
The Round Tablette

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Welcome to the first March meeting of the Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table. Tonight's speaker is Dr. Jerry Brown, speaking on The Logistics of War. The military aphorism that "Amateurs talk tactics; professionals work logistics" leads to the question: what is "logistics." Historian Martin van Creveld, paraphrasing Baron Jomini, defines *logistics* as "the practical art of moving armies and keeping them supplied."

The logisticians - who do the planning and moving and supplying - are "damned if they do; damned if they don't" by the combat elements (from Bradley and Patton to the rifle squad in the line). Army ground logistics are one beast, air logistics a very different beast, and naval logistics yet a third. In World War II, the major theaters (Europe-Mediterranean-Africa, and the Pacific) were very different as well, imposing disparate demands upon logisticians. At the same time, there were a number of similarities that help us to comprehend the problems and successes, but were of little consolation to the logisticians.

World War II was, for the United States, a war of vast distances. No matter where we projected power, we had to send the forces far away and keep them continuously supplied with everything from beans and bullets to toilet paper. The war for the British and Canadians was similar, but they operated on a much smaller scale and became customers of the US logistics organizations, easing their problems considerably. The Japanese similarly faced a war of great distances with many of the same problems. The Italians and the Germans had shorter distances (North Africa, the eastern front) but many of the issues in allocating resources, organizing production, and determining priorities were common across the combatants..

It was a **world** war fought in almost every nook and cranny of the land masses and on nearly all bays, estuaries, gulfs, seas, and oceans. Thus, we fought in every climatic zone in the

world, from the Arctic to the equatorial jungles, from mountains to deserts, from crowded waterways to lonely oceanic deeps.

For the US, all our Lines of Communication and Supply (LOCs) were *exterior lines* - passing through neutral or hostile territory and vulnerable to air and sea attack. All combatants in North Africa operated on exterior lines. Conquest of Europe gave the Germans *interior lines* - protected LOCs within territories under their control. The Japanese went to war because they depended upon *foreign* sources of oil and other resources delivered on exterior lines over vast distances that were open to attack and interdiction. Conquest of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and the creation of a defensive island perimeter about the boundaries of the empire turned these LOCs into *interior* lines (within their defensive perimeter) connecting Japanese controlled resources to the Home Islands.

Our first task was to get to the enemy shore and establish a beach head. Once ashore, ideally we could use the existing road, rail, and water transport net to move materiel and supplies forward to the forces in contact with the enemy. These supply lines needed to be guarded as well. We needed to build up a network of forward depots in the combat zone and logistics bases in the communications zone to support ongoing operations and build a stock for offensive pushes. At the same time, we were also responsible for law, order, health, sanitation, and feeding of the indigenous population now liberated from enemy control. Another demand on the Services of Supply.

In the European (to include African, Middle Eastern, and Mediterranean theaters) theater, we had to move across the North Atlantic to land on hostile beaches and move inland. At sea, German U-boats and surface raiders attacked convoys, often with horrifying success. Closer to land, the Luftwaffe and shore defenses challenged landing forces; the German army proved to be an especially tough, deadly force even when reduced to fanatical young boys and weary old men.

In Africa and the Middle East, deserts and a transport "net" one track wide limited both

If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns – contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

force buildups and mobility. Italy confronted the troops and logisticians with another problem: mud. The most mechanized army in history bogged down in the Italian mud and got moving again on the backs of donkeys. Everywhere, gaining air supremacy further strained logistics.

After the breakout from the Normandy Beaches, the German forces crumbled so fast, we out ran our supply system. We advanced too fast and the Services of Supply were simply unable to keep up. Despite laying undersea oil pipelines from the UK (PLUTO - a serious failure), all oil first came convoyed in tankers across the Atlantic. Land pipelines were laid forward, but we hadn't planned on advancing the lines as rapidly as we needed to. The resulting "Red Ball Express" could keep Patton's spearhead moving to a point, but when it consumed as much fuel as it moved forward, he had to stop. The Allies now experienced severe shortages of fuel and Eisenhower allocated that available to Montgomery, who grasp exceeded his reach, while Patton's Third Army - which could go further faster on fumes than any other force - watched opportunity slip away.

In the Pacific theater (aka "The Great Pacific War"), we fought several different kinds of campaigns - often integrated together operationally. The naval war saw the last great sea battles; the air wars spanned immense distances and involved air-to-air and air-to-ship action; all supporting amphibious island-hopping campaigns and grueling land wars in New Guinea and the Philippines. All of the armed services were essential to this fight. First we had to get to the enemy's coast, land there, and then we had to stay there - lodgment and sustainment - which meant creating advance bases and finding the necessary shipping (ships and sailors).

Complicating matters, command in the Pacific was divided - not to suit monumental egos but because one axis of advance would be from New Guinea to the Philippines to Formosa (large land masses) to Japan (logically the army, hence MacArthur) while the other major axis of advance moved from island group to island group inwards to provide air and logistics bases to support the attack on Japan (Marines and navy, hence Nimitz). In contrast, the European War, primarily a land war with the armies supported by air and naval forces, was pre-eminently the army's show.

The logistic demands of the Pacific war necessitated the development of such capabilities as underway replenishment. Prior to 1941, this not only had not been done but was thought impossible. The Japanese did this during their attack on Pearl Harbor, refueling shorter-ranged vessels underway in the winter seas. We needed more than refueling underway. We needed full

replenishment of food, fuel, lubricants, ammunition, clothing while steaming at fleet speeds to avoid reducing force levels or slowing the movement of the task force. Construction of bases in the middle of the Pacific vastness, the supplying of ground and air forces, and of our Australian allies all had to be ongoing. Ultimately, a joint logistics operation was created to supplement the army and navy support commands.

Further Readings:

Martin van Creveld, *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton* (Cambridge UP, 1977).

The US Army in World War II; the European Theater; Logistical Support of the Armies 2 vols. (Center for Military History)

William L. McGee with Sandra V. McGee, *Pacific Express: The Critical Role of Military Logistics in World War II*, 3 vol. (BMC Publ. 2009).

Alan Gropman, *The Big L: American Logistics in World War II* (Natl. Def. U. P. 1997).

Nicolas Aubin, *Liberty Roads: The American Logistics in France and Germany, 1944-45* (Histoire and Collections, 2014).

Robert P. Patterson and Robert Morgenthau, *Arming the Nation for War: Mobilization, Supply, and the American War Effort in World War II* (U TN Press, 2014)

Announcements:

Twin Cities Civil War Round Table -

Mar. 17, 2015 – N. B. Forrest - www.tccwrt.com - info@tccwrt.com

St Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - Mar. 23, 2015 – Publishing *M&CIW* - 715-386-1268 – rossandhaines@comcast.net

Fort Snelling Civil War Symposium - Apr. 11, 2015 - info@tccwrt.com

Rochester WWII History Round Table – 507-280-9970; www.ww2roundtable-rochester.org

Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345, 320-616-6050, <http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>

Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser -

crazyjerry45@hotmail.com - 651-338-2717

CAF - Commemorative Air Force -

www.cafmn.org 651-455-6942

Minnesota Air Guard Museum -

www.mnangmuseum.org 612-713-2523

Friends of Ft. Snelling, www.fortsnelling.org

Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN, 320-564-6644, <http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>.

World Without Genocide, 651-695-7621, <http://www.worldwithoutgenocide.org/>

Airshow - Eden Prairie - 11/12 July 2015

www.wotn.org 952-746-6100

We need volunteers to drive our veterans to and from meetings. Please contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

Round Table Schedule 2015

26 Mar.	Return to the Philippines
9 Apr.	Air War in the Mediterranean
14 May	Retrospective: Goals of WW2 Leaders

Jon Parshall claims that the American style of warfare [is] less an art form than a managerial and organizational exercise."