

A New “Chowder Society”

Sustaining the force line of effort: Enable global logistics awareness

by Maj Jason Fincher, USMC(Ret) & Capt Elle Ekman

Logisticians can only meet the challenges associated with the *Commandant's Planning Guidance* (CPG) and *Sustaining the Force in the 21st Century* if the community promotes open communication, innovative thinking, and a unity of effort.¹ However, this will be difficult due to the variety of MOSs, the array of billet options, and general lack of shared community across the Marine Corps logistics fields. A newly formed group, the Association of Marine Corps Logisticians (AMCL), hopes to invigorate a community through professional education, mentorship, innovative thinking, open communication, and trust and unity.

In the years immediately following World War II, a small cell of passionate and vocal officers formed an informal group that eventually became credited with shaping the role of the Marine Corps and securing statutory protection for its existence as a separate service. This now legendary group of thought leaders included future CG, FMF Pacific Victor “Brute” Krulak, and was somewhat less than affectionately referred to in Washington, DC circles as the “Chowder Society,” referring to a 1940’s popular comic strip of the time. As during the time of the Chowder Society, shifts in international threats and internal pressure from the U.S. government have created changes within the Corps.

Gen David H. Berger’s recent CPG states that the Marine Corps must shift to support the 2018 *National Defense Strategy* (NDS). He describes “force design [as his] number one priority” and states that he will sacrifice modernization dollars, acquisitions programs, and

>Maj Fincher was a Marine Logistics Officer and is the Founder and President of the Association of Marine Corps Logisticians.

>>Capt Ekman is a Logistics Officer and Operations Research Analyst at LP, Installations & Logistics. She is also the Communications Director of the Association of the Marine Corps Logisticians.



Combat services support will need to look at new designs and concepts for logistics to support the CPG. (Photo by PFC Samuel Ellis.)

hallowed organizational constructs to ensure that the Corps changes to support his priorities. Gen Berger is willing to slaughter sacred cows and has issued a clear challenge for today’s leaders within all Marine Corps fields and specialties to come up with new ways for Marines to support the NDS.

Specific to logistics, the CPG discusses the challenges of supporting Fleet Marine Forces in contested and distributed environments with limited

communications or transportation options. To support Marines in the Indo-Pacific, combat service support will have to drastically shift from the designs and concepts used in Iraq and Afghanistan. Before becoming Commandant, and while still the Deputy Commandant for Combat Development & Integration, Gen Berger signed *Sustaining the Force in the 21st Century*. This document identifies building “global logistics awareness” as a primary line of effort

for Marine Corps logisticians. This line of effort focuses on identifying requirements and then having the visibility to move supplies and equipment as they are needed. This may seem like a small problem, but achieving transparency within current maintenance, transportation, and supply processes so that Marines can react quickly to a changing environment is no small task. Commercial global supply chain practices far outpace military processes, and the Marine Corps no longer possesses the professional vocabulary to recognize and implement more mature industry approaches. Building global logistics awareness must be accompanied by a concerted logistics professional education effort to bring the Corps' support enterprise up to speed. Unfortunately, because of the variety of MOSs, the array of billet options, and general lack of unity, it is difficult for logisticians of all types to gain momentum in identifying solutions and collectively working towards them.

Throughout 2018, a small group of logistics and supply officers in the National Capital Region traveled to various bases and installations conducting logistics focused wargames to identify capability gaps for the future force. Among other efforts, the lessons they returned with directly contributed to the early drafts of *Sustaining the Force in the 21st Century*. They discovered that decades of a Service-wide focus on lethality and desert warfare contributed to the current gaps in supportability. They realized that beyond the vocabulary and capacity shortfalls, there was a more fundamental gap that affected the development, common understanding, and communication across the fields that make up Marine Corps logistics. Taking inspiration from the example of the Chowder Society and other professional military associations like the Marine Corps Aviators Association, without any official endorsement, they founded the Association of Marine Corps Logisticians (AMCL).

AMCL is designed to enhance and cultivate the community of Marine Corps logisticians and supply chain managers through education, mentorship, innovative thinking, and open

communication. AMCL is open to all support specialties and will promote quality professional development through local activities, writing forums, and mentorship opportunities. This open communication and community of effort is needed if the Marine Corps is going to achieve its vision of and promote global logistics awareness. Unlike the Chowder Society, however, AMCL does not advocate directly for any program; rather, it enables logisticians to advocate for themselves. It is the place to identify and share DOD and industry best practices, as well as to develop and exchange ideas. In short, AMCL aims to be the forum where professionals can discuss real logistics problems, share ideas, and broaden their perspective.

After its official start, interest in this grassroots effort gained unexpected momentum on social media as its value was universally recognized. General officers weighed in on online discus-

After its official start, interest in this grassroots effort gained unexpected momentum on social media as its value was universally recognized.

sions and a sense of logistics renaissance began to take hold. In order to maintain strict transparency and legal legitimacy, AMCL applied for and was granted 501(c)3 status. The group also established a website with a professional blog in January 2019. Members from across logistics functions began to write articles and lively rebuttals followed. Logisticians from other Services and allied countries began to take notice and share posts for discussion among their own communities. One AMCL founder stated that "it was like we tipped over a rock to see what was underneath and while we were looking, the rock took off down a hill and gained a bunch of momentum. Now we are trying to keep up the demand."

In trying to keep up with demand, AMCL emphasizes five organizational pillars:

Professional education. AMCL strives to provide opportunities for informal

professional education on a wide range of topics across the MAGTF, throughout other Services and agencies and in industry. Because Marine Corps logisticians are experts at tactical level of support, but must rely on outside organizations for operational level logistics, AMCL seeks to expose Marines to other organizations across the joint logistics enterprise (JLEnt) and industry in order to better enable interoperability. AMCL also aims to expose Marine Corps logisticians to industry vocabulary to enable the identification of emerging technologies, articulation of the service's requirements to industry, and incorporation of industry best practices into Marine Corps Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTPs).

Mentorship. The career paths and availability of mentors for junior logisticians can vary widely depending on which element of the MAGTF they are assigned to in their company grade

years. The wealth of knowledge that our senior leaders and former Marines possess is invaluable. Until now, the community has not had a readily accessible forum to share that experience. AMCL will strive to enable future logistics leaders by providing access to more senior mentors, both active and retired, in a variety of venues.

Innovative thinking. Innovation has become an overused and misunderstood term in the Corps. What remains true is that innovation tends to happen at the seams between ideas. Innovation cannot occur in a stove piped organization. AMCL strives to promote actual innovation by providing a collaborative venue to introduce, explore, and debate ideas between members from various backgrounds and fields. AMCL aims to provide a forum in which these ideas can come to light; this can be through AMCL relationships, articles on social media, or the AMCL blog. AMCL also



Marines in a command operation center during a logistics wargame. (Photo by PFC Samuel Ellis.)

strives to expose logisticians to emerging ideas, techniques, and leaders from industry.

Open communication. AMCL is intended to serve as a leveling function among logisticians that spans the MAGTF by enabling interaction between different elements and specialties. This open communication ensures logisticians at any point of their career, whether on a B-billet, in an operational tour, or working for HQMC, can understand the perspectives of those in other communities. AMCL is intended to provide an informal communications channel to circulate ideas and collect feedback that will enhance the ability of headquarters-level decision makers to stay current with, educate, and influence the force, while allowing the Fleet Marine Forces to advocate for their requirements and influence enterprise priorities from an informed position.

Trust and unity. The Marine Corps has always been a people business. This is especially true among the support MOSs who are called upon to task organize to a greater degree than their combat arms counterparts. Marine Corps logisticians span the MAGTF, but with this dispersion, the community tends to lack a professional network compared to more concentrated aviation and combat arms specialties. AMCL defines “logisticians” in the broadest possible terms.

The logistics community should not wait for the sound of the guns to start exchanging business cards. Building familiarity between Marines in times of peace, who may have to work together on a moment’s notice in times of war, aids in overcoming friction when our Nation is called to arms, and ultimately increases readiness and effectiveness.

AMCL has incubated in Quantico and the national capital region over the last year. The group hosted several successful events and continues to draw followers. AMCL is currently expanding to every Marine Corps base and installation by establishing local chapters to act as the leads for local AMCL events and to serve as the communications hubs for the logistics community. Each chapter will be driven by local membership and will host periodic events that include guest speakers, guided discussions, and site visits, which will serve to broaden logistician’s experiences and provide professional development within the field. Topics may highlight best practices or emerging ideas from within the Service or introduce industry solutions and innovations. Great ideas can come from anyone, and AMCL aims to provide a communications medium so that even the most junior logistician has a voice to circulate their idea.

The idea of global logistics awareness is doomed to become a well-intentioned

catch phrase if the community cannot focus its efforts on achievable goals and then leverage available ideas and information to support the effort. The Corps’ professional military education and technical training pipelines is ill suited to the task of quickly reacting to changes in the operating environment or determining the art of the possible as seen in industry, other Services, and allies around the globe. AMCL could be a legitimate option to augment and enhance official channels in order to educate and build a professional community equal to the task laid out in both the CPG and *Sustaining the Force in the 21st Century*.

AMCL is growing steadily and actively seeking endorsement from the Corps as the official community of interest for all logistics Marines. As AMCL gradually grows in reputation and resources, the opportunities to professionally develop logistics Marines will increase in kind. The organization continues to look for engaged logisticians from all fields and from across the Corps to get involved and share their unique perspectives. Interested Marines from supporting MOSs can get on the website, follow AMCL on social media, and contribute to discussions in an attempt to build a sense of community. As the call goes out for local chapters, Marines can get involved to share ideas and investigate development opportunities. The Marine Corps logistics community needs to ensure that it can support the CPG. We need to understand global logistics awareness so that Marines will be supported on the battlefield of tomorrow. No one will take more interest in caring for the community than the community itself. AMCL is here to support.

For more information visit AMCL at: www.marinecorpslogistics.org.

Note

1. Gen David H. Berger, *Commandant’s Planning Guidance*, (Washington, DC: July 2019); and Headquarters Marine Corps, *Sustaining the Force in the 21st Century*, (Washington, DC: January 2018).

