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Submitted by Captain H. H. Williams
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Major D. R. Wright, CG 5
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Dwight Eisenhower illustrates the importance of logistics:

> Throughout the struggle, it was in his logistic inability to
> maintain his armies in the field that the enemy's fatal
> weakness lay. Courage his forces had in full measure, but
> courage was not enough. Reinforcements failed to arrive,
> weapons, ammunition and food alike ran short, and the dearth
> of fuel caused their powers of tactical mobility to dwindle to
> the vanishing point. In the last stages of the campaign they
> could little more that wait for the Allied advance to sweep
> over them.[1]

<div align="right">Dwight Eisenhower</div>

Introduction

Lieutenant General Conway opened his lecture to The Expeditionary
Warfighting School's class of 2006 by stating that "professionals think
logistics."[2] Meaning that the warfighter not only must focus on killing
the enemy but he must focus on resupplying his men and their gear too.
The current conflict in Iraq underscores the dire need for improvements
to the way the Marine Corps supplies the warfighter at the tactical,
operational, and strategic levels of war. A universal, more timely, and
accurate supply/logistics system is required to keep up with the
operational tempo on an ever-evolving battlefield. The importance of
and urgency for a more efficient logistical system is evident in support
of the 33rd Commandant, Michael W. Hagee, who "fully support[s] the

implementation of Logistics Modernization through the Expeditionary Force Deployment System (EFDS), enabled by Global Combat Support System – Marine Corps (GCSS-MC)."[3] In ALMAR 006/04, General Hagee directed all commanders to support GCSS-MC, "The implementation of which is critically needed today and without which we will not be able to support Expeditionary Maneuver Warfare and Seabasing in 2015."[4] The inventors of GCSS–MC say that it can deliver even in these capricious times because GCSS-MC is far superior to the current system. Supporters say that GCSS-MC will provide the Marine Corps with capabilities that the other system can not so they feel it should be fielded right away.

History of USMC Supply Systems and GCSS-MC

One of the three Marine Corps' current supply systems, Supported Activity Supply System (SASSY) was created in the 1970's for use by Sears, Roebuck and Company and 3M.[5] SASSY, which is mainframe based and requires local area network (LAN) connectivity, was designed for inventory control, accountability, requisitioning of supplies and management of fiscal data. The Marine Corps uses SASSY to interface with Marine Corps Integrated Maintenance System Automated Information System (MIMMS AIS), a system used to track maintenance; however, the interface was not complete and disparities exist between using unit data (the requesters) and the supporting activity data (the suppliers) due to poor connectivity. Aside from inaccurate data, SASSY is hard to learn and it is not user friendly. Unfortunately, the outdated 1970s

technology provided by SASSY does not efficiently support the warfighter in today's information age and the on the current battlefield. It requires LAN connectivity to facilitate communication between the using unit and supporting activity that is not always available while deployed.[6]

Over the last thirty years, attempts have been made to improve the capabilities and technology of previous supply management systems. In an effort to fully integrate supply, maintenance, and readiness into one system, the Asset Tracking, Logistics, and Supply System (ATLASS) was created and fielded in 1993, with the maintenance piece planned for integration by 1999. ATLASS is Windows-based and the connectivity requires phone lines, satellites or information can be simply transferred on a disk. However as with SASSY, ATLASS connectivity cannot be guaranteed while deployed, and therefore the transfer of data may or may not occur and supplies requested may or may not get ordered.

Once completely fielded in 1999, ATLASS was to be "an integrated supply and maintenance, client-server based application that will enable the Ground Logistics communities to do most of their work in ATLASS."[7] However, if a unit in a forward position needed supplies to complete their mission, the unit would order supplies and have to wait "never knowing when what they needed would arrive. Then they would probably reorder it, thinking there was a mistake, and then wasting time, money and extra supplies they did not need."[8] Logisticians have become callous due to unfulfilled promises from SASSY and ATLASS; there is a

concern that GCSS-MC will not deliver the promised products. The Deputy

Commandant for installation and logistics, Lieutenant General R. L.

Kelly, addressed proper program management and ensuring that a vender

will be selected that can and will deliver what they advertise.[9]

Due to the current speed of information flow, time, money, and

resources are more crucial now than ever and on today's battlefield,

there is not time to wonder when or if re-supply will occur. Units need

to have faith that they can place an order once and it will arrive in a

timely manner. The goal of GCSS-MC is to "provide modern, deployable

information technology (IT) tools for supported and supporting units to

support LOGMOD. GCSS-MC will be based upon a recently completed

Logistics Operational Architecture (LOA). This architecture drives the

development of tools that will better integrate the current supply,

logistics, distribution, and financial processes."[10]   GCSS – MC can not

be compared to SASSY or ATLASS; they are systems specific to the Marine

Corps systems based out of Albany, GA. GCSS- MC belongs to the

Department of Defense and will eventually support all of the branches

services with compatible programs. It is an entirely new product with a

new mission.

Based on after action reports from Operation Iraqi Freedom I (OIF

I), Brigadier General E. G. Usher III states:

"The greatest shortfall was the lack of in-transit visibility

information to incorporate into our command and control effort. The

FSSG had large, extended convoys moving hundreds of miles in

unsecured terrain supporting Marine Forces spread across thousands

of square miles in demanding weather conditions. The lack of

visibility on unit stocks and in-transit visibility on ordered items

made it difficult to identify actual shortages, to locate needed

items with in stocks for reallocation, and to direct and track the

movement of ordered items to requesting units."[11]

Brigadier General Usher underscores the need to track ordered parts,

quickly getting them to the requesting unit. Because units sometimes

move frequently, this task is particularly difficult causing units to

have to wait for the ordered parts to catch up with the unit.

The Way Forward

Some may argue that the time to implement a brand new logistics

system is certainly not in the middle of a war, while others would argue

that an upgrade is long overdue and the future is uncertain, so there is

no time like the present. GCSS-MC is but the foundation for the Marine

Corps' overall focus on Logistics Modernization (LOGMOD). LOGMOD is

focused on modernizing systems and tools to best support the Marine Air

Ground Task Force (MAGTF) Commander so he can utilize his force most

efficiently. LOGMOD and therefore GCSS – MC implementation is being

pushed at the highest level in the Marine Corps and "The program's

importance is either above or at least on the same level with weapons

systems we have coming down the road . . . MV-22, Joint Strike Fighter

and Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle."[12] This is a new concept; the timing

is right, the funding is right, and the means to accomplish the upgrade

are present. The Marine Corps must maintain focus and work through

implementation and not resort to the outdated systems of the 1970's.

   GCSS-MC will initially be fielded at the II Marine Expeditionary

Force (MEF) geographic region and then followed by implementation at III

MEF and, finally, at I MEF. A Transition Task Force comprised of

Marines, civilians, and contractors will work with subject matter

experts (SMEs) at each region to field GCSS-MC. [13] Regional training and

on-site support will be available at each MEF following the six month

fielding process.[14] The goal is to have the initial fielding of GCSS-MC

at II MEF by spring 2007. In order to integrate GCSS-MC the following

actions must be complete: integration of the Marine Air Ground Task

Force (MAGTF) architecture with the GCSS-MC architecture, realignment of

maintenance from five echelons to three, redefine Logistics command and

control bandwidth, and redefine supply battalion (Bn) and maintenance Bn

processes and organization.

Conclusion

   The current supply system utilized by the Marine Corps is

antiquated. In order to keep the Marine Corps current with technology

and keep the warfighter supplied on the front lines a new method of

support and logistics is paramount. GCSS-MC is built to support in a

deployed environment, as well as in garrison. "GCSS-MC provides us with

the desperately needed technical enabler. But this is only the first of

many steps. Without process and organizational reform we will only accelerate the old processes and organizational behavior and never capitalize on the art of the possible in terms of performance, scheduling, and cost."[15]

Although GCSS-MC has not yet been fielded throughout the Marine Corps, it is evident that it packs a bigger punch and is far more capable than the dilapidated systems currently in place. GCSS-MC is a universal, more timely and accurate supply/logistics accountability system that has the ability to keep up with today's ever-evolving battlefield. GCSS-MC is designed to deliver, even in these erratic times.

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Notes

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6 ACDS printout Capt Todd McAllister

7 ACDS printout CPT Thomas Schwab

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