



# Distributing Food to the Kurds

by Captain David S. Elmo, USAR

**T**he challenge of providing emergency resupply of food to returning Kurdish refugees in northern Iraq was perhaps the military's most complicated humanitarian assistance logistics effort since the Berlin Airlift. The massive Kurdish repatriation of over 700,000 civilians from refugee camps along the Turkish and Iran borders into northern Iraq demanded emergency resupply of foodstuffs to the vacated Kurdish villages.

"When we conducted our initial village assessments, there was virtually nothing in terms of staple foods in the villages," said Lieutenant Colonel Michael E. Hess of the 353d Civil Affairs Command, an Army Reserve unit from the Bronx, New York, that was responsible for civil military operations. "Any amount of food that may have remained before the Kurdish flight to their northern border was either taken with them, consumed, or unilaterally stolen."

Coalition forces focused their humanitarian mission on selecting food distribution sites and stockpiling goods within the Kurdish communities. The goal was to maintain a 4- to 7-day supply based upon feeding requirements for an estimated population. It was assumed that by creating a village stockpile, the refugees would be encouraged to return directly to their villages (thus bypassing any temporary displaced-civilian camp site). This assumption proved correct.





□ While women and children wait for food at a distribution point in Sarsing, Iraq (left), an American soldier checks for family documents and ration cards. Bottled water and water jugs (above) are stored at the Sirsenk Airfield, Iraq, for distribution to Kurdish families. Turkish and Iraqi civilian trucks (below left) are used to transport food to distribution points.



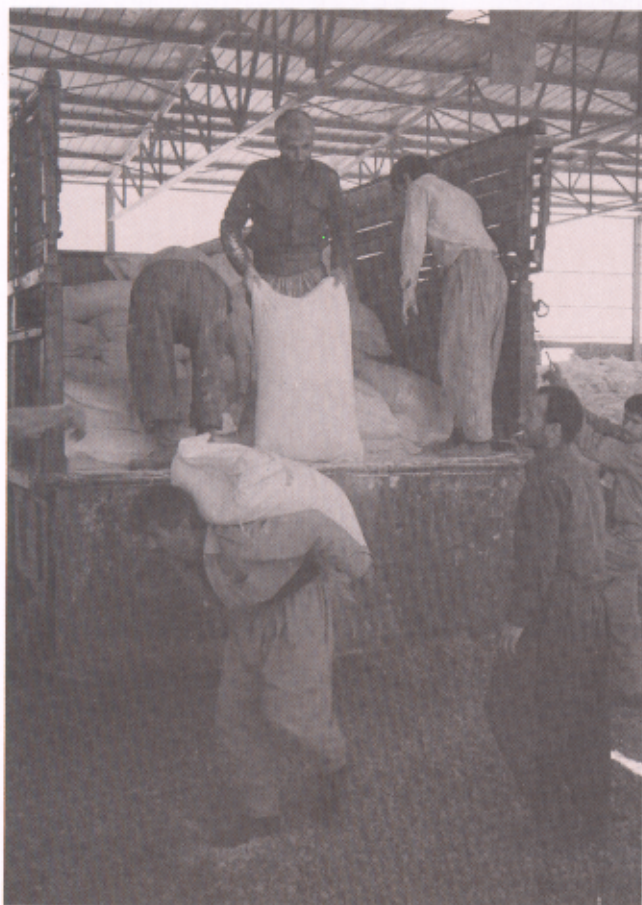
In spite of the enormous resettlement, the extraordinary logistics efforts of the coalition forces and nongovernmental and private volunteer organizations in stockpiling and distributing food enabled them to keep pace with demand. Major settlement populations grew at enormous rates during May 1991. For example, the population of Zakho City grew from 17,000 to over 103,000; the Zakho Displaced Civilian Camp from 0 to over 58,000; and Dohuk from 20,000 to over 100,000. Populations of small villages also increased

at enormous rates. Al Amadiyah, a mountaintop village 75 kilometers east of Zakho, increased from 50 people on 1 May to over 12,000 by 31 May. Other villages selected as food distribution sites within the secured zone included Batufa, Mangesh, Gorgevan, Zawita, Bamirni, Sarsing, Quadish, Deralok, and Shiladiza. Most of these sites also serviced other nearby villages.

Staple food was provided by the coalition military forces, the United Nations, CARE International, and other relief agencies. When recommending a menu, nutritionists from the United Nation's World Food Program and CARE considered the Kurdish dietary tradition. The recommended daily ration per person included 400 grams of wheat flour, 100 grams of rice, 65 grams of pulse (lentils), 33 grams of oil or margarine, and 15 grams of sugar. This menu provided over 2,000 calories per day, 65 grams of protein, and 47 grams of fat. Supplemental menu items included high-protein biscuits, canned meats, canned peas, canned vegetables, tea, salt, baby food, and milk. Many relief workers commented that the food stockpiling operation did wonders to quell uncertainties and bolster confidence in the coalition's commitment to the Kurds.

During the initial days of the operation, food was delivered by truck convoy from Silopi, Turkey. There, the coalition forces had established a humanitarian





service support base, which was a significant logistics hub and warehouse. Transporting food from Turkey became a complex process, for problems encountered at the Turkish-Iraqi border impeded expeditious movement. Convoy operations became more streamlined once food warehouses and supply stores were positioned in Iraq at Zakho and at the Sirsenk Airfield, 50 kilometers east of Zakho. Warehouses at Zakho supplied the areas west of Sirsenk, while the Sirsenk warehouse supplied the eastern areas through Shiladiza, the coalition's easternmost sector.

In the early days of resupply, coalition military trucks were used to deliver food and other emergency items of equipment. The transition to an all-civilian trucking fleet, which was owned by Turks and Iraqis, occurred quicker than most logistics planners anticipated. U.S. Marine Lieutenant Colonel Paul D. Wisniewski, director of relief logistics at the Silopi Humanitarian Service Support Base, explained, "As the civilian trucks became available, they relieved the need for military transport and made the process of transitioning to civilian agencies much easier." In May, over 20,000 tons of relief food and supplies were delivered to 15 locations within the security zone.

The retail operation of distributing food took place at the centralized village distribution points. Selecting



□ Kurdish laborers offload flour from a truck at the Sirsenk food warehouse (above left). Food is distributed to Kurdish families at a schoolhouse that has been converted into a distribution center (above).

buildings to use as food distribution centers was one of the most critical tasks in the preliminary stages of the humanitarian relief operation. Hospitals, schoolhouses, fire department buildings, and police headquarters were used. Many of the centers were initially established by U.S. Army Civil Affairs units working in conjunction with British, Dutch, French, Italian, Spanish, Canadian, and Australian coalition partners. Most centers distributed food on a weekly basis. Orderly control of the people receiving food at the centers was of paramount concern. Ration cards were used to assist in food distribution.

Kurds performed a number of tasks in the distribution process, such as registering families, inventory-





ing stocks, offloading trucks, and rationing food. Their participation relieved military personnel of some of their tasks. Local involvement also fostered goodwill and strong community relations. The Kurds who assisted with food distribution received additional food as payment.

The military coalition's goal was to give the responsibility of food distribution to civilian agencies. CARE International was the leading nongovernment organization that managed the food distribution process. When CARE representatives arrived in the secured zone in early May, they found the coalition's process so well organized that they could take over all operations by the end of the month. CARE's team leader in Iraq, Roland Roome, was so impressed with the coalition's efforts that he commented, "What was incredible to me was how the military set up all the detailed and complicated systems at such speed with so little prior experience in the food game. It was great working with them—real professionals with a great attitude."

The success of the coalition forces in distributing food throughout northern Iraq encouraged the Kurdish people to return to their homes. Operation Provide Comfort was a resounding success. **ALOG**

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## *Sustainment Imperatives in History*

### **Continuity: Simple C-Ration Sustained Momentum**

In the fall of 1944, Patton's Third Army pressed the Germans' retreat from France, making rapid advances along the front. Nazi generals expected to trade space for time by rapidly falling back to prepared defensive positions close to their borders. This tactic would shorten German supply lines while seriously overextending Allied supply lines and leave the Allied spearhead vulnerable to counterattack. U.S. supply units were, indeed, hard pressed to keep pace with the rapid Allied advances.

The Germans' reasoning was strategically sound, but they were surprised by the Allies' ability to resupply the lead troops who kept effective and unexpected pressure on the retreating Germans.

U.S. supply convoys, however, had only enough transportation assets to move critical fuel and ammunition to the combat units on the front. There was no room to transport bulky, conventional rations. A compact, portable, instantly usable item called the C (combat)-ration became an important contributing factor in sustaining the Allied momentum. The C-ration was a triumph of "low" technology but vital in enabling U.S. troops to keep going, exploiting success.

The lowly C-ration became an item that provided *continuity* to the generation of combat power, supporting depth of the battlefield and enabling operational initiative.