



During his career in the Army, retired Maj. Gen. Hawthorne L. "Peet" Proctor served as the 46th Quartermaster General and in several other senior logistics management roles. (Photo by Sam Curtis)



Four Decades of Improving Materiel Management:

An Interview With Retired Maj. Gen. Peet Proctor

■ By Arpi Dilanian and Matthew Howard

Retired Maj. Gen. Hawthorne L. “Peet” Proctor’s long and distinguished Army career began at Fort Ord, California, and culminated at the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA), where he was instrumental in getting supplies to warfighters during the early days of the operations in Afghanistan and

Iraq. Here are his perspectives on how materiel management efforts have changed in the past four decades and how technology and data analytics will continue to play an increasingly decisive role in the future.

What are some of the materiel management initiatives you saw in

Vietnam and during other early assignments, and what we can learn from them?

When I arrived in Vietnam in December 1970, we were primarily retrograding supplies and equipment since most of the U.S. forces had re-deployed to the continental United

A retired general officer with more than 40 years of logistics experience discusses the past, present, and future of materiel management.

States. However, we were continuing to supply the Vietnamese armed forces. As I recall, the Army's retail logistics processes were essentially manual for materiel management as it related to supplying military assistance advisory teams, which was my primary mission.

After the Vietnam War, we shifted our focus to fighting in Europe under the AirLand Battle doctrine. From a materiel management perspective, we saw the introduction of division and corps materiel management centers. With that came the modernization of our legacy system; we moved from using the Standard Army Intermediate Level Supply System and Direct Support Standard Supply System to the Standard Army Retail Supply System and its corresponding unit-level supply systems.

The aim of all professional logisticians is to be prepared for the next war and, where appropriate, apply lessons learned from the previous one. I must say, I am impressed with the manner in which our logisticians are applying what they have learned from the current wars to prepare for supporting full-spectrum expeditionary operations. It is impressive to see the pace at which we are implementing new ideas and capabilities to facilitate global deployment and sustainment of our Army's expeditionary forces.

You served as the DLA J-3 during 9/11 and when the country went to war. Can you elaborate on the steps you took and the issues you faced?

We learned a great deal while supporting Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. When DLA was called upon to support Operation Enduring Freedom, much had changed in the way we supported the force. We were able to rely more heavily on commercial supply chains. We introduced such programs as direct vendor delivery for several classes of consumables and commercial prime vendor sup-

port for food, medical supplies, and pharmaceuticals.

Immediately after 9/11, DLA was tasked to support the special operations forces in Afghanistan with some unique commodities. Subsequently, we were asked to be prepared to support conventional forces for their employment in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Working with each service and using some of our wartime consumption models, we estimated increases in requirements for consumable items. We determined that DLA would require an increase of about a billion dollars in additional obligation authority.

As a result, we were able to procure new chemical protective overgarments, repair parts, medical supplies, and other items needed to sustain the force.

Let me say that the services worked very closely with our national account managers and ensured that the requisite quantities of supplies were in place. To the best of my knowledge, we had very few materiel shortages as we supported Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

Based on your experiences, can you discuss materiel management for predictable items such as food, fuel, water, and ammunition versus items with variable demand such as repair parts?

In the 1990s, I was fortunate to serve as the commander of the Defense Personnel Support Center (now DLA Troop Support) that provided the Department of Defense (DOD) with food and related commodities, clothing and textiles, and medical supplies and pharmaceuticals. For the most part, requirements for these items were based on troop strengths, the number of patients that were expected to be treated, and in the case of fuel, equipment density and mission profile.

We relied heavily on the use of commercial supply chains for consumables, often using direct vendor

deliveries or, in some cases, prime vendors. Although this did not eliminate all materiel management functions at or near their point of consumption, in my opinion it made materiel management within units more manageable.

As for munitions, the programs that were developed to sustain a force in combat were sufficient for the processes used to manage ammunition in the early days of Air-Land Battle, and I do believe they are still working well today.

However, there have been instances in which suppliers of select components of some critical weapons systems have gone out of business because of very low or no demand. As we go forward, we may want to pursue the capability to keep the industrial base warm for those critical weapon systems that we will need for full-spectrum, multidomain operations.

Perhaps with the use of enterprise planning and resource management capabilities, the acquisition of and materiel management for repair parts will become less cumbersome, given the end-to-end visibility and management controls that are in place to effect readiness across the total force.

Regardless of class of supply, I believe that speed, visibility, security, predictability, and accountability should be paramount in any supply chain to support full-spectrum, multidomain military operations.

It has been 14 years since you left the Army, and we have been at war for that entire period. Through your lens, what lessons have been learned that we can apply moving forward?

We have, in my opinion, effectively integrated contracted logistics support on the battlefield. We are also applying valuable lessons learned as we train our logistics forces to be successful in expeditionary operations. A sterling example is a program called Pacific Pathways. In this program, units deploy to a training

exercise and, upon completion, may be deployed to engage in training on another mission at a different location before returning to home station.

However, as we plan for expeditionary operations, it is essential that we include seasoned logisticians in the initial-entry phase to allow for a smooth deployment and sustainment of follow-on forces. Their knowledge, skills, and abilities to overcome unforeseen sustainment challenges is paramount to the success of operations. I would also encourage the use of intermediate staging bases to provide a location for rotating people or equipment in and out of the area of combat operations.

Lastly, we must remember that the bulk of the logistics forces are in the reserve component. It is essential that they remain trained and ready and that they participate in deployment exercises prior to engaging in full-spectrum, multidomain operations.

What are your thoughts on how the Army can leverage its investment in information systems and big data?

I see this as an area of great promise. One way is to improve our use of analytic software in conjunction with condition-based maintenance tools to assist in predicting failures before they occur. This capability exists in the commercial airline industry and other industries, and I believe it would work very well within the DOD.

An example of using big data analytics is perhaps visible in the case of reducing the number of national stock numbers (NSNs) that are maintained in the DOD inventory. In 1973, DLA managed 4.3 million NSNs. By 2003, that number had increased only slightly to 4.6 million. Since 2003, however, that number has risen by roughly 20 percent to about 5.7 million NSNs.

Using today's technology, the services and DLA could, in my estima-

tion, employ big data analytics to significantly reduce duplications and redundancies as well as the number of unneeded items that are procured for our military and allied forces. Big data is also key to establishing a logistics common operational picture from the tactical to strategic levels.

Are there other technologies that will help the Army's materiel readiness over the next 20 years?

Absolutely. The concept of 3-D printing or on-demand manufacturing of repair parts at or near the point of need has endless benefits, in my opinion. I believe if the current limitations of cost, establishment of standards for materiel qualification, raw material refinement, and certified parts manufacturing can be overcome, on-demand manufacturing has the potential to provide improved strategic flexibility. Of course, responsiveness will improve while warehousing costs, shipping times, obsolescence, and redundancy in repair parts stockage will all be reduced.

Any final thoughts?

With the continuous challenges of manning and equipping our Army, I encourage our logisticians to sustain a culture of ownership, pride, and excellence as they build sustainment organizations that remain trained and ready to sustain forces in a full-spectrum, multidomain battlespace.

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