

Transforming and Sustaining on the 21st Century Battlefield

by Richard A. Hack, Lieutenant General, USA Ret.*

Thank you very much for that kind introduction. It's a great experience to once again be around so many fellow logisticians. I want to publicly thank General Sullivan and his great folks at AUSA for all they do for our Soldiers, our Army and our nation. Truly, they have made a huge difference.

They told me to spend no more than about 20 minutes tonight. I asked one of my guys where I should start—he said at about the 19-minute mark.

Tonight I want to talk about changes in the Army—the changes I've recognized, with greater clarity, since I retired from active duty, some changes that I see ahead for our Army, and some thoughts about leading and managing this change. Finally, I'd like to share some lessons that I've learned since retirement that I wish I had learned earlier in life.

Clarity of change

For years people have made analogies about how fast life speeds along in the Army. From day one, "It's like jumping on a moving train." Those of you who have served, or continue to serve today, have all experienced it, heard people talk about it. You show up at a unit or organization and the pace doesn't slow down from the moment you arrive. You are expected to jump right in and start contributing—training, deployments, providing support, developing new concepts/procedures/processes, supporting current and new systems. Many of our Soldiers join units as they ramp up for their tours in Iraq or Afghanistan, going from a fast-moving train to an even faster and more dangerous train. . . . The days start to run together and before you know it, you are moving on to your next unit or next project. Most Army careers are a series of these assignments knitted together in what often appears to be some haphazard order. It's when you finally step (or are thrown) off of that figurative train that you get the chance to watch what's going on—to put it all in context, to truly understand. Those riding on the train sometimes cannot appreciate all of the changes going on all around them as they concentrate on the immediate and important tasks at hand.

I've been watching the Army train change direction and increase speed since it deposited me at my retirement station a little over a year and a half ago, and I am continually amazed at how rapidly the Army continues to evolve. I am in awe of those who are still serving and how they have coped with change, harnessed it and used it to the collective advantage of the Army. From huge force-structure changes, to manning and equipping changes, changes in doctrine and training, to new missions and tasks coming at our Army at dizzying velocity and from every angle. It's simply amazing what the last few years have wrought. Here are just a few that come to mind:

- The Army has reorganized its divisions and built self-contained modular brigades. These modular brigades include the force structure enablers necessary to act independently on the 21st century battlefield. They are not tied to a division base, which improves their strategic

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flexibility, readiness and responsiveness. They allow the Army to more efficiently tailor land forces for the regional combatant commanders.

- The Army's support structure has been similarly reorganized, with new units being formed and other units being disbanded. The echelonment of support units has been streamlined with the formation of sustainment brigades that now work directly for sustainment commands. The DISCOMs [division support commands] and corps support groups of yesterday's Army are rapidly disappearing, their progeny returning as far more capable sustainment brigades that allow the Army to tailor the logistics force for each mission. My last three organizations on active duty were the 13th COSCOM [Corps Support Command], the 21st Theater Support Command and the Army Materiel Command. The 13th COSCOM and the 21st Theater Support Command are fundamentally different from the ones I commanded. The 13th COSCOM is now the 13th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary). It has a different organizational structure with a different logistics concept to support the modular forces of today and tomorrow. Likewise, the 21st Theater Sustainment Command is evolving along a similar path. Army Materiel Command, where I served as the chief of staff and deputy commanding general my last five years on active duty, has changed in significant and fundamental ways as well. It has new missions and formations that were unthinkable just a few short years ago. In fact, in 2001, there was serious discussion as to whether the Army needed an AMC-like organization. Our Army's leadership at the time showed great strategic wisdom in ensuring AMC's existence.

But it isn't just force structure that has changed. For example,

- The Army has changed the way it recruits and trains its Soldiers. We now have a recruiting campaign which is tailored to the force the Army needs for today and tomorrow. Our new slogan, "Amy Strong," conveys the idea that if you join the Army you will gain physical and emotional strength, as well as strength of character and purpose. (By the way, I'm still trying to earn my first Retiree Referral Bonus.)
- The Army has changed and updated its training programs to reflect the realities of on going operations. CASCOM [Combined Arms Support Command] now produces Logistics Warriors who are better prepared to support an Army operating in an environment with no definitive front lines. These Soldiers learn battle drills and combat operations as well as their logistics craft. These training changes include the leader development programs which now comprise subjects that a few years ago would have never been considered as something to be taught at CASCOM schools. (Such topics as language training, cultural training, counterinsurgency, civil affairs/nation-building are now routinely part of the Army's education curricula.) The complexity and realism of CASCOM training has changed as well with the addition of live fire exercises. And anyone who has been to the NTC [National Training Center] recently and compares it to a rotation of just a few years back can attest to how significantly Army training has changed.

But perhaps the most visible changes the Army has experienced are the huge influx of technology and equipment to support our forces in harm's way. I remember talking to a former Chief of Transportation who tried to interest the Army in armoring trucks in the late 1990s. The Army at the time could not conceive of the need. Fast-forward to today and consider that in the past five years we have put armor on all wheeled vehicles leaving forward operating bases and now the Army is preparing to replace armored humvees [High-Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled

Vehicles, or HMMWVs] with the latest generation of armored wheel vehicles—Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) Vehicles. Additionally, there have been incredible improvements in technology—technology that lets us see ourselves and see the enemy—to fuse the Battlefield Operating Systems inconceivable only a few short years ago; technology that permits us to execute logistics missions in new ways. For example, we can now track supplies with unimagined accuracy. Granted, it's not a perfect system, but relatively speaking, the company-grade leaders of our units today are way more efficient than most of us ever dreamed possible (although the older I get, the more efficient I believe I used to be).

When I think back to my 33 years in uniform, we moved from manual processes to automated processes in a blink of an eye. From the days of the NCR 500 vans to Honeywell DAS3 [Digital ASCI Supercomputer 3] vans, to ULLS [Unit Level Logistics System] on Radio Shack TRS 80s [desktop computers], to SARSS-I [Standard Army Retail Supply System] and SIDPERS [Standard Installation/Division Personnel System] on Burroughs computers, to desk tops and then to laptops. Those of us in the middle of it all truly didn't see just how huge a step it was. We were rushing headlong into the information age.

The point here is that there have been tremendous changes in the past—from horses to tanks to computers—but I really think the last few years have brought changes as significant as any in our Army's history. And it's happened much like in the past—with those doing it not really appreciating the magnitude of what they have done! And we're on the cusp of revolutionary changes.

Changes ahead

As fast as the change locomotive has moved in the recent past, the changes in the future will further accelerate in both speed and complexity. I'd like to spend a few moments talking about just a few of the changes I see ahead that will affect our logisticians and logistics organizations.

In the short term, the Army will grow its endstrength over the next few years to 547,000. That is about 30,000 more Soldiers than it currently has, counting its temporary endstrength bump-up. These Soldiers will have to be recruited, trained, housed, equipped and led. New units will have to be formed and leadership selected. There will be great pressure to accelerate this troop increase to help relieve some of the pressure on the OPTEMPO [operational tempo] and PERSTEMPO [personnel tempo] of the current force. This, in turn, will put intense pressure on the institutional Army to man, train and equip them. I foresee episodic shortages of people and equipment, which will cause policies, procedures and processes to be quickly modified to solve short-term challenges (for example, new retention incentives for captains). I see busy times for the entire force and in particular TRADOC [Training and Doctrine Command] and AMC.

A little longer term, the Iraq and Afghanistan operations will eventually end or significantly reduce in size and scope. And if history holds, with this change will likely come dramatic funding decreases. The Army will find itself with more people, more equipment—more extremely used equipment—and less dollars. The Army's linchpin of modernization, the Future Combat Systems, was recently targeted with a cut of \$867 million from its budget, about 24 percent. Delays in this program will mean that the Army will continue to rely on legacy platforms that will be older than many of the Soldiers operating them. The workload to maintain and reset these older platforms will increase, most likely without a correspondingly proportional increase in funding. The Army's logisticians will have to continue to become more and more efficient to maintain the required readiness. Such initiatives as Conditioned Based Maintenance

Plus (CBM+), SCOR [Supply Chain Operations Reference] and innovative Performance Based Logistics Contracts may be able to alleviate some of the pain. New and evolving doctrine, formations and command relationships will also help. Perhaps the Army will be ready to seamlessly connect AMC to the TSCs [theater support commands] to the warfighting units. Perhaps laws will be modified to even more closely align our acquisition and sustainment communities and functions. I know pressure will increase to become more efficient in our depots and arsenals. And the pressure will not just be in the equipping area. As budgets decrease, pressure will mount to decrease personnel costs. I am sure there are many in the audience who remember the pain associated with Reductions in Force in the '70s after Vietnam and further reductions in personnel in the late '80s and early '90s. I remember AMC in its heyday, when it had over 100,000 civilians and 10,000 Soldiers. By 2003, AMC had less than 1,000 Soldiers and less than 50,000 civilians. Much like the past, the leadership will turn to the institutional Army to pay as much of the personnel bill as prudent risks permit.

Managing the change

We've talked a little bit about past and future changes—managing change is crucial. Now what's important here is not that the Army is going to change—it has always been changing and always will be changing. That's what's required for any healthy organization to remain relevant and succeed. What's important is how organizations are led through these changes, how risks are mitigated and how the institution manages the many competing priorities and tasks—with agility, adaptability and intellectual acuity. The solution is not some exotic management course or fancy software program; the solution always has and always will rest with people, the people who make up the Army—Soldiers, Department of the Army civilians and contractors.

The Army has always contained some mix of Soldiers, Department of the Army civilians and contractors. The mix has changed over the years as the Army has changed. What has remained constant is that to be successful all must be used correctly to accomplish the mission. The Army's leaders, particularly our logisticians, need to know how to leverage the strengths and mitigate the weaknesses of each to best serve our nation.

Past initiatives of military-to-civilian conversions and outsourcing have resulted in a blurring of the goalposts for all involved. Each is dependent on the other in some capacity. Our civilians and contractors are right there next to our Soldiers, often riding in the same convoys, sharing many of the same dangers and choking on the same dust. They are equally dedicated to the nation they serve. Each group brings unique skills and talents to the mix and each—Soldiers, civilians and contractors—will continue to play an important role in our Army's future.

But America will continue to refine that which is inherently governmental—which skills must be kept as organic, which ones can be shared (organic and contractor) and which ones are best left to industry. This mix will change as events change. Some skill sets will be defined in the political arena, directed by our law- and policymakers, others will be left for the Army to decide. The only constant for the future is that our Army force will be comprised of Soldiers, civilians and contractors.

The Army depends on its leaders to support and guide it as it perpetually goes through its metamorphosis. There is no time for a slow, deliberate process. The processes that serve the Army well when the nation is at peace are not necessarily appropriate for an Army that is at war and transforming at the same time. The previous Chief of Staff likened “transforming while at war” with tuning up a car while it is moving. That is a new experience for much of the Army, but

not for Army sustainers. Logistics units have continuously supported the Army through all of its changes; all the while transforming themselves. It has never stopped from our point of view. There is always one more wrench to turn, one more receipt to be processed, one more mouth to feed, one more Stryker to fuel. That's why knowing how to deal with change while you're changing is so important and I believe is one of the strengths of our Logistics Corps.

Three last lessons

Finally, I'd like to share with you three lessons I've learned that would have been useful to me while still serving in uniform.

The first lesson is to be "contracting smart." I wish I'd paid a little more attention to what makes a good statement of work (SOW) and a good contract. I'm not saying that you need to get certified by the Defense Acquisition University, but every leader, military and civilian, needs to understand some basics about the contracting process. Too many in the Army leave the writing of the statements of work or objectives to someone else and never review them. These documents are the "operations orders" for contractors' proposals. Since I've retired, I've read many statements of work, and I am continually surprised by their lack of clarity. The government contract specialists and administrators are wonderful people, true professionals. They make sure the contract process complies with the federal acquisition regulations—but Army leaders are the experts at knowing what it is the Army wants the contractor to accomplish or deliver.

The second lesson is that you think better when you get the proper amount of sleep. While some of you are probably thinking "Sure, easy for him to say!" I can look out right now and see that a bunch of you aren't getting enough sleep and are trying to catch up as I speak. I know we have made a habit of gutting it out. I've been there. Leaders seldom get enough sleep. They soldier on. "I can do it, I don't need sleep," they say, but you do, we all do. But over time, the amount of sleep you get affects your thought processes and decisionmaking ability.

The third and final lesson is to guard against becoming one-dimensional. The mind requires stimulation. The ability to focus intently is a wonderful talent, but when used to an extreme it tends to make you myopic to everything else. To put it in perspective, General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff during World War II (and by the way a VMI graduate), tried to finish his military day at 5 p.m. He didn't always succeed, but when he did, he would spend his time riding his horse, reading, attending movies and having dinner with his wife. He also spent many weekends at his country house, to be disturbed only in extreme emergencies. I found that as I became more and more consumed by the intensity of my job and ongoing operations, I became more and more one-dimensional. If I did take a break to read something, it was inevitably related back to my jots. My mind never got a break. We all need things that give our mind stimulation and allow it to refresh itself. It is interesting to imagine what General Marshall would have thought of those of us who are tethered to our cell phones and BlackBerries and constantly at work.

Closing

I appreciate the opportunity to share a few thoughts with you this evening. Thanks once again to the Association of the United States Army for all that it does. God bless our Soldiers, civilians and contractors who are in harm's way. And God bless America. Thank you.