Rear Adm. Scott Stearney, commander of the Joint Enabling Capabilities Command, describes to Lt. Gen. Kathleen Gainey, then deputy commander of the U.S. Transportation Command, and Lt. Gen. Darren McDew, commander of 18th Air Force, how his unit provides uninterrupted connectivity to joint operations around the world. (Photo by Julianne Sympson)

Simple Is Better in Joint Operations

Perspectives From Retired Lt. Gen. Kathleen Gainey

■ By Arpi Dilanian and Matthew Howard

Retired Lt. Gen. Kathleen M. Gainey knows joint logistics better than most people do. This 35-year Army veteran served as the deputy commander of the U.S. Transportation Command and as the director of logistics, J-4, of the Joint Staff during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Here are her views on the future of joint operations for the Army.

Can you talk about some of the benefits of serving in a joint assignment?

Serving in a joint assignment is like serving in another country. You learn about the culture, you learn different—and often better—ways of doing things, and you learn why they [the other services] operate the way they do. You learn to appreciate how they employ and sustain their weapon systems and how they depend on another service or agency for support.

This allows you to have a much more comprehensive view of the other services' needs, how they view the Army, and what you can do about it within your own organization now and in future assignments.

The friendships you build [in a joint assignment] will pay you immeasurable benefits later when you need to work with that service or any other in the future. It gives you credibility you would not otherwise have going into some other position later in your career.

What is the most important sustainment consideration that the Army should embrace for success in future joint and multinational operational environments?

What I learned most during my time in Iraq, at the Defense Logistics Agency, on the Joint Staff, and at the U.S. Transportation Command is that simple is better. The United States has very complex systems, processes, and organizations compared to other countries. We tend to overwhelm them when we come into an area and do not consider the impact we will have on their existing infrastructure, contracts for support, and workforce.

We need to do advance planning to look at who is there, what their mission is, how they are supporting themselves, how our presence will impact them, and how we can best blend into the existing infrastructure.

Establishing contact prior to arrival is very important. Advance parties need to look at not only where and how they want to set up, but also how to establish contact with all other agencies and organizations there immediately. They need to set up a council to ensure they do not cause fratricide in contracting for supplies or services, driving the price up and diverting all the resources to the Army because it can afford to pay more.

How important are allied partnerships in executing the national defense strategy?

They are essential. They help show others in the world that we are not alone in our beliefs. By establishing partnerships, we better understand any concerns our allies have, so we can shape a more thoughtful and cohesive strategy. Building operational and institutional capability and capacity in our allied partners is also in our own best interest; the more their capabilities are interoperable with ours, the better we will operate together.

For example, in Afghanistan, we leveraged the existing British contract for equipment demilitarization rather than set up a new contract at the same location. This prevented competition for the same capability and any price escalation, and it eliminated the time, effort, and cost to set up another new contract.

Can you share some challenges you faced while serving as a leader in the joint force and how you overcame them?

I had the responsibility of helping lead the logistics enterprise, driving joint force readiness and providing the best logistics advice to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Because I had no directive authority nor any budget control over the services and supporting agencies, I had to provide the services with a compelling argument for what needed to be done to create a coalition of the willing.

We set out to see what was import-

ant to the services, combatant commands, supporting agencies such as the Defense Logistics Agency, Defense Security Cooperation Agency, the departments of State and Homeland Security and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

We then distilled core common items, developed a working group to prioritize tasks, established lead organizations and teams, and created a road map to get to common goals. We were very successful in creating energy and a will to develop a solution and in aligning efforts and funding among very disparate organizations.

There was not a lot of trust between the Department of Defense and other government agencies. To rectify this, we took on five projects that meant something to each organization and committed to solving these issues in six months. This was very successful. We developed and implemented solutions. This built a lot of trust and helped break down barriers at the worker level.

Having established contacts and trust enabled the military and other government agencies to reach out to each other and work a myriad of issues in response to the earthquake in Haiti. From that success, we collectively determined that we needed a means to work together throughout the year on other existing issues or potential problems and developed a government council that still operates today.

What can the Army do better in partnering with its sister services to increase readiness?

There are several things that can be done that will improve interoperability and reduce costs. There is not a natural inclination to work with another service to jointly design equipment and supplies. This is often due to different requirements and timing of when the equipment is needed. But the services should seek opportunities to develop standardized pieces of equipment and supplies.

This could be done in many ways. First, each service should recognize the requirements of the other services, as far as function and scale. The requirements are very different if you are setting up an Air Force expeditionary base versus a Marine Corps patrol base. However, as bases grow and you have three services on them with equipment that does not work together, this makes the services less effective and efficient.

Would it make more sense to have equipment that is interoperable, modular, operable from different power sources (power grid, generator, solar), and scalable from very small to very large? Absolutely, it would. The services should start with standardizing core items, like generators, tents, base camp shower systems, tool kits, and maintenance sets.

Second, we should align systems so they can talk to each other and streamline processes. The Army and Marine Corps have made some workarounds to allow the Marines to order parts through Army supply systems on Army-operated bases.

The cost and complexity of developing one system is not practical. The first step is to look at standardizing terminology so the same language is spoken. The systems then have the same context for word choices in data fields. I think establishing design characteristics for systems that make them interoperable should be mandated across the services for all new systems developed. The Office of the Secretary of Defense has made some headway in this, but more work needs to be done.

Third, expanding the understanding of each services' systems and processes can be done through officer, warrant officer, and noncommissioned officer professional development programs. Simply having Soldiers read professional publications about their specialty from other services or participate in interservice blogs, exchange programs, and the like can be invaluable. The services also need to do the same kinds of things with their commercial industry partners and allies.

How does innovation and technology affect joint force success, and how does it increase interoperability in the future?

Soldiers are master innovators. The more senior leaders trust junior leaders and subordinates to contribute to solutions, the more the Army is able to take advantage of the incredibly talented force we have.

There are many junior Soldiers who not only understand the new technologies better than older Soldiers but also can imagine better and more creative uses for those technologies. For example, several junior officers developed an in-house program to determine the most cost-effective place to refuel aircraft given the actual cost of the fuel at the destination airbase in Afghanistan or at the home base in Kuwait or Qatar.

Not everything that works for commercial industry will work for an expeditionary military. But a lot of industry's innovations can work with a little adaptation. The Army needs to be on the lookout for those kinds of things.

Information technology has been huge in enabling a global distribution network. However, we still have to reduce errors and ensure sufficient redundancy.

Today the Department of Defense's in-transit visibility system is dependent on fixed infrastructure. Satellite tracking for items exists, but it is very expensive. We need to look at how to drive down the costs for tracking equipment and supplies in transit without providing specifics to unauthorized users that could cause pilferage.

Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance in combination with unmanned vehicles can free Soldiers from going on convoys to very dangerous and remote locations. Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance can help determine route security and obstacles. 3-D printing can help maintainers make emergency repairs forward. But, we need to be wary of pushing capabilities too

far forward and burdening forces with unresourced missions that can be better performed at major base camps.

We very effectively used capabilities of other services to support missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Navy Phalanx CIWS [close-in weapon system] is for defense against anti-ship missiles, and the Army used it in base camp security. In addition, Naval electronic warfare officers were assigned to Army units and helped with frequency deconfliction on Army vehicles to mitigate issues with electronic equipment canceling out existing system capabilities.

What issues do you foresee for the joint force as we shift to more expeditionary operations?

All of the services are working very hard to increase readiness, particularly in expeditionary operations. Operating in Iraq and Afghanistan caused the knowledge of how to deploy in an expeditionary manner to diminish.

The Army and Marine Corps have both said that they have already seen where the expertise they once had at every level is gone—except at the most senior levels. This means mid-level and junior officers and noncommissioned officers do not possess the knowledge or experience to teach their subordinates. Simple tasks like load planning equipment, loading out equipment on rail cars, and air load planning are difficult.

We can remedy this by reviewing, updating, and if appropriate, changing standard operating procedures we worked so hard to develop during the Cold War and after Desert Storm. This might include reviewing old standard operating procedures units had when deploying to Germany or to the National Training Center, which were proven methods that only need updating.

We also need to do more joint training to ensure we are interoperable and examine what needs to change in doctrine or policies to facilitate how we want to operate. Emergency deployment readiness exercises by air, sea, and a combination of the two used to be a staple of unit training. In the 24th Infantry Division, we built readiness for deployment by crawling, walking, and running through professional development discussions, rehearsal-of-concept drills, tactical exercises without troops, command post exercises, and full-scale rehearsals.

Finally, we need to relook at base camps—not so much the standards at base camps, but the pace at which we achieve them. We became enamored with having all of the creature comforts of home at them, and this put an extraordinary demand on logistics support. Soldiers need to know that we will take care of them. However, they are savvy enough to know that mission requirements and security come before burgers and ping-pong tournaments.

Is maintenance also an issue?

Absolutely. Maintaining equipment in remote locations is a significant challenge for all services. This is not new. We had pre-positioned materiel configured in unit sets throughout the Cold War, and Army pre-positioned stocks both ashore and afloat greatly expanded after Desert Storm. Again, we know how to do this at the senior levels but not the junior levels.

We need to ensure we have trained operators and mechanics. Much of the maintenance work was performed by contractors overseas to reduce the military footprint. We should train Soldiers to handle maintenance tasks by making routine and scheduled maintenance part of unit training schedules and by ensuring junior unit leaders are properly trained to supervise it. Maintenance is training!

We also need to do more with advanced parts forecasting tools. The stress on a weapon system is different in peacetime than in war and different in various geographic locations. We order parts on the basis of current demands and keep some wartime stocks on the basis of past history and hard-to-source items. But in a contingency, the parts we have stocked may not be the right ones. Using big data analyses, like industry uses to develop more advanced forecasting models, could address these variables and allow us to expand options and reduce costs.

What piece of advice would you give to Soldiers to maximize their success in joint billets?

Learn as much as you can about the joint organization you are in. Learn the other services' cultures, processes, and procedures, and make sure you understand each service's role in accomplishing the mission. You aren't trying to convince them to transfer services. Rather, you are trying to help everyone involved understand how others operate. Doing so will provide insights into how to improve your methods.

The same thing goes for relationships with commercial industry partners and partners from other nations. As others teach you about their services—how they operate, who makes decisions, and what is important to them—make sure you reciprocate and teach them about the Army.

Become as much of an expert as you can on the Army so that you can offer input on why we do things the way we do. When you return to your parent service, become an advocate for the joint organization you just left and impart what you learned to others.

Arpi Dilanian is a strategic analyst in the Army G-4's Logistics Initiatives Group. She holds a bachelor's degree from American University and a master's degree from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

Matthew Howard is a strategic analyst in the Army G-4's Logistics Initiatives Group. He holds bachelor's and master's degrees from Georgetown University.