

Logistics Modernization: The Answer to Attrition Logistics

Subject Area Logistics

EWS 2006

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EWS Contemporary Issue Paper

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To

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7 February 2006

Report Documentation Page

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

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1. REPORT DATE 2006		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2006 to 00-00-2006	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Logistics Modernization: The Answer to Attrition Logistics				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) United States Marine Corps, Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University, 2076 South Street, Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Quantico, VA, 22134-5068				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 13	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

Advancements in tactics, equipment, and technology have been utilized extensively within the aviation combat element (ACE) and ground combat element (GCE) over the last two decades to dramatically increase their range and lethality on the battlefield. However, commensurate improvements have not occurred within the Marine air ground task force's (MAGTF) combat service support element (CSSE), which has resulted in a capabilities gap between the fast moving, highly efficient "teeth" of the MAGTF, and its antiquated and unresponsive "tail." The inability of the CSSE, with its capabilities rooted in the tactics and technology inherited from its "attrition warfare" oriented predecessors, to support the highly mobile and maneuver-centric warfighters of the ACE and GCE was clearly demonstrated in Operation Iraqi Freedom I (OIF I). Lack of a well defined command and control (C2) architecture, reliance on antiquated and non-interoperable supply and maintenance systems, lack of total asset visibility (TAV) and in-transit visibility (ITV) within the MAGTF, and the radically different task organization adopted by the CSSE in theater, all contributed to its inability to provide responsive combat service support (CSS) to the MAGTF's maneuver forces. To solve this problem, the Marine Corps has embarked upon the largest and most comprehensive

logistics transformation project ever attempted. By coupling the lessons learned from OIF I with the logistics modernizing initiatives first outlined in the integrated logistics concept (ILC) of the late 90s, the Marine Corp's Logistics Modernization Task Force is currently supervising the long overdue transformation of its CSS community's people, processes, and technology. The logistics modernization (Log Mod) effort will achieve its mission of providing a CSSE capable of supporting the maneuver forces of the 2015 MAGTF by focusing on the transformation of the following logistics areas: the logistics operational architecture (Log OA), logistics C2, the realignment of supply and maintenance functions, MAGTF distribution, and finally, the renaming and reorganization of the force service support groups.

The Logistics Operational Architecture

Currently, the CSS community lacks a real-time, shared data information environment, because it utilizes over two-hundred information technology (IT) systems that were acquired in response to a specific need instead of anticipating a general requirement.¹ Therefore, diverse technologies and IT solutions were acquired by CSSEs without a clear understanding of how they were expected to interact between one another. Thus, when the Marine

Logistics Command (II MEF) and 1st FSSG (I MEF) deployed to OIF I, they quickly discovered that the requisitioning process did not function due to the non-interoperability of their respective requisitioning systems. Furthermore, a detailed understanding of exactly what comprises the "logistics chain," along with a common idea of what tasks must be performed to move material from the source of supply to the warfighter (to include all associated supply, maintenance, and distribution requirements) does not currently exist. Consequently, no shared vision exists amongst the CSS community on exactly what needs to be done, who should do it, and what IT requirements will enable those activities throughout the logistics chain.

The Log Mod initiative addresses these shortfalls by defining the Log OA, which in turn provides a description of the tasks, activities, and information exchange requirements that exist throughout the logistics chain.² By providing this "blueprint," the Log OA has enabled the entire CSS community to understand its requirements and has thereby enabled analysts to devise the IT solutions and process reforms necessary to conduct successful log chain management. Primary amongst the IT solutions is the development and fielding of the Global Combat Support System- Marine Corps (GCSS-MC), which, when fully

operational, will drastically reduce the number of IT systems required within the CSS community, through its ability to provide a real-time shared data environment.³ Additionally, by identifying the essential tasks to be accomplished throughout the log chain, the Log OA has identified the need for several other process improvements, which form the core of the remaining Log Mod initiatives.

Logistics Command and Control

Logistics C2 requirements within the MAGTF are defined by a need to provide the CSSE commander and staff with the information to plan for and execute their missions properly. This not only necessitates that a clearly defined architecture is understood (who needs to communicate with whom throughout the logistics chain), but also that the CSSEs are equipped with the IT systems that meet their global communications requirements (specifically with vendors and distribution agencies linking the logistics chain from wholesale sources of supply to the warfighter). OIF I clearly revealed that the CSSE was lacking in both areas. The lack of an architecture and equipment to enable an accurate and real time common tactical picture (from a logistics perspective), greatly hindered the MAGTF commander's ability to influence the battlefield.

To address these issues, the Log Mod effort has focused on conducting a nodal analysis of the logistics chain throughout the strategic, operational, and tactical spectrum.⁴ By understanding the information and agencies that need to be addressed as supplies and services are performed along these nodes from "factory to foxhole," the Log Mod effort has enabled the CSSE to understand the C2 requirement throughout the logistics chain. Furthermore, intensive IT solutions centered on addressing the CSSE's communications equipment shortfalls, and fielding of the GCSS-MC will ensure that the CSSE of the future can command and control the logistics effort required to support the maneuver capabilities of the 2015 MAGTF.

CSSE Reorganization/Realignment

OIF I demonstrated that two major organizational practices inherited from the CSSE's attrition warfare oriented predecessors will not be effective in supporting the future MAGTF. First, the active duty FSSGs are currently established with functionally aligned units designed to operate cost efficiently in garrison instead of mission effectively while deployed. Consequently, when the FSSG deploys in its entirety, as was the case for OIF I, it must undergo a cumbersome task organization process to create the multifunctional requirements based units that

are required in deployed environments. This wastes valuable time that should be spent on externally focused activities (i.e., how to better support the warfighter), and creates units that have no habitual relationship internally or with the units they will support in combat.

Second, the naming convention currently utilized within the FSSGs (CSS detachments and groups) does not adequately convey the size or command structure inherent to that unit and is, therefore, inconsistent with Marine Corps and joint doctrine.⁵ For example, the term combat service support detachment is currently applied to units ranging in size from a few dozen Marines and commanded by a lieutenant, to several hundred Marines commanded by a lieutenant colonel. This creates confusion amongst supported commanders who, when informed of the name of the unit supporting them, consistently ask, "How big is it, and what can they do?"

In order to negate the need for the resource consuming task organization process that the FSSG requires prior to deploying, the Log Mod initiative has directed that the FSSGs operate in garrison the way they will in combat. This fundamental change in outlook requires the FSSG to change from its functionally aligned format to a capabilities-based organization with established direct and

general support missions that will remain intact regardless of whether in garrison or deployed. This will greatly enhance the support provided to the MAGTF because it will enable the formation of habitual relationships within the CSS units and with their supported units. Furthermore, by negating the need to alter its organization drastically to meet deployment needs, the more efficient task organization process will enable the CSSE to focus more of their efforts on the supported unit prior to deployment.

The Log Mod solution to correct the confusion accompanying current naming conventions is simple: change them. Thus, Log Mod has mandated that the MAGTF's CSSEs be named in the following manner: combat logistics groups will be MEF level assets commanded by general officers (today's FSSGs). Beneath them will fall combat logistics regiments (commanded by colonels), then combat logistics battalions (commanded by lieutenant colonels), and finally combat logistics companies (commanded by captains). Additionally, these units will be assigned specific direct or general support roles in order to allow the establishment of habitual relationships that are vital to success on the battlefield.⁶ By implementing these naming changes, the Log Mod initiative will enable planners from

all services to gain a quick and accurate understanding of the size and command structure of a MAGTF's CSS units.

Realignment of Supply

Nowhere is the FSSG's "attrition logistics" mindset more apparent than in the supply field. Decades of reactive stock management, disjointed and stove-piped supply chains, antiquated IT systems (many designed in the 70s), and the lack of single process ownership for the supply chain, have led to the accumulation of an "iron mountain" of supplies that wastes resources and hampers responsive supply support.⁷ The enormous stockpiles of supplies located in rear areas and the relative lack of critical supplies (particularly in repair parts) located with maneuver units in OIF I clearly demonstrated the shortcomings of this system.

The Log Mod effort to transform the supply function into a viable maneuver partner in the MAGTF involves the complete transformation of the function. First, a single process owner for the supply chain (from source to customer) will be established, ensuring unity of command. Second, inventory practices will be updated to better leverage distribution capacity, thereby, enabling a reduction of stocks. In this model, only mission critical or difficult to attain items are stocked, and the remainder

are requisitioned and delivered (utilizing an enhanced distribution system and better defined service agreements with sources of supply) to the customer on an "as required basis."⁸ Finally, the GCSS-MC module will enable the first ever shared data environment within the supply chain, and will thereby provide requesting units as well as supporting units total visibility of the status of their requisitions. This transition to automated solutions capable of reducing the involvement of supported units is a critical first step in enabling a transfer of many logistics responsibilities from supported units to their supporting units.

Realignment of Maintenance

Maintenance activities within the CSSE are closely aligned with the supply architecture and practices required to support them. Therefore, it is not surprising that the maintenance community suffers from the same lack of updated processes and equipment as their supply brethren. Not only are their systems outdated and incapable of providing real-time shared information, but also the five echelons of maintenance (EOM) construct has outgrown its relevance. Under this fragmented structure, maintenance efforts are redundant (and, therefore, duplicated) at varying EOMs and are inefficient due to the lack of a single process owner throughout the maintenance chain.

Under the Log Mod initiative, the future of the maintenance function is radically different from today's slow and inefficient system, and involves similar transformations in processes and technology. Primary amongst these is the reduction of the five EOM system into a three level of maintenance (LOM) construct.⁹ More maintenance capability will be pushed to using units under this system, without overburdening them, because of the increased efficiencies created by the fielding of GCSS-MC. Furthermore, a single process owner for the entire maintenance chain will be created, thereby ensuring unity of command throughout the chain. Thus, with a more robust maintenance capability resident at the using unit level, the CSSE's maintenance community will be better equipped to meet the intense maintenance demands of the highly mobile 2015 MAGTF.

MAGTF Distribution

The CSSE's inability to provide in-transit visibility (ITV) of supplies in the distribution pipeline, along with the MAGTF's inability to capture total asset visibility (TAV) of its limited lift assets, greatly limited the operational reach of the MAGTF during OIF I. While the lack of adequate IT capabilities contributed to this unacceptable situation, the reliance on a distribution

pipeline that was segmented at numerous points between its commercial sector roots in the United States and its MAGTF terminus in Iraq formed the crux of the problem.

The Log Mod initiative has addressed these shortfalls by streamlining the distribution chain and providing for single process ownership of the entire chain to ensure unity of command.¹⁰ Furthermore, the implementation of GCSS-MC (along with other IT enablers) will enable ITV and TAV, which will greatly increase the MAGTF's ability to track its supplies as they come into theater. These systems will also enable more efficient use of limited lift assets to ensure the efficient distribution of those supplies over the last tactical mile. These changes will ensure that the future MAGTF will have a distribution architecture that can support the exhaustive materiel requirements involved in conducting maneuver warfare.

Conclusion

Recent experiences in OIF I have shown that the MAGTF's attrition warfare-based CSSE is currently incapable of supporting the fast moving maneuver forces of the 2015 MAGTF. The logistics modernization initiative is the Marine Corps' method of correcting these deficiencies to ensure that operational pauses due to logistics are not a reality on future battlefields. This expansive effort will

require a considerable amount of time and effort to achieve; however it is imperative given the unacceptable nature of the consequences should the CSSE fail to keep up with the requirements of their supported units on future battlefields.

¹ Rineaman, Keith, and Ruark, Robert (Col USMC). "The Logistics Architecture: Our Sandtable for Logistics Modernization." Marine Corps Gazette Aug. 2005: 27.

² Ibid: 28.

³ Delarm, Randy F., and Eckert, Ronald (LtCol USMC (Ret.)). "GCSS-MC." Marine Corps Gazette Aug. 2005: 21.

⁴ Headquarters Marine Corps. "Logistics Modernization Operations Plan (Solution Initiating Directive)." Jun. 2005: 45.

⁵ Ibid: 55.

⁶ Ibid: 38.

⁷ Ibid: 70.

⁸ Barnes, D.G. (LtCol USMC). "Realignment of Supply Functions Brief." USMC.mil. 15 Apr. 2004 <https://logmod.hqmc.usmc.mil/library_briefs.htm>.

⁹ Lasure, Ken (Maj USMC). "Realignment of Maintenance Brief." USMC.mil. 15 Apr. 2004 <https://logmod.hqmc.usmc.mil/library_briefs.htm>.

¹⁰ Headquarters Marine Corps. "Logistics Modernization Operations Plan (Solution Initiating Directive)." Jun. 2005: 101.