Lifeblood of War: Logistics in Armed Conflict*, the “chaotic logistical practices lead to a piratical, devil-take-the-hindmost attitude, which in turn results in wasted effort.”¹²

In addressing the need to re-configure the administrative loads to reflect the projected ground scheme of maneuver, essentially marrying up capability sets afloat, there was not an adequate port facility at Ascension Island. Instead, this action took place while the ships were at anchor in what Thompson describes a “ceaseless mid-Atlantic swell...floating ‘parks’ of vehicles and stores on Mexeflotes could be seen, bobbing in the swell, while they awaited their turn to come to the ship, or ships, to deliver their loads, and take more.”¹³ The time spent reconfiguring at sea took away time for rehearsals for which the embarked force, having trained primarily for conventional warfare supported by a land based logistics structure, badly needed.¹⁴

The disconnect between operational planning and logistics preparedness continued and was accentuated by the arrival of the 5th Infantry Brigade which, as Thompson describes, fell victim to “a severe case of cognitive dissonance.”¹⁵ Cognitive dissonance, in the case of the 5th Infantry Brigade, resonated from false political and senior military assumptions as to the intended employment of the brigade as well from an overzealous assumption that the situation facing the British was one that was, as Thompson explains, “a few dissidents equipped with small arms” as in the “Brush-fire wars” and operations in Northern Ireland had presented in recent history.¹⁶ Additionally, these types of limited, tactically focused and land based operations negated operational logistics concerns and brought with them “false logistic

lessons.”¹⁷ As a result, and to no surprise, the 5th Infantry Brigade was ill equipped having only administratively loaded supplies and personnel without consideration for ground mobility and logistics distribution assets.¹⁸ The logistics burden was then placed on the Commando Logistics Regiment who had planned to only support one brigade, but ended up supporting two that numbered 9,000 troops.¹⁹ Not only was the 5th Infantry Brigade unprepared, the entire operation suffered logistically in its ability to maneuver and sustain itself with ammunition, fuel, and subsistence.

The Evolution of Logistics as an Element of Soviet Operational Art

As in so much of the doctrinal development of the US military in the last decades of the twentieth century, the nature and significance of logistics within operational art becomes clearest when one considers the path breaking work done by the Soviet military in the early and mid-twentieth century. In seeing how the Soviets reinvented their military after the Bolshevik Revolution, one can discern some lessons for Marine Corps logistical planners in the period following Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) and Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF). Some of the very same challenges facing the Marine Corps logistics community today after prolonged land wars in mature operating environments also faced the Soviets as they invented modern operational theory during the inner war period following World War I and the Russian Civil War.

In particular, the following abbreviated discussion of the evolution of Soviet theory on operational logistics sheds light on two topics. The first is the criticality of operational logistics planning. The second is the follow-through aspect in planning for the command, control, and centralization of logistics in supporting multiple and/or distributed operations.

Like the majority of world powers following World War I, the Soviets heavily reassessed their military theory in preparation for future war. Soviet experience encompassed not only World War I, but also the Russian Civil War, and they analyzed lessons learned from both experiences at a theoretical level. The combination of these lessons resulted in the development of Soviet Operational Art.²⁰ According to Jacob W. Kipp's essay titled, "The Origins of Soviet Operational Art: 1917-1936," Soviet operational art is "the theory of deep operations, and the mechanization of the Red Army."²¹ At the very heart of Soviet operational art is logistics and operational logistics planning, which is best illustrated in Kipp's geographic depiction of the Russian Civil War.

During the Russian Civil War, the Bolsheviks pulled back towards Moscow while the White Armies were dispersed in the hinterlands of Russia's south. This created two distinct battlefield environments: one very similar to the fixed warfare of World War I and the other much more conducive to maneuver. In illustrating these two combat environments, Kipp references R. Tsiffer's observation of the battlefield landscape in his 1928 description: "the Civil War seemed to confirm the general rule that the more developed theater of war, the more likely the emergence of positional forms of warfare, conversely, the less developed the theater of war, the greater the opportunities for the employment of maneuver forms of combat."²² This diverse battlefield environment proved to be very beneficial in the development and sustainment of deep strike operations, specifically those carried out by strategic cavalry. The Bolsheviks, in their use of strategic cavalry to conduct deep strike operations such as those in the Ukraine (June-July 1920) and Marshal Tukhachevsky's general offense (July-August 1920) through Visula towards Warsaw, brought to light as Kipp points out through V K Triandafillov's observation, the need for "realistic logistical norms in keeping with the geographic-economic realities of the theater of

military action” as opposed to taking them for granted as the Bolsheviks did, often overextending themselves in the areas of logistics sustainment, command and control, and lack of reserves.²³

In acknowledging that deep strike operations were to become the main tenet of future war, the Soviets recognized that uninterrupted logistics sustainment throughout the entire operation depended on two things. First, as noted by N.E. Varfolomeev, the first Chair of Operational Art at the Soviet Military Academy, deep and rapid pursuit required the use of “successive deep operations,” which Varfolomeev called “the zig-zags of a whole series of operations successively developed one upon the other, logically connected and linked together by the common final objective.”²⁴ Second, that zig-zagging process in turn depended on, as Varfolomeev envisioned, the “successful struggle against the consequences of the attendant operational exhaustion.”²⁵ Kipp then states, “Logistics, the unity of front and rear as an organizational problem, thus assumed critical importance as an aspect of operational art.”²⁶ To drive home the criticality of logistics planning as a mainstay in operational art, the Soviet Military Academy insisted that its officers plan and apply the tenants of operational art through “actual operational-scale wargaming” as opposed to formal lectures and specialized studies.²⁷ Additionally, Kipp explains, “Each student was expected to apply norms and do calculations that the members of front and army staffs had to do in preparing for an operation.”²⁸ This level of planning engrained the importance of linking the operational and tactical levels of support in sustaining deep operations, which is a valuable lesson for today’s logisticians in thinking through the complexities in supporting forces in austere and disaggregated conditions.²⁹

Emerging Concepts Indicate the Urgency of Finding a Solution

In light of the lessons from our historical cases and the theory devised by the Soviets, one can appreciate all the more keenly the significance of potential logistical inadequacies for the

success or failure of *Expeditionary Force 21*. Without a sound operational logistical concept at its core, that capstone concept for the Marine Corps cannot succeed. The challenge for the Marine Corps thus becomes to build on both the practical lessons and the operational theory that have come before, thereby anticipating the needs of future war rather than waiting for the experience of disaster to inculcate change.

The March 2014 release of *Expeditionary Force 21* presents the Marine Corps logistics community with myriad focus areas, most notably a logistics capability that encompasses the following:

- Logistics enablers able to sustain and support “dispersed, disaggregated, and afloat forces”³⁰
- A Marine Corps logistics enterprise that is “integrated with naval logistics” and at the same time “interoperable with joint, theater and applicable multi-national logistics capabilities”³¹
- A logistics network that is able to sustain the Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) “from the seabase”³²
- Provide support to forward deployed forces as described in the “Expeditionary Force 21 global laydown...with improved logistics responsiveness and agility while sustaining equipment readiness of disaggregated units”³³
- “Maximizing MAGTF sustainment from the seabase by continued resourcing and integration of key initiatives with the Navy such as cargo routing, material expediting, repairable retrograde, and afloat inventory positioning”³⁴

The characteristics of Marine Corps Logistics as mentioned above foreshadow a future operating environment that demands logisticians capable of confidently leveraging sea-based, joint, multi-

national, and theater level logistics in sustaining tomorrow's Marine MAGTF. This reversion to a maritime conceptual framework is causing a paradigm shift for Marine Corps logisticians who have primarily supported the MAGTF in mature operating environments.

In his October 2014 article entitled "Expeditionary Logistics for the 21st Century: Tactical and Operational Efficiency," Lieutenant General William Faulkner (currently the Headquarters Marine Corps Deputy Commandant for Installations and Logistics), praises the lessons learned that Marine logisticians gained during OEF and OIF. Nonetheless, he cautions, "we should not assume we will have the time or distribution capability to build large stocks of supplies in support of future operations."³⁵ LtGen Faulkner suggests that, as the Marine Corps moves away from a mature sustained environment towards an unknown future, "logisticians must be able to provide timely and accurate support by deploying logistics capabilities rapidly and operating immediately anywhere and in any environment."³⁶ Forces may be required to operate in smaller and dispersed missions, ranging from "smaller special purpose MAGTF operations and forcible entry [Marine Expeditionary Brigade] MEB level engagements to humanitarian aid and disaster relief effort."³⁷ The requisite logistics capability, especially in today's fiscally constrained environment as well in a reduced amphibious lift inventory, demands Marine logisticians who are familiar and capable of working within the operational level of logistics. Furthermore, operational design in future conflict that spans the range of military operations must include the complexities and realities of operational reach in sustaining forces in an anti-access, area-denial (A2AD) environment.

Relying on an "iron mountain" of supply stocks and services ashore is not practical in future operations that require dispersed, disaggregated, and distributed operations. Sustaining operations from the sea base as well as from theater logistics hubs and intermediate staging bases

is becoming a linchpin requirement in operational planning; a requirement that has arguably been taken for granted in mature operating environments. In bolstering the necessity for expeditionary-based logistics architecture capable of flexible sustainment options, LtGen Faulkner insists on a key linkage:

The increasingly complex environment of distributed operations requires improved total asset visibility linking tactical to operational logistics support through command and control and a robust distribution network that rapidly and accurately delivers equipment and supplies from diverse points of origin to forces.³⁸

Satisfying both the tactical and operational logistics capability required in sustaining an ever increasing dispersed force such as those currently deployed as forward SP-MAGTFs and Marine Expeditionary Units (MEU) not only requires a multi-modal system of distribution, requires an institutional element of logisticians who are geographically familiar with and competent working within such an environment.

There is no doubt that after more than 13 years of ground war in both Iraq and Afghanistan the majority of the Marine Corps' logistics community is expert at tactical level distribution and sustainment. These prolonged ground wars have brought the Marine Corps closer together when working with the Joint community in a very stable, mature logistics environment. Now that the drawdown of forces from Iraq and Afghanistan has taken place, and its steady logistics infrastructure has been removed, the strategic focus is on what is coined as the "New Norm." The draft Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 4-12, titled *Operational Logistics*, defines "New Norm" as a force that is smaller than a MEU - sized SPMAGTF, plus non-MAGTF entities that include Marine Special Operations Forces (MARSOF), Crisis Response-MAGTF, and Theater Security Cooperation missions "that are deploying at a rapid rate around the globe with minimal organic logistics capability and require operational logistics support from the Theater Component Command."³⁹ The "New Norm," for the majority of

logisticians, will require refocusing on establishing familiarity with component level capabilities as well as being able to operationally tie-in to those capabilities in managing logistics shortfalls.

In a May 12, 2011 Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned interview, former Marine Forces Command G-4 Colonel Robert Elzie was asked a series of questions surrounding best practices and recommendations germane to operational logistics for future Marine Corps operations. Colonel Elzie makes an important point in distinguishing the Marine Corps' tactical level focus in logistics capability as compared to the United States Army Title 10 responsibility, which helps illustrate both the current and future logistics dilemma Marine Corps logisticians face. Elzie emphasizes that units within a Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF), particularly the Marine Logistics Group (MLG), "are tactical logistics units" and that the MEF is really the first level of authority where the bridge between tactical and operational begins.⁴⁰ The requisite training, education, and execution of logistics are focused at the tactical level. However, as smaller units composite in support of future combined coalition operations as identified in the "New Norm," and even those that continue to form the current MEU and Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) construct, logisticians must be able to narrow the institutional void in logistics coordination at the operational level to avoid a lapse in support within both the current and future combat environment.

The institutional void is very clear. Just as Elzie points out, there are strategic level organizations that the MEFs rely on and coordinate with such as the Marine Corps Logistics Command (LOGCOM), the Marine Corps Systems Command, the Defense Logistics Agency, and the Army's Material Command in bridging support to the tactical level.⁴¹ The current and future expeditionary environment, however, calls for an operational design that tailors units to operate in a disaggregated fashion, meaning that units such as the SPMAGTF-CR and MEUs are

simultaneously supporting operations in more than one geographic combatant command (GCC). The result of such operations is forcing Marine Corps logisticians, primarily mid-level Staff Non-Commissioned Officers, company and mid-level field grade officers, to work within the operational logistics level. As Elzie points out, “The Marine Corps does not man, train or equip to operational level logistics mission. We do it on an ad hoc, pick-up team, type basis.”⁴² In the “New Norm” environment logisticians are finding themselves forward deployed and less prepared to handle operational logistics coordination in the areas of intra-theater movement and cross-organization sustainment support, thereby placing the supported unit at risk of operational pause.

As the Marine Corps logistics community reconstitutes its operational level logistics acumen, it is necessary to revisit expeditionary logistics sustainment concepts that emerged in the late 1990s, particularly those associated with Operational Maneuver from the Sea (OMFTS) and Ship to Objective Maneuver (STOM). From an operational perspective, OMFTS and STOM introduced a future concept through a better integrated Navy and Marine Corps in moving a lighter, agile force directly from ships and over the horizon to an objective area, thus reducing the age-old requirement of phasing or massing combat power ashore then pursuing the objective.⁴³ Major acquisition efforts such as the MV-22 tilt-rotor aircraft, the Advanced Amphibious Assault Vehicle (though placed on hold within the procurement cycle), the America Class LHAs, and the San Antonio Class LPDs all resulted from the concepts behind OMFTS and STOM; in addition, they stressed the importance of sustaining the force from the sea base. Moreover, the push towards an integrated Navy-Marine Corps team within these concepts generated interest in maximizing logistics interoperability between the Navy and Marine Corps.

Beginning with the July 30, 2003 “Terms of Reference” (TOR) that was signed by VADM Charles W. Moore, Deputy Chief of Naval Operations, and LtGen Richard Kelly, Deputy Commandant Installations and Logistics, both the Marine Corps and Navy set in place a roadmap “to make logistics more ‘naval.’”⁴⁴ At the strategic and operational logistics levels the TOR initiated new programs of record to include Naval Tactical Command Support System and Global Combat Support System-Marine Corps; introduced integrated logistics policies, procedures, and doctrine; and placed an emphasis on maximizing common logistics support organizations, as well as training and education, naval distribution, and automated identification technology (AIT).⁴⁵ The actionable results from the TOR led to an integrated sustainment effort in the areas of:

- Afloat MEU Support for consumables and repairables
- Integration of ordnance handling and reporting
- Use of common expediting cells
- Use of same deployed logistics support organizations (Commander, Task Force 53/63/73)
- Integration of shared AIT initiatives
- Integration of Advance Traceability and Control (ATAC) policies and procedures
- CL IV material support to Seabees⁴⁶

The above list of integrated sustainment initiatives, still very much in use today, is an essential component of operational logistics planning and execution, yet a large majority of Marine Corps logisticians today are scrambling to regain focus and proficiency in these mission-critical operational level planning concepts that make expeditionary operations successful.

Globalization has brought with it an increase of conflict that demands a higher frequency of deployed forces that are most likely to operate in smaller, dispersed formations. These dispersed forces are likely to originate from the same command, to include joint partners, to cross between geographical combatant commands (GCC), to disaggregate and require support from multiple GCCs, and to require an increase of logisticians capable of coordinating the full range of logistics. Units such as MEUs, SP-MAGTFs, and MARSOC elements are already experiencing the complexities of sustaining themselves in such diverse formations without the luxury of a mature, land-based logistics infrastructure. Additionally, the time and space necessary to re-learn the logistics intricacies each GCC provides are diminishing.

In an attempt to resolve the institutional deficiencies between the operational and tactical levels of logistics coordination, the Marine Corps Logistics Operations Group (MCLOG) has instituted an expeditionary logistics seminar that focuses on a unit's expected geographic area of operations.⁴⁷ The seminar focuses on naval centric expeditionary sustainment support such as those programs and services already in place and managed by the US Navy's Priority Material Office. In addition, the curriculum focuses on intra-theater logistics service providers and other governmental organizations that provide operational level support to units deploying under the operational control of a numbered fleet or a Marine Corps service component.⁴⁸ The goal of the curriculum is to enhance a Marine Corps logistician's ability to "transition from the tactical to the operational level of logistics" and be "able to execute expeditionary logistics while employing the full range of logistics capabilities."⁴⁹

Other attempts to meet the challenge of expeditionary logistics coordination include the recent development of the MAGTF Materiel Distribution Company. According to a February 19, 2015 press release entitled "MAGTF Materiel Distribution Company [MMDC] Activates," a

promising new trend has arisen in support of operational level expeditionary sustainment.⁵⁰

According to the article, 2nd Supply Battalion created Distribution Liaison Cells (DLC) within the MMDC comprised of a mixture of supply and motor transportation military occupational skill sets, ready to deploy within a 24-hour notice. MMDC's Executive Officer, Captain Jarvis Anderson, says the company's mission is "to provide general shipping and receiving services, consolidated distribution services and to maintain asset visibility to enhance throughput velocity and sustain operational tempo."⁵¹ This initiative appears closely tied to the expeditor concept currently in place, yet it offers an enhanced opportunity to build upon that concept by adding skill sets. These skills might include a mobility planner, perhaps an air delivery planner, and a tailored procurement team (comprised of a Marine Corps contracting officer, comptroller, pay agent, and Supply Officer), with the entire capability capable of being maximized. The concept might also provide for a broader service to multiple smaller MAGTFs deployed within the same geographic combatant command area.

The DLC concept as articulated goes far to meet the burden of operational logistics, but it also provides the basis for a more comprehensive solution to the Marines' dilemma in operational logistics. It has the capability to collaborate directly with supported units within the MEF during the pre-deployment training plan, yet also be independent enough to travel to prospective logistics hubs and Fleet Logistics Centers. There, they can make the necessary administrative arrangements so that when deployed the supported unit understands, both conceptually and functionally, how it will either be directly supported should a contingency arise, or be capable of operational logistics tie-in within the theater. Additionally, the DLC will have the ability to generate and build a working relationship with the supporting Marine Forces Component or Naval Forces Component as well as to leverage intra-theater assets to support the

unit once deployed. The DLC concept, when augmented, can become the organizational link between the tactical and strategic levels of logistics. Its flexible nature in organization and capability, in theory, will be able to shift as needed between direct support of an individual element as well conduct theater-level-tie-in to accommodate multiple contingencies. As the Marine Corps evolves into a widely distributed, rapidly mobile expeditionary force operating across and between several geographical theaters at once, such a dynamic operational capability will meet the changing needs of a force that must respond to unpredictable developments while meeting ongoing obligations.

Conclusion

In the past decade or more, a large population of Marine Corps logisticians has arisen who have had multiple deployments to both Iraq and Afghanistan. The demand and immediacy in which units were required to composite, train, and deploy to those areas of conflict required a mature architecture for end-to-end logistics. Though the mature logistics system in place enabled tactical success on the battlefield, at the same time it created an institutional void, as logisticians remained unexposed to the intricacies of coordinating the larger spectrum of logistics. Just as Napoleon experienced in his 1812 Russian Campaign and the British during Operation CORPORATE, many Marine Corps logisticians are vulnerable to the same consequences in planning for and sustaining expeditionary operations. Resolving the current dilemma facing Marine Corps logisticians is twofold. First, logisticians must refocus on expeditionary, maritime, operational logistics planning. Second, the Marine Corps must capitalize on geographically positioning logistics enablers who are capable of bridging the tactical and operational levels of logistics in support of their units. The Marine Corps, through agencies such as MCLOG, has made great headway in addressing the first focus area, just as 2nd

Marine Logistics Group has done addressing the second. However, the Marine Corps must do more. Planners must reconnect with the theory of operational art so as to influence full awareness of the need for operational logistics capabilities; increase the frequency of wargaming emerging logistics concepts in support of large scale exercises; and build upon the DLC concept to make it fully capable of meeting the needs of a flexible, mobile, dynamic force meeting 21st century challenges of highly distributed, yet rapidly aggregated operations within a theater and around the globe.

Notes

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- ³ Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, *Operational-Level Logistics*, 1-2.
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- ⁵ Richard K. Riehn, *Russian Campaign*, 139.
- ⁶ Richard K. Riehn, *Russian Campaign*, 142.
- ⁷ Richard K. Riehn, *Russian Campaign*, 150.
- ⁸ Richard K. Riehn, *Russian Campaign*, 151.
- ⁹ Richard K. Riehn, *Russian Campaign*, 152, 395.
- ¹⁰ Julian Thompson, *The Lifeblood of War:Logistics in Armed Conflict* (London; Washington: Brassey's UK, 1991), 268.
- ¹¹ Julian Thompson, *The Lifeblood of War*, 262.
- ¹² Julian Thompson, *The Lifeblood of War*, 263.
- ¹³ Julian Thompson, *The Lifeblood of War*, 265.
- ¹⁴ Julian Thompson, *The Lifeblood of War*, 265.
- ¹⁵ Julian Thompson, *The Lifeblood of War*, 281.
- ¹⁶ Julian Thompson, *The Lifeblood of War*, 283, 287.
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- ³³ Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, *Expeditionary Force 21*, 40.
- ³⁴ Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, *Expeditionary Force 21*, 40.
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