

# Becoming the Modern Logistician

A junior officer learned that relationships build logistics and became a valuable asset to her unit.

■ By 1st Lt. Charlotte R. Krause

Many recall their entrance into the officer world. The adrenaline rush hits you the first time you walk into a room of your peers after taking the oath of your commission. You have no expectations or knowledge of what you will experience on your new path—just the understanding that the path is required.

Upon entering the Basic Officer Leader Course (BOLC), junior logisticians belong to one of three branches—Transportation, Ordnance, or Quartermaster—until they complete the Logistics Captains Career Course and become a part of the Logistics Branch. But it is not just the captains course that prepares an officer for the Logistics Branch; lieutenants learn a lot from their first years on the job.

## Learning the Basics

There was plenty of tension in the room on the first day of my BOLC. The newly commissioned officers were buzzing with fear, anxiety, and excitement. We did not realize that our days would be filled with the Army's famous "death by PowerPoint" and that we would spend hours poring over technical manuals that had been worn out from hundreds of hands searching feverishly for capacities, formulas, and weights.

Classroom days filled with paperwork and property accountability were the opposite of what we were expecting based on the exciting endorsement for the Transportation Branch that we received at the career fair. The importance of property accountability and equipment maintenance to mission capability was burned into our minds.

## Starting Out

When I graduated from BOLC,

I was terrified to learn that I would become the executive officer of a forward support company in a light infantry battalion. Although lectures in BOLC had stressed how that was a prized position to obtain, all I could think about was how I should have placed more priority on my physical fitness.

In my unit, there was an air of distrust about filling a senior lieutenant position with a second lieutenant, especially one without any platoon leader experience. The lack of time in a learning position left me with no previous knowledge or experience to draw from.

Another downside to being an executive officer was that I did not have a direct noncommissioned officer (NCO) counterpart. Having that counterpart is how many lieutenants gain their expertise and technical proficiency.

At the battalion level, I was largely invisible. No one seemed to believe that a second lieutenant could be an executive officer, and everyone was waiting for me to fail. Knowing that I wasn't ready, I spent my time learning everything possible about the company property book and the Soldiers I would be working with.

Meeting the neighboring infantry companies proved to be an adventure. Some were demanding, some were ready to learn, and others were busy with their own missions. Most were dismissive and tried to go around me and use the contacts that they had previously built in the company. No one had warned me about the challenges of simultaneously learning about a new area, a new lifestyle, and a new profession.

After a few months of hard lessons

and a steep learning curve, I began to catch my stride. My initial approach of a hard-nosed, steel-fisted nature did not end up making good relationships. I quickly learned that relationships build logistics. The number of moving pieces in logistics operations requires a team working across the facility, post, nation, and theater to make things happen.

I went from being dismissed to being a valuable resource for many infantry leaders. Requirements became easier to fulfill. The effort put into building relationships began to pay off.

The infantry companies began to put their requests in earlier and would double check their paperwork, demonstrating that they understood that we also required preparation and had execution time lines outside of their requests.

While we were providing sustainment support, there was little time to provide ourselves with basic Soldier and marksmanship training. When our Soldiers provided ammunition for training events, in return they were given the opportunity to qualify on their individually assigned weapons.

The more time I spent working with different units and building friendships, the deeper my resources became. A large list of favors came to fruition and more often than not a pay-it-forward scenario commenced.

## Deploying on the Battalion Staff

Before long, I found myself preparing to deploy to Afghanistan. The bridge into my new position on the battalion staff was established during my unit's rotation at the National Training Center.

I had attended the battalion staff



*Lieutenants listen to a briefing during a Basic Officer Leader Department field training exercise. (Photo by Julianne Cochran)*

leader training program, where I served as the logistics counterpart. This was the first time I had officially been integrated into the logistics fusion cell, and I began to understand the big picture of the mission. As a company-level asset, I provided input to the battalion to help make things run smoothly.

In Afghanistan, I was placed in a three-role position; I was the contracting officer's representative, battalion maintenance officer, and assistant S-4. With a new job title and location, I had no experience, contacts, or resources to draw from.

Soon I began to build rapport. It started with meetings, phone conferences, and emails. Rapidly, I saw a whole new side of communication; portals of information and examples I could use piled into my email from people whom I had never met.

I was involved in providing contracts and maintenance for three locations. In all of my tasks, I had to consider each location individually because they all had different

challenges and needs. Luckily, I was paired with an NCO who provided the experience and insight I needed to make a plan. An officer will never forget the NCO who took the time and had the patience to teach someone with a quarter of their experience how to handle a situation.

Distance and technology problems challenged my ability to communicate with the locations I was supporting. Halfway through the deployment, relationships began paying off as the battalion retrograded outlying locations. The more issues that came up, the more people came to help. It seemed that the customer service I provided throughout my time in Afghanistan was being paid back tenfold.

I have used my experiences from BOLC, as an executive officer, and while deployed on a battalion staff to help me become a modern logistician. I experienced what it takes to become a valued asset to the Army, despite not going through the normal career

progression of a lieutenant.

Through trial and error, I learned the importance of being a firm leader and devoted to the mission and its requirements. Creating contacts and learning to employ resources gave me a great sense of accomplishment.

In the Army, it takes a community to complete any major task. Very often we chalk it up to good planning or organization, but the bridge to success is made up of hard working people.

My recommendation to someone beginning the journey to becoming a logistician is to reach out and learn about your resources. If your senior NCOs have taken the time to build a relationship with someone, you should know why they have that contact and make an effort to maintain that contact as well. Logistics is customer service, and it requires you to make use of many different resources and agencies.

Pay attention to what it takes to run an operation. Although it may not seem important at the platoon level, at some point you will be expected to understand the basics of an operation and implement one for a larger element.

Finally, devote an extensive amount of time to understanding classes of supply and property. You will become a valuable source of information if you have a fundamental knowledge of these two items. Hone that skill and be a knowledge bank for those around you.

Every choice you make in your early career as a logistician will train you to become an asset or a burden. Make the effort count for you and for your future Soldiers.

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