

# The Seven Deadly Sins of Sustainment

The author describes the requirements for providing efficient and effective support for combat units, using the seven deadly sins as a basis for the discussion.

■ By Brig. Gen. Steven A. Shapiro

Working in the 1st Theater Sustainment Command in Afghanistan has given me a unique vantage point to see how logisticians from strategic through tactical levels are sustaining current operations while retrograding equipment no longer needed for the current fight.

As the connection between the warfighter and our strategic logistics partners, the 1st Theater Sustainment Command links the industrial base with the current fight. In this role, logisticians have a responsibility to examine and review their actions in terms of effectiveness and efficiency through a constant after action review process to avoid committing the seven deadly sins of sustainment.

## The “Sins” of Sustainment

During a manufacturing forum I attended years ago, the guest speaker used the seven deadly sins as a descriptive tool to relate his perspective on manufacturing. Using these sins metaphorically, I offer the following definitions and how they apply to the sustainment mission:

- Lust—chasing unneeded capacity or capability.
- Greed—wanting more stocks “just in case.”
- Gluttony—keeping items on inventory and never saying no to requests.
- Sloth—planning imprecisely and thus overspending.
- Envy—wanting what the other guy has.
- Pride—parochialism or not sharing assets and information across services or commands.

- Wrath—reacting poorly when somebody suggests doing something different to save money or prevent shipping excess to the theater.

## Combating the Seven Sins

Deployed logisticians, along with those they support, must know how to prevent the seven deadly sins in their work. To do so, they must ask this key question: How is the mission of sustainment and retrograde kept in balance and on track?

**Lust.** First comes the hard question: What is the requirement? In a resource-rich environment, this question is seldom taken seriously. However, today this question is critical for two reasons: to save resources and to prevent a forward stockpile of items that will just need to be retrograded. To follow up, logisticians should also ask, “Is this really needed?”

**Greed.** Logisticians cannot guess requirements for combat units. They need to engage them and truly determine what their requirements are. In Afghanistan, logisticians often find that less is better and is what the combat unit needs and agrees to. Units do not want a bunch of “stuff” on their forward operating bases taking up valuable space. Stockpiling just creates transportation problems later. Logisticians should relay these concerns to the highest levels of the materiel enterprise in order to prevent the pushing of unneeded materiel.

**Gluttony.** Stocks on hand need to be checked and a determination

needs to be made about what can be sent back to the wholesale system. An item not needed in theater may be needed in the continental United States. Working with the wholesale level allows one to determine what is excess and whether to ship it to where it is needed or destroy it in place.

**Sloth.** Command supply discipline in the deployed force is a force multiplier. We have to emplace control measures to ensure we are not asking for unneeded items. It is critical that we order only what is needed so that we do not take up valuable space and further burden our retrograde mission.

Logisticians and warfighters agree that we need to bring back some control measures, such as working the manager review file daily, canceling unneeded requisitions, restricting offline requisitions from the General Services Administration, reviewing all local purchase requests before they leave Afghanistan, and consuming what is on hand before ordering more. Saying no actually reduces risk by avoiding unneeded stockpiles. For logisticians, saying no is no longer taboo.

**Envy.** Next we need to look at what we have already spent money on and determine if spending more is worth the cost and effort. For instance, we have military construction projects that are being reconsidered based on our current manning and strategy. Senior officers are making tough calls, but they are calls that need to be made based on what we know about the future. Nothing is wrong with re-

ducing requirements with mission changes. In fact, it is the sign of a learning organization and should happen daily.

**Pride.** In Afghanistan, we are driven to share capability across the services. We can certainly do better, but today we have Army engineers using Navy equipment to deconstruct base camps, Marines driving Army equipment, and our coalition partners borrowing equipment from all of our military services. This way of sharing prevents unneeded shipping costs to the combined joint operations area and reduces our footprint.

We should share not only equipment but also logistics data. In U.S. Forces-Afghanistan and the 1st Theater Sustainment Command, we always say “we have no secrets” and post all information on our shared portal. Seeing our numbers on other organizations’ slides is a huge benefit and keeps us all grounded. Although not painless, creating this common operational picture has helped external organizations to develop their own common operational pictures and allowed them to focus on assisting us instead of trying to “see” us.

**Wrath.** As we work across these disciplines, it is important to realize that we are rewriting doctrine in many instances. At this point, no ideas are bad and all ideas are welcome. When we have battle rhythm events, our teammates are encouraged to speak up because their perspective may be the one that helps us put this puzzle together.

As we think about where we have been and where we are going, applying the above principles provides a basis for effective decision making. It has led us to adopt some tactics, techniques, and procedures. Getting this right is critical to resetting the services and allowing us to train for the next set of operations.

### Taking Action at Multiple Levels

We are taking action at all levels in order to execute the above ap-

plications. Again, these actions are not set in doctrine but have been acquired over years of tough lessons learned.

Battlespace owners must own their footprints. If a reportable item is in your area, it is your responsibility. This is especially critical for functions such as contractors and

not too proud to ask for assistance.

As we transition out of Afghanistan, a framework of thought to look at sustainment issues based on lessons learned is critical. I am not advocating codifying the seven deadly sins as a change to Army doctrine. I am advocating using them as a prism to look at these is-

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containers on the battlefield.

The 1st Theater Sustainment Command recently cut an order to define “good enough” or “expeditionary.” This places a left and right boundary on needs.

We are looking at our major contracts, task order by task order. We need to know whom we are paying for what service. This is important, hard government work but key to reducing our footprint.

We are looking at all requirements and making tough calls. We cancel operational needs that are just no longer required and review every new task order to ensure it is a needed service.

We are touching everything. If we have not used the items in a container yet, we probably won’t. If the items are not needed, we are using multiple avenues to dispose of them, such as foreign excess personal property, Defense Logistics Agency disposition services, and foreign military sales.

We have developed an aggressive logistics battle rhythm and are talking about all of this in the open. We have linked this battle rhythm to that of the operational corps headquarters and regional commands.

We have brought in our strategic partners who can help, and we’re

sues as we transition into a period of lower operating tempo with constrained resources.

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*Editor’s Note: As the Army’s official professional bulletin on sustainment, Army Sustainment provides a forum for the exchange of information and expression of original, creative, and innovative thoughts on sustainment functions. We welcome your commentaries and thoughts on any sustainment-related topic. Submit articles and comments to [usarmy.lee.tradoc.mbx.leeasm@mail.mil](mailto:usarmy.lee.tradoc.mbx.leeasm@mail.mil).*

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