

Making Tactical-Level Logistics More Survivable

Employing an infiltration mindset
by Capt Sean Ford

The jig is up for a friendly position or convoy if an enemy unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) is heard overhead. Peer adversaries will care little about collateral damage or conserving ammunition when they fire on an entire grid square to destroy their target. For example, in July 2014, the Ukrainian 24th and 72nd Mechanized Brigades were obliterated by a combination of UAVs and short-range BM-21 Grad multiple launch rocket systems fired from Russian soil.¹ Much like these two Ukrainian units, which presented a large signature to the enemy, adversaries will detect Marine Corps logis-

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tics units if they do not reduce their footprint or rethink outdated concepts. Unfortunately, logistics units across the Marine Corps are not prepared to operate effectively in a fight with a peer adversary. The Maneuver Warfare Exercise and Integrated Training Exercise should not be the first-time logistic units are practicing and experimenting with their defensive skills, fieldcraft, and new

concepts of resupply. The reality is that this is mostly the case across the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps needs to prepare logistics units for a fight with peer adversaries by improving their tactical mindset while in garrison by revising training plans and tactics. The enemy will actively seek to destroy our logistic trains through multiple platforms and with catastrophic results. According to the *Marine Operating Concept*, “to be detected is to be targeted is to be killed.”² A focus on better training will naturally improve tactics.

Logistics units do not train their fieldcraft in field exercises against a thinking adversary while at their home stations. Additionally, infantry units do a poor job of giving priority to the training of their logistics elements. Time needs to be set aside to training logistic units in fieldcraft, local security and convoy security, and communications with supported or adjacent units. Logistics units need to go through an infantry evaluated field exercise where an infantry unit is the supporting unit that provides subject matter experts to coach logistics units on fieldcraft and defensive tactics against a thinking enemy. Furthermore, infantry units need to prioritize their logistic section’s training. While conducting training with an in-



Concentrations of logistics assets can form a self-optimized target for a peer adversary. (Photo by PFC Patrick King.)

fantry unit as the supporting unit, logistic units can experiment with new tactical concepts, which will make logistics units harder targets. Logistics units and their logistics trains must train at their home stations to the tactical 5000-level training and readiness standards as set forth in the *Motor Transport Training and Readiness Manual*, have a larger part in force-on-force exercises, and become more involved in experimentation and fielding of equipment for future force design.³

Through training, the logistics community needs to rethink the concept of a tactical motor pool and the concept of the convoy because they present high payoff targets for the enemy. Currently, logistics trains are told by their training and readiness manual that in the field, they are to create a tactical motor pool as the right way to operate in a field environment. Although essential to train to, tactical motor pools will not be enough in a peer adversary environment. Gone are the days of the “coil” defense. Furthermore, the traditional concept of a “convoy” needs to be re-thought. Right now, the Marine Corps’ idea of a convoy closely resembles a route march. One air-delivered munition or artillery barrage should not have catastrophic effects on the entirety of a unit’s logistics trains. As Capt Dylan Metzler states in his 2019 *Marine Corps Gazette* article, “In contested combat environments against potential great power competitors, personnel and equipment cannot be transported in large, slow-moving, and vulnerable targets of great value.”⁴

Logistics units need to practice a “distributed dispatch method” when employing tactical motor pools to avoid creating large, vulnerable targets of great value. Logistic trains will have to break into smaller elements, two to four vehicles each, and spread out in a very distributed manner. The key to success is to keep the elements in line-of-sight of each other. This idea will facilitate internal communication between elements. The section leader’s position must act as a dispatch element to all the other elements. When the section leader receives a message from higher headquarters, he will relay that message to whichever subordinate element he



Convoy operations need to employ an infiltration tactics mindset to increase survivability.
(Photo by LCpl Michael Iams.)

wishes to dispatch. Conducting distributed operations in this manner prevents two significant issues with motor pools. The first is that the enemy cannot destroy all logistic trains in one swoop. The second is that returning logistics trains will not lead back to all the other logistics assets.

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Furthermore, convoys need to resemble infiltration tactics, and the logistics community needs to inculcate an infiltration mindset into its officers and staff non-commissioned officers. If a dispatch determines the appropriate amount of logistics to be delivered to a specific unit in need—for example, two trains to the requesting unit—it should not dictate each train’s path. These two trains will depart when ready and take routes that they designate themselves, allowing for variety. This variety creates an infiltration logistics concept as opposed to a route march logistics concept. By dispersing the trains and then com-

ing together at the designated requesting unit, they can unload and then depart via different routes to within range of the dispatch. Additionally, new concepts can be applied to command and control through experimentation while training.

Marine units tend to separate logistics from operations, which is manifest in the separation of an administration and logistic operations center (ALOC) from the combat operations center (COC). Marine units usually place ALOCs outside of a COC. This practice manifests itself as either a separate tent room complete with a wall between the COC and the ALOC, an ALOC vehicle staged outside of COC, or another logistics operation center altogether. This practice leads to an insidious mentality of divorcing logistics from operations. Logistics cannot exist without operations. Operations cannot function without logistics. Knowingly disconnecting these elements from each other is asinine. It also creates a larger signature for the enemy to attack. In fact, by physically separating logistics from operations, one is doing their adversary a favor. According to Frans Osinga in his book *Science, Strategy and War: The Strategic Theory of John Boyd*, John Boyd states, “interaction permits vitality and growth while isolation leads to decay and disintegration.”⁵

The Marine Corps needs to remove the term “ALOC” from its lexicon and incorporate logistics completely into its COC through a logistics liaison and a designated logistics area inside the COC. According to *MCTP 3-40B: Tactical-Level Logistics*, “Optionally, there are GCE units that combine their administration section with the logistic section to form an administration and logistic operations center (ALOC). This is not a doctrinal term.”⁶ If it is a “non-doctrinal” term, then why is it in Marine Corps doctrine? Logistics needs to be survivable through integration with operations to have a shared situational awareness on the battlefield. This way of thinking entails the logistics staff being a part of the COC staff and not a separate operations center altogether.

Improvements in tactics and operating concepts in the logistics community

will not change or be validated without a shift in focus on fieldcraft training while at home stations. Commanders who wish to make their logistics units harder targets and more survivable will need to task infantry units to support logistics units’ training for improvement of potentially antiquated ideas. The logistics community needs to begin experimenting with distributed forms of tactical motor pools, think as infiltrators, eliminate the concept of an ALOC, and fully incorporate logistics officers/chiefs into COC operations.

Notes

1. Col Liam Collins and Capt Harrison Morgan, “King of Battle: Russian Breaks out the Big Guns,” *Modern War Institute*, (January 2019), available at <https://mwi.usma.edu>.

2. Headquarters Marine Corps, *The Marine Corps Operating Concept*, (Washington DC: September 2016).

3. Headquarters Marine Corps, *NAVMC 3500.39D: Motor Transport Training and Readiness Manual*, (Washington DC: June 2019).

4. Capt Dylan F. Metzler, “Logistics in the Contact Layer,” *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Quantico, VA: April 2018).

5. Frans P.B. Osinga, *Science, Strategy and War: The Strategic Theory of John Boyd*, (New York: Routledge, 2007).

6. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCTP 3-40B: Tactical-Level Logistics*, (Washington DC: April 2018).

