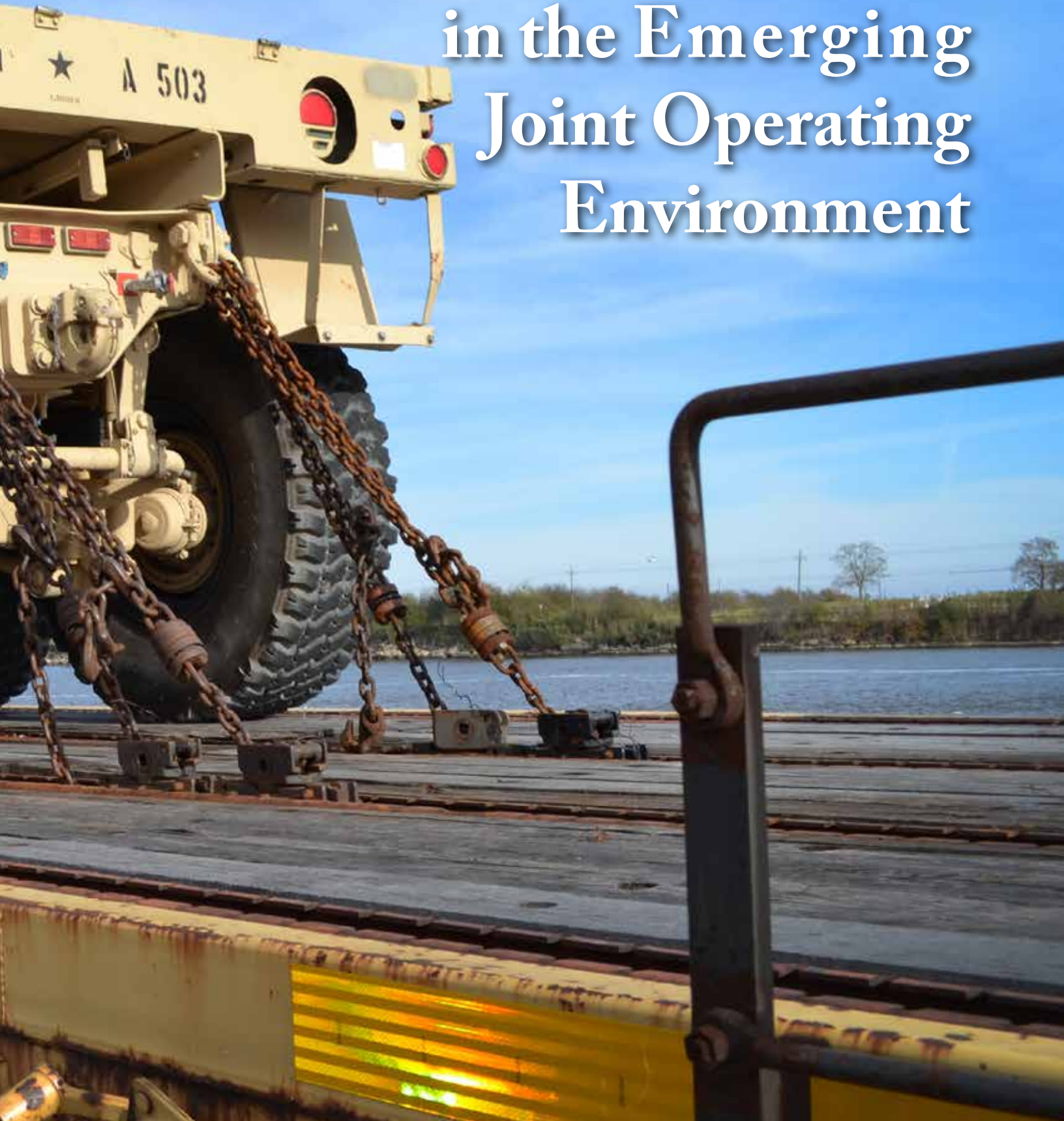




The 842nd Transportation Battalion, 597th Transportation Brigade, Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command, orchestrates terminal operations for the loading of unit equipment and the offloading of cargo at the Port of Beaumont and Port Arthur, Texas, in December 2013. (Photo by Sarah Garner)

Sustaining Military Operations in the Emerging Joint Operating Environment



Sustainers must think critically and innovatively to adapt to the emerging joint operating environment.

■ By Lt. Gen. Stephen R. Lyons

The U.S. Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM) has never been a stranger to innovation. As it celebrates its 30th anniversary this year, the command is taking time to reflect on the past. Before USTRANSCOM's establishment in 1987, the concept of forming a unified, joint command whose sole purpose is to serve as a nexus for strategic mobility was generally unpopular.

At a time when other commands were struggling to maintain personnel, equipment, and budgets, a fledgling USTRANSCOM was considered to be diverting valuable resources. Within a few years of its establishment, however, USTRANSCOM proved its worth when it was asked to deploy in support of Operation Desert Shield, the nation's largest force commitment since D-Day.

The operation's overwhelming success prompted Gen. Colin Powell, who was then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to sing USTRANSCOM's praises. He called the operation the command's "graduation exercise," and as far as he and the president were concerned, USTRANSCOM had just graduated magna cum laude.

The Changing Environment

We military professionals understand that logistics is critical to our nation's ability to project power around the world. It is viewed by both our partners and our potential adversaries as a comparative advantage. The nation's ability to deploy rapidly and sustain military power on a global scale provides U.S. political leaders with multiple options for pursuing national interests.

The quiet professionals of the joint logistics enterprise play a critical role in the nation's defense. As professionals, they are compelled to ensure that strategic logistics and the ability to project military power globally remains a comparative advantage for the United States well into the future. However, logistics professionals should assume that what has worked

in the past will not produce success in the future.

The joint operating environment is rapidly changing. It is characterized by emerging near-peer competitors and the need for integrated transregional, multidomain, multifunctional operations. As a result, the Department of Defense (DOD) must challenge assumptions about logistics and sustainment operations.

For example, we DOD personnel cannot assume that we will operate with impunity (zero attrition), retain assured geopolitical access, maintain cyber mission assurance, and receive approval for the timely mobilization of enabler forces. We should anticipate long and contested lines of communication. As this audience is aware, logistics often precedes maneuver, so we should expect to have to fight just to get to the fight.

Technological Challenges

The nation's future adversaries are becoming more advanced and more deadly. Every day, more cyber threats emerge with the intent to disrupt and degrade the nation's ability to project and sustain forces globally. The DOD must face difficult truths and understand potential weaknesses so they can be fixed now, not later. These challenges can seem daunting. How, then, are we to face these tests?

Solutions will undoubtedly span the full spectrum of joint capabilities integration (doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, and facilities). Fundamentally, the DOD must consider ways to deliver lethal effects in nontraditional ways that will reverse the ever-increasing logistics burden.

Today's high-tech warfighting investments to enhance lethality, mobility, and survivability continue to drive increased requirements for strategic mobility, fuel, ammunition, and other critical sustainment needs. Innovations such as autonomous technologies, artificial intelligence, and smart data will clearly play larger roles in the wars of tomorrow.



A UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter is unloaded from a C-5M Super Galaxy transport aircraft from Dover Air Force Base, Delaware, on April 8, 2017, at Robert Gray Army Airfield, Texas.

Thought and Innovation

However, innovation is more than just technological advances. Overcoming these challenges and the many that will follow requires innovation and critical thought on how to conduct operations in the joint operating environment. Technology by itself will not be our salvation.

To succeed on future battlefields, we DOD professionals must always be willing to think differently, challenge our processes, and expand our minds about concepts not previously accepted. Intellect will lead physical change. Ultimately, it is our people and their proven intellect, agility, ingenuity, and ability to adapt faster than our adversaries that will lead us to future victories. In the end, it is only victory that counts.

Warfighting readiness will always

remain the number one priority. However, the character of war is changing rapidly. Again, what works today will not lead to future success. The time is upon us to shape the future, to challenge the validity of our “sacred cows,” and to set the conditions for those who will follow us to achieve victory.

The services must think more jointly and look for ways to integrate the logistics value chain (from factory to foxhole) with an eye toward one outcome: warfighting effectiveness. In doing so, they will preserve their ability to project military power, rapidly replace lost combat potential, and enable global reach, freedom of action, and continuity of operations in order to meet national objectives.

The DOD requires innovative thought and empowered, critical

thinking at every echelon, and it must act now. As the chief of staff of the Army, Gen. Mark A. Milley, persuasively said, “The pain of preparation is always less than the pain of regret.”

I have great confidence that this audience will remain wide-eyed about future challenges and continue to adapt to the emerging joint operating environment. I could not be more proud of the sustainment professionals who have contributed so much to our nation’s success. Thanks for all you do; you remain equal to the task. Together, we must deliver!

Lt. Gen. Stephen R. Lyons is the deputy commander of USTRANSCOM at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois.