

THEATER LOGISTICIAN: Ensuring a Continuum of Logistical Support to the Warfighter



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Dowd was commissioned through the ROTC program upon graduation from Cumberland College, Ky., in 1979. His military education includes the Quartermaster Basic and Advanced Course, Logistics Executive Development Course, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Armed Forces Staff College and the U.S. Army War College. In addition, he holds a master's degree in logistics management from the Florida Institute of Technology.

Dowd has served in command and staff positions throughout his career to include: tech supply officer in the 702nd Maintenance Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division; battalion maintenance officer and commander, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 4th S&T Battalion, 4th Infantry Division; research and development officer, CASCOM, Fort Lee, Va.; support operations officer and executive officer, 3rd Forward Support Battalion, Schweinfurt, Germany; division material management officer, Division Support Command, 3rd Infantry Division; joint logistics plans officer, USACOM, Norfolk, Va.; and commander, 299th Forward Support Battalion, Schweinfurt, Germany. During this tour, the 299th deployed to Bosnia and provided the logistical support for the 2nd Brigade "Dagger" Combat Team, 1st Infantry

Division. He served as chief, logistics operation center, and DA DCSLOG, Washington, D.C. In July 2001 he assumed command of the 1st Armored Division Support Command. During this time frame his units deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Dowd served as the assistant deputy chief of staff for logistics, U.S. Army Europe, and the executive officer to the Army G4. His most recent assignment was director of Logistics, Engineering and Security Assistance, U.S. Pacific Command, Camp Smith, Hawaii.

Dowd's awards and decorations include the Defense Superior Service Medal, Legion of Merit with one Oak Leaf Cluster, Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medal with four Oak Leaf Clusters, Army Commendation Medal with Silver Oak Leaf Cluster, and the Army Achievement medal with two Oak Leaf Clusters.

Q: Good afternoon, General Dowd. Let's start with an overview of your command and its responsibilities.

A: As you know, I am the logistician for CENTCOM. General Petraeus is my boss, and I have the overall responsibility for logistics within the 20 countries in the CENTCOM AOR. Logistics includes the functions of transportation, engineering, foreign military sales movements, oversight of contracting, planning for these functions, and the day-to-day execution of these functions. Among others, these are the bigger themes to which I devote my attention for the command.

Q: You are tasked with reducing the footprint, while still engaged, in Iraq and transitioning much of that to Afghanistan, also engaged. What are the most significant challenges to that, and how are they being met?

A: First off, there has been a lot of good planning, both at the CENTCOM and [Multi-National Forces-Iraq] MNF-I, [Multi-National Corps-Iraq] MNC-I, and [Army Central Command] ARCENT levels of structure. We have what I call LOG Nation; all the logistics elements at the various echelons on command, looking at the overall drawdown.

We know how much equipment has to come out, and we are getting help from the OSD folks on what materiel we might be able to leave behind. One of our challenges right now is getting the appropriate authorities to help us make decisions on what we will bring out and what we will leave for the Iraqi security forces as they build their military.

Another challenge has been transferring resources and equipment from Iraq, as they become available, over into Afghanistan. For example Red Horse and Seabees [engineering units] are necessary to help us build the base camps in Afghanistan. We have had to time their withdrawal from Iraq and transfer to Afghanistan to construct the base camps for the buildup of forces. Those

are complex decisions, and complex movements to execute. We want the incoming units to be able to get off the plane, hop into their awaiting MRAPs, drive off to their pre-established protected base camps and be in the fight within a week or so. We have met this challenge very well.

The third challenge is the ability to repair the gear from Iraq that is needed in Afghanistan prior to moving it. We are primarily talking about engineer equipment needed in Afghanistan in order to finish the building of the facilities in there. We have had to time that very closely on bringing the equipment out, repairing it and bringing it forward.

These are our biggest challenges we are facing in balancing the Iraq drawdown and Afghanistan increase in force structure.

Q: You mentioned what you might be leaving behind with the Iraqi forces. Do you have interaction with the Iraqi Logistics Corps and assist in developing professional capabilities within their system?

A: The Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq [MNSTC-I] provides the oversight for training. They are a subordinate command to Multi-National Forces-Iraq, commanded by General Odierno. What we've done is to pull together some of our national partners like the Defense Logistics Agency, who have come to our theater and helped the Iraqis develop warehouse procedures, repair part procedures and an accountability process for many of the critical assets to keep their gear and military running. We also have provided logisticians at the tactical level to assist the Iraqis in developing their logistical systems from the tactical level to the operational level and on to the strategic level. We are also using the Army Materiel Command to help do some of the oversight work on some contracting and repair of Iraqi gear. It's about looking at the entire life cycle of the logistics model within the Iraqi forces. I will tell you that we have only been at this for about two years, and we still have a ways to go, but we have worked these initiatives very hard and are seeing strong results.

Q: As the Northern Distribution Network spools up, what have been the experiences so far?

A: We realized we needed a Northern Distribution Network as we were looking at the amount of forces that were going to flow into Afghanistan. We had one primary route into Afghanistan, which we call the Pakistan ground line of communications, or Pak GLOC. We got with our command's policy team and our political/military [pol/mil] folks and looked at other opportunities to bring supplies into Afghanistan. From there, we developed the Northern Distribution Network [NDN], with the help of TRANSCOM and DLA, to bring supplies over a network of various commercial routes which transit, Russia, the Caucasus, the

Central Asian States, and into Afghanistan through Russia and other points along the route.

We transport only non-lethal cargo through the NDN — mainly rations, wood and other similar supplies. We are considering transporting some types of vehicles—again non-lethal in design. The NDN provides a valuable supplement to the Pak GLOC. It also allows us to help those countries that the NDN transits. We try to procure various items locally such as concrete, barbed wire, water and Coca Cola. This lessens the transportation burden, while providing local economic benefit to the countries through which the NDN transits.

So the NDN benefits us and others in a number of ways. It was a choice to try and improve the LOCs while helping the pol/mil teams in their engagement with these other countries.

Q: Are you looking to establish even more lines of supply into Afghanistan?

A: We are currently working a route with the State Department through China, where we might be able to bring things in through the Pacific, working with PACOM, to bring gear and vehicles in through that route.

We are also working an air route coming in from the north to Navoi Airfield, Uzbekistan. There we are downloading it from the aircraft and trucking it into Afghanistan.

As you well know, logisticians like to have as many routes available as possible. That way if the enemy cuts one of the LOCs, we can use the others to keep the stream of supplies steady.

Q: The Global Combat Support System-Joint portal provides you with a theater-level common operating picture and supports a unity of effort. Can you tell me a little more about the system and what it does for you?

A: This is an initiative that we are working with some of our national partners like [Defense Information Systems Agency] DISA and the Joint Staff to develop a log common operating picture in the theater. We are using the GCSS-J system as our baseline in order to develop a one-stop shopping location for logisticians to look at various locations, to see fuel levels, ammunition levels, repair parts levels, mobility levels, and so on. Access to this kind of real-time information allows us to be able to make critical logistics decisions, along with TRANSCOM and DLA.

We've just finished looking at the fuels efforts and found that the warfighters have liked this access a great deal, as it allows them to look at a common operating picture; see what the fuel levels are at specific locations; and then

bring fuel in when and where necessary. This common picture depicts the entire theater in detail.

After finishing the fuel module, we're working ammunition now and have TRANSCOM assisting with the mobility piece. These are initial efforts now, and we are working to give the logistician in theater a common operating picture.

Q: How dependent are the coalition partners on CENTCOM to provide supplies and support for their mission?

A: Since I arrived here, we've brought the coalition logistician two-star generals in for sessions quarterly to talk about just this very issue. Meeting in a forum gives us a broader view. For example, we have been able to look at the fuel picture in theater and identify vendors that other countries might be able to use or that we might be able to use making the overall support piece much easier.

We are looking at all of our requirements from the coalition, and we've all decided to share where it makes sense to share. In addition to fuel, another example of sharing is "real life support," such as lodging and dining facilities on forward operating bases. We are also continuing to make progress on sharing transportation where it makes sense to do so.

We have been at this hard for about a year, and we are getting better at looking at mobility movements; for example, if the U.K. has an aircraft that's empty, maybe we can move some of the U.S. supplies on it, and vice versa.

We do have a great relationship with our coalition, and we are working through these logistical initiatives because we all jumped in there at the same time under NATO, and now we need to work as a team.

Q: The Joint Contracting Command has recently established the methodology that has reportedly streamlined the contracting process. What role does that organization play, and how has their partnership delivered results to the warfighter?

A: The Joint Contracting Command was set up in Iraq and also oversees Afghanistan. We have a one-star commanding in the leadership role there.

The big thing it does for us is that it allows us to vet all of the contracts that come into theater. Prior to this, contracts could be stovepiped right into theater, and the leadership would have no oversight on cost and how well they were being performed. Now they must vet through this organization, and folks like the Defense Contract Management Agency provide oversight on what they

provide to the customer, how much it is costing, and how many people it involves. It allows us to keep control on how many contractors are on the battlefield, where they are located. It allows us the opportunity to vet those contractors and make sure we don't have any bad guys in there.

So the big thing it adds is a vetting and oversight process and a process that improves the overall contracting support to the theater.

Q: Can you describe how the logistics chain is able to drive jobs and revenue to Iraqi and Afghan firms, thus providing local jobs? Is this the purpose of the Afghan First Initiative?

A: Exactly. We have the Iraqi First Initiative and the Afghan First Initiative, and we're in the crawl stages of a Central Asian States First Initiative. An example of one of these initiatives is the Iraqi Trucking Network. We got with local Iraqi tribes to transport supplies. This allowed us to take U.S. military trucks off the road. These local Iraqi firms were able to acquire trucks and hire drivers and do the hauling for us. The Iraqi Trucking Network concept is starting to spread throughout Iraq, and eventually it could be an enabler as we start to drawdown to help us push gear and equipment out of Iraq. The vast majority of transportation in Afghanistan is already conducted by Afghan nationals, so the Afghan First Initiative focuses mainly on procuring commodities, such as water, soda, juices, building water plants, and using some of their natural resources in country in order to help build the infrastructure that we are building for our military. The NDN is providing an opportunity for our CASA first initiative to get under way.

Q: How efficient is the current in-theater asset tracking system in keeping up with materiel movements?

A: I would say in Iraq we are in very good shape. We have a lot of good [in-transit visibility] ITV. We have some great locations where we track movements, mainly at the primary border crossings.

In Afghanistan, the ITV has improved over the last 12 months. I think we now have 16 different locations out along the Ring Road that give use to a lot more ITV. Considering CENTCOM's austere and dangerous environment, we are pleased with the efficiency the systems provide. Our commercial vendors such as APL and Maersk are putting ITV and tracking mechanisms on their platforms so that, as they are moving supplies over the Pak GLOC, [we] see those supplies coming up the Pak GLOC and across the border, which allows the receiving teams to prepare for their arrival.

A lot of good work [by] our Strategic Deployment Distribution Command partners, who work with the commercial vendors, helping to move our cargo.

Q: There have been calls recently, from the secretary of defense and others, to move away from outside contractors. Has that begun to manifest itself in theater yet? What are some of the areas that could more easily migrate from outside contractors back to the military and others that are perhaps well-suited to remain in the contractor world?

A: I have not really seen any impact in the theater yet. We are currently reviewing those support pieces. Perhaps the trucking network would be one possible initiative that, as it grows to provide more trucking assets from the Iraqi firms to move our materiel around, would do well to remain in the contract world.

We are still assessing and looking at our contractors. We need to look at what this will all mean during the drawdown and how we can reduce the contractor footprint and cut costs. Bottom line is that a lot of that planning is going on right now.

Q: The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have generated a sprintlike pace to the OPTEMPO that has been eating up life cycle time on equipment across the board. The truck fleet and air transport fleets are particularly hard-used. How do you manage the need to move supplies with fleet of equipment that is being hard-pressed?

A: There are a couple of primary things we do. As you know, we have some repair facilities in theater that do rebuild of the gear forward. So, for instance, the uparmored HMMWVs, among others, are repaired in theater and not brought back to CONUS, which helps us a great deal.

We also look at equipment called TPE—theater provided equipment—which is always kept forward and not brought back and forth as units rotate in and out. This allows us to work this set fairly hard since all of the maintenance is done forward. This gives us the opportunity to get the other equipment items that need more attention back to CONUS to go through reset and be ready for the next effort.

So, we have rebuild facilities forward, including some pushed forward into Iraq; we have the TPE sets; and we have some tremendous reset capabilities ongoing in CONUS for all the services.

Q: Anything else you would like to add?

A: I want to thank you for taking the time to interview the logistician here. A lot of times we are the guys in the back, but in these kinds of fights we are right up there [at the] front with the warfighter—there are a tremendous number of logisticians pushed forward making it happen.

This has been a joint fight. I can tell you that the logisticians from all the services have blended together well, and we have some incredibly creative thinking going on about how to do air movements, airdrops, how to move MRAPs and anything else the warfighter needs so that the end-users have what they need when they need it.

My main point is that I am very proud of what the logisticians are doing in theater, and we have had a really great team onboard that has done some great planning with the national partners to make sure they are involved in our efforts. We have been right there toe-to-toe with the warfighters making sure that the logistician's requirements and needs are heard and [that we] eliminate duplication of effort where possible.

This has been a great effort that has brought people together to develop the plans, develop the conops and make sure that the logistics of the plan are supportable.

It is amazing what we are doing in theater with the great help of our national partners; TRANSCOM, DLA, Army Materiel Command, Marine Corps Materiel Command and all the others that help us every day.