



A commissary meat cutter places packaged meat on the shelf. Ensuring U.S. meat arrives to Soldiers and family members in Europe requires a combination of interagency, international, and joint cooperation. (Photo by Senior Airman Franklin R. Ramos)

Across the Pond: The Strategic Implications of Delivering U.S. Meat to Soldiers and Their Families in Europe

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An old logistician's saying goes something like this: "The best logistics is logistics that nobody notices." This is certainly true in most military operations. But sustainment professionals can also have strategic impacts on crises and policies at the highest levels of diplomacy and trade. At the level of interstate deliberation, even relatively minor border clearance, movement, or trade issues can become major points of disagreement and conflict between nations.

This article examines one such international trade disagreement and demonstrates how—through diligent coordination, innovative thinking, and tireless advocacy—U.S. European Command (EUCOM) logisticians

and leaders averted a potentially serious disagreement between the United States and the European Union (EU) and broke a 13-year bureaucratic logjam. In the process of working through this issue, logisticians also learned important food importation lessons of interest to the broader military sustainment community.

Historical Backdrop

In 1997, a widespread epidemic of classical swine fever (CSF) occurred throughout Europe. The first case was reported in January 1997 in Germany. The disease quickly spread to the Netherlands and from there to Italy, Spain, and eventually Belgium.¹ In the wake of this epidemic, the EU was

determined to improve the quantity and quality of information on animal and animal product movements within its borders.

In 2000, the European Commission Directorate General for Health and Consumers grew concerned about ensuring that meat products originating in the United States were arriving only at designated U.S. installations throughout Europe. Some meat products from the United States contain growth hormones and genetically modified organisms, which do not meet European Union standards.² But, the foremost reason for the EU's heightened concern was the recent epidemic of CSF.

Initiating new safety measures with-

in Europe proved relatively simple, but from a U.S. military perspective these new rules posed daunting procedural challenges. U.S. representatives in Brussels and at EUCOM in Germany gradually came to realize that sustainment and resupply of American forces in Europe could be threatened. Over the next 13 years, a succession of working groups, panels, and senior leader engagements ensued in an effort to ensure that meat from the United States continued to flow to troops serving in Europe.

Running Out of Patience and Time

By the time logisticians from the EUCOM Deployment and Distribution Operations Center (EDDOC) began working on the issue in 2011, it had simmered for 11 years and the EU's patience was wearing thin. From the beginning, it was clear that if the U.S. military did not act fast to develop a program to meet EU requirements, a much larger storm would be on the horizon. During the next two years, EUCOM painstakingly developed the framework for improving the quantity and quality of information on meat destined for U.S. forces overseas.

In order to effectively establish a framework for action, the first—and most daunting—challenge was to overcome the legal blocks. Lawyers from multiple U.S. departments and organizations insisted that no governmental organization outside of the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) or the Department of State had the authority to “negotiate” with the EU to resolve this food importation impasse. For years, numerous legal opinions were expressed that all but stopped progress toward an achievable solution.

The chief concern for all legal entities involved was that the United States is a sovereign entity that can only negotiate with other sovereign nations. They held that the EU, while a legislative body, was not recognized as a sovereign

political unit by the U.S. government and therefore could not be negotiated with. To recognize the EU as sovereign would be to throw all existing bilateral status of forces agreements with European nations into legal peril.

Although these concerns were and still remain valid, this was a classic legal Catch-22 situation. EUCOM could not address substantive importation issues with the EU, but importation guidelines were threatening to cut off the supply of meat products to U.S. forces in Europe, Africa, and Southwest Asia.

A Workaround

The metaphorical dam finally broke in the fall of 2012 when the EDDOC teamed with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and other European theater stakeholders to develop an innovative strategy to nest EUCOM coordination authorities with the EU under an existing bilateral framework already developed by the USDA. This precluded any peril to existing status of forces agreements and allowed senior leaders from EUCOM to coordinate and recommend a solution to the principal deputy assistant secretary of defense for logistics and materiel readiness as well as the Joint Chiefs of Staff J-4 and J-5.

Ultimately, OSD concurred with EUCOM's solution and determined that, since this issue predominately affected forces serving in the EUCOM area of responsibility, the EUCOM directorate of logistics would serve as the lead agency for developing the framework and policy concerning this issue. While the bureaucratic play-by-play of how EUCOM J-4 cut through this logistical “Gordian knot” is interesting and instructive for sustainment professionals, the remainder of this article focuses on the importation process of class I meat products into the European theater.

The Nuts and Bolts of Meat Importation

Before a shipment of meat leaves the continental United States (CONUS), the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) certifies and issues health certificates confirming its quality and consumability, just as it does for products destined for local supermarkets in the United States. The FSIS is the public health agency in the USDA responsible for ensuring that the nation's commercial supply of meat, poultry, and egg products is safe, wholesome, and correctly labeled and packaged.³

The USDA is responsible for ensuring that these products meet the requisite criteria to be considered safe for human consumption according to U.S. standards. Once approved, the product can be loaded at the supplier's location and transported to the East Coast for transoceanic movement to European border inspection points (BIPs).

Additionally, the USDA Foreign Agriculture Service (FAS) plays a role in assisting the Department of Defense with importation issues. The FAS enhances export opportunities and global food security by expanding and maintaining access to foreign markets for U.S. agricultural products and by removing trade barriers and enforcing U.S. rights under existing trade agreements.

The FAS works with foreign governments, international organizations, and the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative to establish international standards and rules improving accountability and predictability for agricultural trade.⁴ This interagency cooperation between the USDA and the Department of Defense is important to the interagency dynamics of meat importation.

Across the Pond

The shipping process from CONUS to Europe consists of completing pa-

¹ I. Greiser-Wilke et al., “Molecular Epidemiology of a Large Classical Swine Fever Epidemic in the European Union in 1997–1998,” *Veterinary Microbiology*, Vol. 77, Issues 1–2, Nov. 15, 2000, pp. 17–27.

² Tim Josling et al., “The Beef-Hormone Dispute and its Implications for Trade Policy,” Stanford University, Stanford, Calif., <http://www.pf.uni-lj.si/media/beef.hormones.pdf>, accessed Jan. 28, 2014.

³ “About FSIS,” http://www.fsis.usda.gov/About_Fsis/index.asp, accessed June 9, 2013.

perwork from military and commercial agencies, arranging for transportation, and shipping the products. A key ingredient to enabling a flawless operation is ensuring that all accompanying documentation is accurate. If upon arrival at a BIP the shipment has the correct paperwork and passes the BIP inspection, it is granted entry for onward movement within the EU.

The Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command's (SD-DC's) 598th Transportation Brigade, headquartered in Sembach, Germany, helps ensure that the paperwork is correct when shipments move via surface mode. The 598th plays a critical role in nearly all surface transportation moves within the European theater, ultimately ensuring that, regardless of location, U.S. personnel have what they need when they need it.

Inside a European BIP

Upon arrival at a BIP, customs inspectors thoroughly examine each document accompanying a shipment. The inspection process consists of a variety of strict methods agreed to by EU authorities. Entry is refused if a shipment destined for U.S. and NATO locations does not meet established criteria.

The EU treats products destined for U.S. and NATO bases differently than those destined for European tables. EU officials are concerned that products not complying with European standards might enter into its stream of commerce. To mitigate these concerns, the EUCOM headquarters, along with the Army's Public Health Command Region-Europe, implemented a program that tracks each shipment arriving in Europe to its final destination.

The Trade Control and Expert System (TRACES) is a trans-European management tool for tracking the movement of meat products destined

for U.S. bases in the EU. This system consolidated and simplified previously existing systems and is a major innovation in improving the management of animal diseases. It also reduces administrative formalities.⁵

Once BIP inspectors approve onward movement of the shipment from the BIP to its final destination, an electronic common veterinary entry document (CVED) is created.⁶ Once the CVED is complete, an electronic version of the document is entered into TRACES and authorities approve the transit of these shipments to U.S. installations throughout Europe.

Once a CVED is created by the BIP, the receiving agency—whether the Defense Commissary Agency, the Army and Air Force Exchange Service, or Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation—has 30 days to close the shipment out in TRACES. If shipments are not closed within this time frame, inspectors may refuse additional shipments.

End State

The Defense Commissary Agency Central Meat Processing Plant (CMPP) at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, is a key hub for CONUS-origin meat products destined for U.S. forces in Europe. The CMPP opened in March 1998 and processes beef and pork for commissaries in 10 countries throughout Europe. The CMPP cuts, grinds, packages, vacuum seals, and ships more than 175,000 pounds of USDA-approved beef weekly and processes 65,000 pounds of high-quality Bavarian pork each week.⁷ After processing at the CMPP, these items are loaded and transported to U.S. military installations, embassies, and consulates throughout Europe.

The interagency, international, and joint cooperation necessary to ensure

meat products from the United States are available to U.S. forces overseas is truly astonishing. As EUCOM logisticians waded into the complexities of the process, they undoubtedly had at least a small role in ensuring greater harmony and cooperation between the United States and the EU.

Without the professionalism and dedication of each individual and agency involved in this process, many traditional American food items may not be readily accessible to U.S. service members and government personnel serving in the region. So the next time shoppers decide to reach for that small taste of home at any commissary in Europe, maybe they will reflect on what it takes to be able to enjoy these products. For professional logisticians, we hope this brief discussion demonstrates that even seemingly intractable political or diplomatic obstacles can be overcome with collegiality, cooperation, and innovation.

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⁴ "About FAS," <http://www.fas.usda.gov/about-fas>, accessed June 9, 2013.

⁵ "TRACES system," http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/food_safety/veterinary_checks_and_food_hygiene/f84009_en.htm, accessed June 9, 2013.

⁶ "Suffolk Coastal Port Health," <http://www.porthealth.eu/Import-Process-POAO.htm>, accessed Jan. 23, 2014.

⁷ "Ramstein Central Meat Processing Plant Defense Commissary Agency Europe," http://www.commissaries.com/regions/cmpp_brochure_Oct_08.pdf, accessed June 9, 2013.