

Logistics Innovations and Getting the Basics Right

The Deputy Chief of Staff, G-4, has been making strides to enhance materiel readiness and ensure the availability of logistics support. Sustainers can do many things to assist in these efforts.

■ By Lt. Gen. Aundre F. Piggee

In my Army career, I have deployed to the National Training Center three times. During a rotation when I was a young second lieutenant, I proceeded to get lost almost every night, but I eventually made it to my logistics release points because of the basic skills I had learned at my home station. This experience has shaped my thinking for 37 years.

Today, as the deputy chief of staff, G-4, I set policies that all Army logisticians will use on an expeditionary battlefield, where our basic skills will be put to the test. The Army may end up in a remote corner of the globe without much infrastructure, where our forces have to self-sustain and where our adversaries have new approaches to warfare. It will not be like the past 16 years of war, when our troops regularly arrived at well-established forward operating bases.

Logistics Innovations

The G-4 office and our partners have made strides in enhancing materiel readiness and ensuring logistics support is available to increase the lethality of combat units. The next expeditionary battlefield will have many improvements to help logisticians do the basics of supply and maintenance better.

Common authorized stockage list (mobile). We have implemented an innovative approach to planning what repair parts will be most needed in austere environments. Units are now given a common authorized stockage list with the goal of being 100 percent mobile. Within three months of converting to the new approach, brigade

combat teams reported filling 19 percent more demands for parts than they had previously. This measure results in the faster repair of weapon systems.

Army pre-positioned stocks. We have grown our equipment stocks all over the world to serve as a deterrent and bring lethality forward. We are assembling the equipment in ready-to-fight configurations to meet a fight tonight scenario for early-entry forces. We also are working with the Army Materiel Command to update the facilities that store the equipment. Having the equipment already in place has another advantage: it decreases demand for strategic airlift and sealift so those assets can be used to move troops.

Logistics Civil Augmentation Program (LOGCAP) changes. A new version of LOGCAP will focus on setting and surging the global theater for Department of Defense contingency operations. LOGCAP has been a critical force multiplier that enables sustainment by leveraging contracts awarded ahead of time and executing planned and deliberate responses to full-spectrum operations globally. The new program seeks to have a management team on the ground within 72 hours of notification.

Field feeding. The old dictum, “An Army marches on its stomach,” is as true today as ever. We are always trying to improve the quality of our meals ready-to-eat to ensure that they meet nutrition and calorie standards and that Soldiers like the food. With the help of warfighter evaluations, we are removing the less popular items and will be adding new favorites, such as



pepperoni pizza, a chicken burrito bowl, and a teriyaki meat stick.

Leap-ahead technologies. Across the Army, we also are aggressively developing leap-ahead technologies that will radically change sustainment on the battlefield. You can expect “spider web” sustainment with many modes, nodes, routes, and suppliers that are all interoperable with joint and coalition partners.

Spare parts will be manufactured using technologies such as additive manufacturing. We are examining technologies to produce water locally. Lift platforms will fly farther and faster, carry heavier payloads, and team with unmanned systems. Sensors and power management tools will monitor system performance and observe activity.

Sustainers also will rely less on echelons-above-brigade support. You will see a reduction in the “cognitive load” through the application of artificial intelligence and machine learning technologies.

Logisticians will have improved visibility of fuel supplies. Information systems under development will automatically collect and transmit data about how much fuel is on hand, in transit, and consumed. This data will improve our operational energy management, just as data from the Global Combat Support System–Army is improving materiel management. Efforts also are underway to re-engineer business processes to inform the next-generation enterprise resource planning environment.

Improving Skills

These innovations will make us more ready as an organization, but individuals need to step up to the plate too. As I travel around the Army, I continue to hear about and see a need to better adhere to strict standards and discipline. Here are six suggestions on how to improve your expeditionary battlefield skills.

Start by getting the basics right. All the wizardry of technology does not matter if Soldiers cannot do the basics. I recently visited units in Hawaii and was glad to see they were practicing a handy mnemonic I used to employ, 35-Mike-Mike. That means sustainers must focus on the necessities first, such as ensuring their customers have the class III (petroleum, oils, and lubricants) to get to where they are going, the class V (ammunition) to fight, well-maintained and ready equipment, and necessary medical capabilities. With these four immediate priorities met, the basics of warfighter demands are covered.

Make sure to focus on the basics of blocking and tackling when dealing with maintenance and supply discipline. For example, when performing preventive maintenance checks and services on your unit's equipment, you must have sufficient technical manuals for all of your Soldiers and mechanics. Also, when you call a maintenance meeting, all of your commanders and leaders must be present.

It sounds so obvious, but these are the basic standards we need to adhere to. The Army's supply and

maintenance discipline programs are commanders' programs and, as such, their results reveal units' readiness to execute expeditionary sustainment.

Focus on mission command. Logistics chains of command are necessary to ensure the best sustainment and to enable supported units to achieve their missions. What is essential is that the commander's intent is followed. Make sure that intent is understood by all subordinates, and discuss with your subordinate commanders the circumstances that may dictate a deviation from the ordered course of action. When facts change on a battlefield, courses of action may need to change too.

Insert yourselves into the planning process. Upon receipt of mission orders, be prepared to bring to the table a working concept of support. As a logistician, you must integrate yourself into the larger planning process and enter the process with accurate numbers.

One of our greatest challenges is reporting accuracy. Improper reporting makes the provisioning of anticipatory logistics nearly impossible to accomplish and leads to wasteful and last-minute resupply efforts. So, develop running estimates with an awareness of supported forces' logistics demands and how situations dictate specific commodity requirements and services.

Hold sustainment rehearsals. It is essential to validate readiness for a combat operation by conducting sustainment rehearsals of what will occur before, during, and after planned combat operations. They should be professionally run and cover the who, what, where, and how of support. It is the last opportunity to share knowledge prior to mission execution and is important to improving performance during execution.

This issue's hip-pocket guide is a great checklist of important elements of support and how to use those elements to run a successful sustainment rehearsal. Keep the guide in your pocket.

Incorporate lessons learned into home-station training. Expeditionary warfare demands contributions from

the total force. Since the majority of sustainment units are in the reserve components, the readiness of citizen Soldiers is paramount. To help with training, some high-demand National Guard units will receive 63 training days a year, which is more than the standard 39 days.

Leaders at all levels should spend time incorporating into training the lessons learned from other Soldiers who have experienced similar challenges. We can learn from their hard-earned experience.

Build relationships. Relationships and roles are key. Logisticians must be clear about what roles will be accomplished by the forward support company, the brigade support battalion, and the combat sustainment support battalion. Start building relationships in garrison to know what each unit can do and what each unit can do for the other units, both on the battlefield and in garrison.

History teaches us that on an expeditionary battlefield the onus is on everyone to win. Seventy-four years ago, U.S. forces that landed at Normandy had great difficulties maneuvering Sherman tanks through overgrown thick hedges. For weeks, Gen. Omar Bradley and top leaders were baffled about how to solve the issue until a skilled sergeant in an ordnance unit came up with a simple solution.

Sgt. Curtis Culin III took the steel beams that the Germans had installed on the beaches (with the intent to rip the bottoms off our boats) and welded them to our tanks to slice through the hedge rows. It was, as Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower said, "a godsend" for the invading U.S. forces.

That is why on an expeditionary battlefield, everyone needs to get the basics right, communicate up and down the chain of command, and be innovative in every mission.

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