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FORWARD SUPPORT BASE OPERATIONS IN SUPPORT OF LOW/MID INTENSITY CONFLICT CONTINGENCY AND EXPEDITIONARY FORCE OPERATIONS

BY

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Combat service support for AirLand Battle doctrine has been designed around a linear, fully developed battlefield integrating tactical, operational, and even strategic theater support operations into the logistic sustainment of forces. Without benefit of a mature battlefield logistics capability, contingency force commanders face the dilemma of deploying combat service support assets and infrastructure during critical initial phases of contingency operations simultaneously with combat and combat support forces needed to ensure overwhelming combat power against the enemy and sustainment survival of those forces. (continued on back)

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FORWARD SUPPORT BASE OPERATIONS IN SUPPORT OF LOW/MID INTENSITY CONFLICT CONTINGENCY AND EXPEDITIONARY FORCE OPERATIONS

An Individual Study Project
Intended for Publication

by

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INTRODUCTION

As we consider the direction for AirLand Battle Future, logistics will necessarily need to keep up with a smaller, more agile and deployable, force structure that may very well have even fewer combat service support units to put on the battlefield than there are now. Quite possibly, contingency corps and forward presence may soon overshadow, if not replace, forward defense in our strategic deterrence and responsiveness vocabulary, too, as we develop ensuing AirLand Battle Future doctrine now for the twenty-first century. To sustain any contingency operations today and protect deployed forces later from logistic limitations inherent in fewer worldwide forward basing opportunities facing the United States in the future, Forward Operating Base (FOB) may need to be included in the logistics doctrinal vocabulary of contingency corps, and even become the cornerstone of AirLand Battle Future logistics. FOB is a viable forward base alternative to forward defense prepositioned logistics and management infrastructure.[1] Using currently available combat service support structure, an FOB can provide credible operational level sustainment now and in the future for the airland battlefield even as our forward defenses dismantle: which is particularly essential to our future Army since, as much as land combat

force projection, forward defense has also been a key component of our warfighting sustainment capability.

ISSUE

The issue now and in the future is how to deploy support for contingency and reinforcing units, and how to control the flow of support into and on the battlefield. FOB can be the solution that allows deployed forces of any size to project and distribute sustainment onto and across battlefields anywhere in the world.

Whether supported by forward area support teams (FAST) as in light divisions or forward support battalions (FSB) like those found in heavy divisions, contingency forces need to follow guidance outlined in FM 100-16 and quickly establish the theater support base. Even if the contingency calls for only a brigade sized force, a logistics base separate from the supporting FAST or FSB operations is critical to the sustainment of the deployed forces. This is the mission of the FOB: to look to the rear for supporting resources and liaison with the direct support units; provide logistics expertise and division support command level decision making beyond the scope of the supporting commands on the battlefield; coordinate support for all non-organic task force units in the theater; link the tactical support to the operational and strategic logistics agencies outside the area of operations; vanguard the projection of logistics support forward with the flow of battle, and transition the

FOB into the corps and theater support basing as the theater develops.2

PURPOSE

The whole purpose of the FOB is to be able to use effectively not only the tactical, but also the operational and strategic logistic resources of the Army during contingencies. Future airland battlefields may not be where we feared most or least expected, but United States commitment and responsiveness will necessarily continue to be an integral part of Army AirLand Battle doctrine, regardless where our forward basing remains. No matter where any future battlefields unfold, to maintain initiative, promote force agility, fight simultaneously throughout the depth of the entire battlefield, and synchronize that fight effectively, complex logistics support issues will continue to characterize AirLand Battle sustainment doctrine just as it does now. Doctrine that can ill-afford to ignore initially providing adequate support during critical early phases of contingency operations or to uniquely distinguish contingency support capability from support needed on the mature airland battlefield. Providing adequate complex logistics support for contingency forces thrust onto fluid, lethal battlefields of potentially uncertain dimensions is, however, further complicated by disruption of our increasingly more sophisticated automated support systems as the forces deploy and, therefore,

disruption of our ability to access operational and strategic logistics support from the tactical frontlines using existing routine airland battlefield systems. This is particularly true when the initially deployed brigade is also called upon to be the Army component command of joint and/or combined operations, or at least controlling (and supporting) special operation forces (SOF) until overall conventional forces build further. With its tactical support committed to looking forward on the battlefield to the immediate needs of deployed forces, contingency force commanders at all levels need a doctrinal bridge to span the gap deployment to bare-base areas of operation created between the tactical logistics battlefield and both operational and strategic logistics bases until those bases become an integral part of the area of operation. Establishing a Forward Operating Base capable of direct access to operational and strategic resources that is also functionally separate from the tactical direct support efforts is a doctrinal necessity for that bridge and successful logistics support.

CURRENT DOCTRINE

Current logistics doctrine has developed in support of a rather linear battlefield. Even in support of AirLand Battle, supply and services remain echeloned to the brigade support areas, and supported units, through division, corps, and theater from our strategic national resources. It also

remains true that no matter how exotic we try to make logistics, it is still requirements driven business; and must also be prepared to exploit success or opportunity as well as routinely meet consumption requirements. Fortunately, some requirements are easily predicted, like food and water. Any requirement that is not situation dependent is predictable, even on the most lethal and technologically modern battlefield. Unfortunately, however, requirements surfacing on the battlefield that have not been predicted are the ones that frustrate both commanders and logisticians. Echeloned support is designed to overlap enough to make resources readily accessible for most unforecast needs and reduce frustration; as long as the battlefield has matured enough for division base and echelons above division units to be there within reach of tactical support units. On a mature battlefield, tactical, operational, and often strategic logistics capabilities are present. Normally, in the theater, tactical logistics are direct support level requirements for three to five days of operation. Operational levels of sustainment are thirty to sixty days duration and strategic levels extend operating limits over seventy-five days. Contributing to operational sustainment are echelon above division and echelon above corps general support units, theater war reserve stocks, and host nation support. Strategic sustainment originates with the industrial base and depot/wholesale stocks, but spills into the theater to sustain the level of war at which you

must win. Our forces stationed overseas as part of our forward defense initiative have included sustainment infrastructure for all wartime levels. Our presence overseas has allowed us to operationally plan with the logistics insurance of a mature theater support structure available to provide sustainment. Our doctrine accepts this capability will prevail, even though we are not forward deployed in the most dangerous current hot spots of the world. Contingency plans, therefore, do not all enjoy this doctrinal guarantee of in place support.

To better understand how important Forward Operating Bases are to low and mid-intensity contingency operations where logistical infrastructure will develop concurrently with combat force build-up, it is important to examine our logistics infrastructure. Regardless whether supported with forward area support teams (FAST) or forward support battalions (FSB), either is still a requirements based support system. Requirements still have to be identified, requisitioned or requested, and then received, stored or distributed, and issued. Automation continues to make this laborious process faster, simpler, and better, but not without increasing dependence on automated systems with limited battlefield mobility and virtually incapable of decentralizing support capability such as required during contingency operations. Although our forces can fight as autonomous brigades, brigade support is still dependent on echeloned support coming from behind the brigade rear

boundary. Much of the linking automation between tactical direct support and higher levels of supply has migrated to echelons above division, particularly in light divisions usually earmarked for contingency plan use. In addition, most management functions used to link tactical direct support requirements with operational and strategic resources have been centralized either within th c vision or in echelons above division management centers. Therefore, to support even an autonomous brigade task force, managing resources on the airland battlefield is a full time job for everyone, even in peacetime. Although great progress has been made in automating the mechanics of translating requirements of tactical need into delivery of strategic resources at the proper time and place to satisfy those requirements, automated battlefield combat service support systems have not yet been linked effectively over the long distances between tactical, operational, and strategic support. Close coordination and courier/liaison is anticipated, even after the battlefield fully develops, to transfer automated data on diskette and metallic tape across that battlefield. Courier and liaison coordination and data transfer is a cumbersome communications method in an automated support system; as is the linear front to rear distribution of automated data even in an established theater of operation. In is completely inefficient, and quite possibly ineffective as well, for use during contingency operations when operational and strategic

support elements remain at the end of extensive lines of communications reaching from potentially anywhere in the world into continental United States home stationing.

Regardless of current changes in world politics or past experience, we continue to recognize higher probabilities for low and mid-intensity conflicts and an inherent need to effectively execute contingency operations virtually anywhere in the world. Forward stationing, and prepositioned war reserves, contribute substantially to shaping logistics support and force sustainment operations wherever forward deployment initiatives currently deter conflict, particularly at the higher intensity end of the spectrum. But not only may our forward stationing presence be shrinking back to within our continental boundaries, it even now hardly constitutes a truly global land-based capability to sustain force projections.

NEW CHALLENGES

With extensive forward defense in jeopardy, Army thinking and structure must react to be able to meet new challenges. The United States Army Posture Statement, FY 91, reflects however that, "The Army will continue to maintain forward-deployed forces to meet national security commitments and maintain the credibility of the Nation's deterrent strategy. However, the easing of global tensions, coupled with reduced military threats, may require fewer of these forces. This will cause greater reliance on ready,

flexible, and rapidly deployable contingency and reinforcing forces- elevating the need for greater strategic mobility. Since advances in strategic lift alone may not adequately meet Army requirements, future Army contingency and reinforcing forces must be designed to be more strategically deployable with no decrease in combat capability. It is imperative that future Army forces be capable of:

- Attaining a clear tactical advantage wherever committed:

- Conducting land campaigns and simultaneous close and deep operations:

- Maintaining superior force agility through both physical capabilities and leader development:

- Fighting outnumbered and winning: and

- Linking the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war."[3]

Faced with so much world political change, it is hard to imagine exactly what the Army of the future will look like to meet resulting challenges: and, perhaps, even harder to determine how to best support Army forces on the battlefield to do what our current posture statement emphasizes. History may even repeat itself, as it often does, with far-reaching reorganization of tactical units similar to restructuring during the period 1940 to 1942 that streamlined existing divisions to make them more suitable for open warfare by minimizing their service elements where these functions could be collected and provided at parent

c and army levels.[4] Perhaps the Army potentially can eve reuse words like regiment or battle group to determine how to design combat force structure for a smaller, more agile and deployable future Army. At least at this point in time possibilities for the future force structuring seem nearly that limitless, as long as Chief of Staff, Army, imperatives of force quality, doctrine, force mix, training, modernization, and leadership development remain protected.[5] But there are limits, logistically, to how useful history can be in predicting future force structure, particularly for combat service support organization and structure. Technological advances alone have irrevocably changed the logistics complexion of the battlefield forever.

Even so, logistics remains the economics of warfare; and in broad terms sustaining the deployed forces of the United States remains a business of production, distribution, and consumption, just as it was the logistics business of World War I and World War II.[6] Just like economics, sustaining the deployed forces of the United States on future battlefields can also simply be stated as allocating (properly distributing) scarce resources (from limited production capacity) to competing ends (unit consumption). Of course, this allocation of resources is still command responsibility. Responsibility layered all the way from consuming unit commander, through distribution systems of tactical, operational, and strategic commanders, to the release authorities of our national resources. Without

question, however, the mechanics of this responsibility is vested in logisiticians, and logistics coordination must exist throughout the flow of support to sustain the technological advantages of the battlefield we currently enjoy. "The ultimate aim of all logistics [and logisticians] is to get the proper combat elements to the right place at the right time, properly equipped to fight, and with the means at hand to maintain them in the accomplishment of their missions [on mature battlefields as well as during contingencies on developing battlefields]."[7] Forward defense initiatives have permitted considerable logistics support and infrastructure be prepositioned and established, supporting our current echelons above corps logistics doctrine, where forces, and commands, remain forward deployed to handle the business of distributing resources on the battlefield.[8] Obviously, shrinking forward deployed logistics opportunities challenge our existing sustainment doctrine as well as our warfighting capability.

Contingency operations do not enjoy such warm logistic receptions as our forward defense provides. With over half the world expected to have modern conventional weapons by the twenty-first century, about the only thing our forces are guaranteed during contingencies is arrival on a very lethal, and potentially prolonged, "bring your own" highly technical battlefield.[9] Since we are doctrinally unaccustomed to bringing everything, all at once, to a fight we expect to need, logistic eyes will need to not only look

forward to support combatant units, but also backwards through long logistic pipelines to keep the right support flowing in the right order.[10] Command and control of the pipeline on the battlefield, and battlefield logistics management at the pipeline mouth, are the essence of FOB. Britain was faced with just such an operational sustainment requirement during what is now called the Falkland Islands War. Two theater sustaining bases, one on Ascension Island half-way between England and the battlefield and one consisting of sustainment vessels within the Task Force afloat, linked strategic support functions performed in Britain to tactical level combat service support units supporting the land war on East Falklands.[11] These key sustainment support bases were, in fact, the British center of gravity during the Falkland campaign. Obviously, even though the central organizational framework for operational sustainment is the theater army; field armies, corps, and even divisions must be prepared to plan and conduct operational level sustainment depending on the nature of the contingency and task forces required.[12] No doubt, divisions must further be prepared to deploy, and coordinate sustainment for, their subordinate brigade task forces that may operate in theaters without parent organizations either independently or reinforcing other committed units, as occurred in operation Just Cause. Regardless what structure and form contingency forces take in the future as part of evolving AirLand Battle doctrine in the next century,

however, commanders at all levels will need to be prepared to sustain operations in low and mid intensity conflicts anywhere in the world: and do it over dangerously long and unforgiving lines of supply and communications during contingency operations or on any other maturing battlefield. Likewise, regardless what structure and form combat service support takes in the future: command, control, and management of logistics for the battlefield will remain a key functional responsibility of logisticians to ensure combatant commanders still have the resources needed to support and sustain smaller, more agile forces committed sequentially into the theater of war.

Right now, AirLand Battle doctrine focuses predominantly on the magnitude of threats of global conflict and the operational art of a rather linear continental warfare in Europe. It is an eyes-forward, aggressive ways and means to a defensive end supported by a robust echelons above corps logistics doctrine and capability.[13] However, AirLand Battle is also Urgent Fury into Grenada in 1983 and Just Cause in Panama on 20 December 1989, and it is still our answer to the complete low, mid, as well as high intensity range of the conventional conflict spectrum. So as the perceived end to the cold war continues to dissolve the high-intensity bi-polar threat orientation that fostered current nuclear deterrence strategies and much of our conventional warfighting battlefield doctrine, we must continue to anticipate how to successfully fight, and

sustain, our future Army. Naturally, with forward defense initiatives supporting current doctrine still embattled with Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) reduction talks and increasing interest in contingency corps and forward presence, the European battlefield must continue to influence future doctrine but without dominating our operational level thinking. Forward defense initiatives permitted significant battlefield sustainment build-up to occur where national strategic interests have been most threatened. Our forward-deployed Army forces have successfully implemented support doctrine using pre-positioned war reserve materiel stocks and solicitation of host nation support (HNS).[14] With these initiatives in jeopardy, greater emphasis on independent force projection capability and support basing of these nonforward-deployed forces is essential.[15]

Regardless the size or composition of the forces deployed, or the intensity of conflict, provisions must still be made for base development.[16] Contingency forces in low and mid intensity conflicts where our stationed presence is usually less pronounced will be greeted with little or no waiting logistics capability ready to protect their combat power arriving, more than likely, from multiple origins and support bases. Projecting sustaining logistics forward onto the battlefield will be a deploying force responsibility and FOB doctrine must recognize the importance of immediately being able to service and control the logistics needs of all

units arriving in the theater of operations sufficiently to facilitate mission accomplishment: currently an echelon above corps responsibility.[17]

Actually, there may be less emphasis on echelons above corps support in the future anyway, driving many operational requirements into the lower levels of our force structure. This will become even more apparent as force structuring seeks to build more agility into the Army. General John W. Foss, Commanding General, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, in an interview with Armed Forces Journal International, seemed to indicate force agility will be the lead tenet of AirLand Battle Future as we shape the Army after CFE negotiations are completed.[18] Our current force character has developed defensively over the last forty years of cold war peace, with more battlefield endurance than strategic agility. But incumbent CFE force reductions accordingly predict we no longer can expect the densely populated battlefields experienced in the past that focused attention on building force endurance rather than agility. General Foss therefore projects we will move toward a much more nonlinear battlefield of relatively sparsely displayed troop dispositions from a smaller force requiring much greater battlefield agility to concentrate combat power. These forces however already have the technological capability of locating, fixing, and engaging enemy forces successfully at great range to shape the dispersed battlefield to our advantage. Future success in battle, as

a resu[illegible]ll depend upon how fast we can move and how fast we can b[illegible]d up combat power to exploit the technologically achieved [illegible]vantages.[19]

Even with agility becoming the potential lead tenet of AirLand Battle Future, combat service support commitment to not only agility, but also initiative, depth, and sychronization will remain relatively unchanged and point to the increased importance and need of FOB command, control, and battlefield management of logistics down to the maneuver brigade. Agility will still require we provide forces continuous, uninterrupted support. Initiative on the battlefield will still require logistical anticipation of combat needs, continuous readiness, and responsive support derived from understanding the commander's intent. Depth will still demand continuity of support, particularly on the more nonlinear battlefield expected in the future, and over extended ranges of support needs and quantities necessary to fight throughout the depth of the battlefield. Synchronization will still require total support integration. Forward commanders on dispersed nonlinear battlefields will begin to look like contingency commanders. To make sure they both receive full advantage of the tenets of agility, initiative, depth, and sychronization wherever they fight, logisticians are needed forward with each of them in FOB to integrate their logistics into the battle.

Without expecting significant changes in requirements, distribution becomes the recognizable cornerstone of AirLand

Battle Future logistics and the FOB the controlling node, regardless the improved automation and communication, and a major consideration in the planning and execution of contingency operation logistics support. True, a lot of great improvements over the past twenty years have made airland battlefield support today much better than during World War I, Korea, and Vietnam, but still tough business particularly during contingency operations. We need to concentrate on how we deploy support for units from many different locations and many different organizations now, as we had to do in Panama, and develop doctrine for that kind of support that can compliment AirLand Battle Future doctrine before we face a prolonged, pronounced logistic situation we may not be able to handle so easily.

AUTOMATION

General Foss has also commented fewer people will probably be needed in logistics for the simple reason that we now have reliable automation and communications back into the rear area; so we can move away from basic logistical concepts that have carried the U.S. Army since 1942 using supply point distribution where everybody has their own vehicle and goes back and picks up what they need and brings it back to the front.[20] I agree we have grown into a logistics age dominated by automation. I remember studying TAERS (The Army Equipment Repair System) a long time ago in school before my first assignment, and later working with

TAMMS (The Army Maintenance Management System) as a mechanized infantry battalion motor officer in Europe. Both were quantum leaps in management technique and efficiency in those early career days, although I still am convinced backordered used to mean someone had rolled up my 2765 requisition, stuffed it in a flip-top bottle, and thrown it out into the ocean from the Normandy beaches! Without question neither TAERS nor TAMMS compare at all to SAMS (Standard Army Maintenance System) and SARSS (Standard Army Retail Supply System) currently used today and which I recently enjoyed having on my side as a maintenance battalion commander supporting a light infantry division. We have a lot more alphabet soup systems available to us in logistics automation now, too. But in contingency operations like Urgent Fury and Just Cause, or the many exercises and deployments common throughout the light infantry, alphabet soup does not get the job done if we cannot get these systems quickly onto the battlefield or at least access support agencies efficiently through them from the remote areas of the contingency world.

Even with all the improvement I have seen, Army logistics systems are still plagued with 1960's technology, sequential batch processing, independent discreet data bases, and limited asset visibility. Although far superior to any previous requisitioning systems, SARSS automation is still fed most places by predominately manual unit input and produces output that must be hand-carry transferred to the

location of the SAILS (Standard Army Intermediate Logistics System) computer to capture accounting data before entering the wholesale supply system. The same hand processing requirement holds true for SAMS and DS4 (Direct Support Unit Standard Supply System) information processing needed to determine battlefield force readiness. What this means is that even on the mature airland battlefield, these existing obstacles prolong our processing times and, in turn, our ability to support. Near-term initiatives, like the Objective Supply System (OSS), are great in-roads to reducing order ship time (OST) and improving battlefield support capability. System tests of OSS at Fort Hood, Texas, reduced OST from 12-25 days to 5-7 days.[21] By successfully using modem transfer of unit requisitions from ULLS (Unit Level Logistics System) to a master computer, OSS automatically edited, cost accounted, and sequentially searched asset inventories until the requisition was filled (or had to be procured). Creating a major time and cost savings, OSS is obviously a winner. It is no wonder OSS is the cornerstone of the ongoing Army Strategic Logistics System (SLS) initiative designed to further reduce OST throughout the Army, create one single supply system, increase visibility of all inventory, and optimize use of automation.[22]

SLS will dramatically change how we do business in Europe and, eventually everywhere else in our forward defenses and CONUS reinforcing units. But SLS architects,

and perhaps even AirLand Battle sustainment doctrine developers, need to remember contingency corps and forward presence are becoming the vocabulary of the future: and future airland battlefieds may not be where we feared most or least expected for that matter, but United States commitment and responsiveness will necessarily continue to be an integral part of Army AirLand Battle doctrine regardless where our forward basing remains. No matter where any future battlefields unfold, to maintain initiative, promote force agility, fight simultaneously throughout the depth of the entire battlefield, and synchronize that fight effectively, complex logistics support issues will continue to characterize AirLand Battle sustainment just as it does now. Doctrinely, we wil need to consider how to deploy in the future in contingency operations to regain the support advantage our forward defenses have afforded us in the past.

CONCLUSION

Our greatest dilemma when we thrust contingency forces onto fluid, lethal battlefields of potentially uncertain dimensions is reestablishing our interconnecting support bases. We automatically sever or disrupt our sophisticated automated support systems as the forces deploy. We cannot afford to deploy into any potentially hostile environment without benefit of force multiplying technology and logistics. FOB offer the opportunity to project the

sustaining technological advantages of our Army now as well as for AirLand Battle Future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Forward Operating base advantages must be seized upon now and implemented as doctrine. Too often peacetime training opportunities are forfeit because we train smaller units (battalion and brigade) away from their external support units. Our linearly oriented combat service support structure and automation fails, too, because it is designed around interdependent connectivity of echeloned support. Doctrine must be able to provide for all conflict on all scales. Strategic Logistic System (SLS) initiatives need to be designed to support FOB in contingency operations. FOB sychronizes battlefield support and every deployable force needs to practice its use with every available resource committed to its success. Every planning headquarters needs to include FOB in considering every contingency operation. As our forces face reduction with continued worldwide commitments, we can no longer fight without guaranteeing logistic support; the tenet of Forward Operating Base doctrine.

ENDNOTES

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