

The Impact of Enterprise Resource Planning Systems on Army Sustainment

Enterprise resource planning systems improve equipment management, parts and supply ordering, and financial accountability while providing visibility of equipment in the supply pipeline.

■ By Maj. Gen. Larry D. Wyche



As we look past Army Sustainment 2020 to Force 2025 and beyond, the importance of advanced technologies, logistics systems, and improved business practices is becoming even more apparent.

The Army is faced with a reduced budget and force levels that make automation and technology vital. These reduced levels are expected to continue as the Army streamlines its operations and transforms from an Army at war to an Army of preparation.

Long used by the business community, enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems allow companies to store and manage data for every stage of business. This information is shared among all users of the system, facilitating near-real-time collaboration across all business areas.

The collaboration allows for greatly increased communication velocity and enhanced accuracy while ensuring situational awareness across operational, logistics, finance, and human resources areas of interest.

ERP Systems

Over the past few years, the Army and Department of Defense have made great strides in updating their business processes and implementing ERPs with associated business process reengineering. The Logistics Modernization Program (LMP), fully deployed in 2010, replaced 35-year-old legacy systems with a single, fully integrated enterprise solution. LMP users include the following:

- The Army Materiel Command.
- The Communications-Electronics Command.

- The Aviation and Missile Command.
- The TACOM Life Cycle Management Command.
- The Joint Munitions and Lethality Life Cycle Management Command.
- Depots and ammunition plants.
- The Army Sustainment Command.
- National Maintenance Program users.
- The Defense Finance and Accounting Service.

LMP resides and is maintained at the national level, whereas the Global Combat Support System-Army (GCSS-Army) resides with and is maintained by tactical logisticians. The two systems are sister programs and can share data.

Similar to LMP, GCSS-Army is an ERP solution that combines several automated sustainment information systems into a single, integrated, web-based system. GCSS-Army will bring the same benefits to brigades, battalions, and companies that LMP brought to the national level.

The system will improve readiness and accountability and, for the first time, allow for full financial auditability. It can track spending according to the individual serial number on the equipment, the specific person doing the work, and the specific appropriation used.

GCSS-Army Fielding

GCSS-Army Wave 1 fielding began in November 2012 and will continue throughout 2015. The fielding was separated into waves based on lessons learned from previous standard Army management information

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system (STAMIS) and industry ERP implementations.

The wave process mitigates risk and allows for more rapid fielding, increased system familiarity, and an overall better system. By reducing the fielding complexity, a smaller amount of change occurs, allowing units to more easily integrate the system into their operations.

The wave method creates system familiarity while associated school-house training builds the knowledgeable user base that GCSS-Army and ERPs require. The method also allows for lessons learned to be applied to future updates, improving the overall product the Army receives.

GCSS-Army fielding Wave 1 focuses on the supply support activity and supporting finance functions. GCSS-Army replaces the Standard Army Retail Supply System (SARSS) while maintaining full interoperability with legacy systems. By focusing on SARSS and finance in Wave 1, the GCSS-Army team can completely replace a single legacy STAMIS throughout the Army.

Units in the continental United States will receive the system later this year, starting with Fort Campbell, Ky., Fort Stewart, Ga., the West Virginia National Guard, and the Georgia National Guard.

Continuing throughout the rest of the world, the team will field to units in the Pacific (Hawaii and Korea) and move on to Europe, where Germany and Italy will receive the software for the first time.

By the end of 2014, 59 percent of GCSS-Army Wave 1 fielding will be complete. The fielding team will maintain this rapid pace until Wave 1 ends in the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2015.

The fielding process includes a 180-day organizational change management period to prepare units for the changeover to GCSS-Army. Every 30 days until the transition is complete, the unit and fielding team have key events that must occur for fielding to continue.

These activities include site prepa-

ration, advanced lead user training, prerequisite web-based training, lead user workshops, audience analysis, and data cleansing.

The organizational change management period provides units with ample time to prepare their people, processes, and data for the conversion from their legacy STAMISs to the improved processes and systems within GCSS-Army.

This is essential to the conversion since GCSS-Army has very strict input criteria for data entry and improved work processes that mimic industry best practices.

After-action reviews from fielded units have highlighted the importance of a thorough and detailed scrub of data before switching over to GCSS-Army. Valuable feedback is already helping to improve the system for future units.

The GCSS-Army programming team has addressed many issues that were brought up during various global updates, discovered during fielding and reported through the GCSS-Army help desk. Patches to the system occur on a routine basis, addressing bugs and improving functionality based on this important user input.

Wave 2 fielding will begin in fiscal year 2015 and run through the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2017. During Wave 2, GCSS-Army will replace legacy maintenance, unit supply, property book, and remaining finance and materiel management systems. These systems include the Property Book Unit Supply Enhanced and Standard Army Maintenance System-Enhanced (SAMS-E).

The first GCSS-Army Wave 2 working-level integrated product team meetings with major Army commands were held recently. Discussions included change management, data cleansing, site preparation, future fielding planning, and implementation concerns.

Training on GCSS-Army

Training is a critical aspect of the implementation for complex systems such as ERPs. GCSS-Army training

has been implemented early in initial-entry training and professional military education to ensure units have a robust knowledge base before they receive the system.

The Army introduced institutional training for GCSS-Army in the first quarter of fiscal year 2013 to ensure users were prepared for the transition.

Both Warrant Officer Basic Course students and automated logistical specialists now receive GCSS-Army training. SARSS and SAMS-E will be removed from programs of instruction beginning no later than the third quarter of fiscal year 2014 and replaced with GCSS-Army training.

Since the Systems, Applications, and Products in Data Processing (SAP) enterprise application is the ERP software powering GCSS-Army, the team is working to build a base of SAP-certified logisticians.

The Army Logistics University has partnered with Virginia State University to offer SAP certification at Fort Lee, Va. Graduates of the course are providing valuable feedback on how the program can be improved to meet future learning needs.

Impacts of GCSS-Army

GCSS-Army will benefit the entire force. Affecting materiel management, property accountability, unit supply functions, maintenance operations, and finance, GCSS-Army improves visibility and accountability for users throughout the logistics pipeline.

As a single web-based solution that replaces multiple STAMISs, GCSS-Army allows universal permission-based access through a web browser worldwide. The system standardizes and simplifies sustainment work processes and saves sustainment Soldiers' time.

With near-real-time access to transaction statuses, users can identify and solve problems almost as soon as they occur. The many tools the ERP provides allow for detailed fill-rate analysis and interactive adjustment capabilities that were not possible through previous solutions.

With Wave 2, maintenance records will be immensely improved, with all transactions recorded throughout an item's entire life cycle.

Records will no longer be subject to loss during lateral transfers between units or when items enter reset. Repair parts and supplies will be fully tracked; GCSS-Army allows for in-transit visibility of shipments as they occur.

GCSS-Army also provides valuable tools for commanders and sustainment planners across Army sustainment functions. It features unprecedented asset visibility and status information down to individual modified table of organization equipment subparagraphs.

These individual organizational assets can be attached and detached in any way commanders require. Concise reports provide commanders with the maintenance, supply, and

monetary details needed to make important decisions.

Feedback from units using GCSS-Army has been extraordinarily positive. Commanders, maintenance managers, and accountants rave about how the system improves logistics processes within their units. Maintenance supervisors appreciate the much greater visibility of transactional data, which saves time and improves readiness.

Instead of "chasing data" through multiple sources, GCSS-Army provides a single source for logistics readiness data. Coordination among sustainment functions is improved, with resource managers and logisticians working together to facilitate operations.

The Army is well into fielding its future tactical logistics system. GCSS-Army replaces many legacy STAMISs with one integrated web-

based solution.

The ERP system greatly improves equipment management, parts and supply orders, and financial auditability. It provides near-real-time visibility of equipment status in the supply pipeline, and simplifies reporting of readiness and budget information across the chain of command. GCSS-Army improves commanders' situational awareness, facilitating decisions using the latest information.

Maj. Gen. Larry D. Wyche is the commanding general of the Combined Arms Support Command and Sustainment Center of Excellence at Fort Lee, Va.

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