

Operation Desert Storm: Logistics Anecdotes

By LCDR M. Conrad “Connie” Agresti, SC, USN, (Ret.), Member

Easier to Beg Forgiveness: I was Supply Ratings Assignment Officer (PERS-405D) on 2 August 1990, when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. DoD was capitalizing upon the post-Cold War “Peace Dividend”, and end-strength of all services was being drawn down, resulting in personnel shortages and billet gaps. Two years earlier, I deployed on 72-hour notice to the Gulf as Supply Officer, USS VINCENNES (CG 49)—I was keenly aware of intra-theater logistics capabilities/limitations and knew that unless key personnel were onboard when ships sailed, the tail to get them onboard, with so much else headed to the Mid-East, could last months. Therefore, I directed my detailers to immediately review the manning of all deployable units. Wherever an LPO or CPO gap was projected, I had PCS orders modified to extend incumbents onboard and accelerate potential gains rotating from shore by detaching them early and eliminating or minimizing leave enroute, especially for those in the same geographic location. (A move three months early or four months after a “projected rotation date” is still considered “on time”). I knew that the shore commands would feel the brunt of these actions, but with recent combat experience, my concern rested with the warfighters in harm’s way. I weathered more than one Flag-level review for these unilateral decisions, but by-and-large, my actions were upheld, and the bottom line is that Supply Departments were well staffed when ships sailed for DESERT SHIELD and, subsequently, DESERT STORM. These processes were subsequently adopted Navy-wide.

Best of Both Worlds: Prior to ODS, ships operating in the CENTCOM Area of Responsibility (AOR) used the logistics guidance from their respective fleets (LANT or PAC). This caused confusion in combined fleet operations. One of my tasks in Bahrain serving as Deputy ACOS for Logistics (N4D) at COMUSNAVCENT (FWD) was to compose a Logistics Manual for the NAVCENT AOR. Since I had been a Department Head in both fleets (USS PETERSON (DD 969) (LANT) and USS VINCENNES (CG 49) (PAC), I knew what I liked from each of the fleets’ logistics guidance and incorporated the best practices into our LOGMAN. As the document neared completion, I met with representatives of CTF 63, CTF 73, and FMF to ensure that all equities were adequately represented and the rest, as they say, is history.

Mail, Morale, and Readiness: There are few things certain in life; among these are death, taxes, and late mail delivery to military units. Since I could not resolve the first two, I took on the task of trying to solve the mail SNAFUs. I knew such problems well after eight prior deployments and endured the fact that the washed-khaki uniforms I had sent to myself never arrived (I ended up wearing “chocolate-chip” BDUs during my 6-month NAVCENT tour). My first glimpse of the mail hub at Bahrain International Airport was as bad as I expected – 8’ piles of boxes (many marked “CASREP”) and mail bags and only two overworked postal clerks who were bullied by aircrews refusing to fly anything other than their ship’s mail. I obtained augmentees (often transient personnel awaiting the “freedom flight” home) to help sort the mail including segregating CASREP parts from all other boxes. I reviewed all MOVREPs and fleet dispositions while standing watch in Flag Plot in order to coordinate opportune life, and directed that all aircraft carry CASREP parts and first-class mail for ships in company within their weight and cube limitations. We whittled-down the pile of frustrated mail and markedly improved readiness. I never learned whether mail for ships that had departed the AOR ever caught up with them. I do know that I never saw my khakis again.

Be Prepared for Anything...and Improvise: While conducting a logistics airhead in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia for an out-chopping Amphibious Ready Group (ARG), the contracted material handlers never reported for duty. With two fully loaded USAF C-141s on the ground and all of one-half hour “stick-time” driving a forklift (while working for Good Humor Ice Cream one college

LCDR (ret) Connie Agresti served as Deputy ACOS for Logistics (N4D) of COMUSNAVCENT (Forward) during the ODS Cease Fire Campaign from September 1991 – February 1992. After retirement from the Navy in 1995, he worked successively as a defense contractor, government employee (auditor), and management consultant to military acquisition, finance, and national intelligence customers. LCDR Agresti fully retired in 2016 and currently lives in Virginia Beach with his partner, Alice.

Logistics Anecdotes

Continued from page

summer), I commandeered an idle forklift and took the risk of operating moving the cargo pallets off of the aircraft. Once the Marines arrived, in three CH-53 hellos, we transferred the cargo hand-over-hand (Marines are good for that) for further transfer to the ARG. Regrettably, I did not have time to gloat in my victory as I got to spend some quality time with a Saudi Customs Officer after one “jarhead” showed up with a Maxim magazine – but that’s another story.

Get Along by Going Along: In early-1992, RADM James E. Miller, SC, USN, the-COMNAVSUP, came to the CENTCOM AOR on a week-long inspection tour of logistics facilities and to meet with foreign counterparts. I was the VIP Group’s designated escort, which included visits to numerous locations in Kuwait, Iraq, UAE, and Saudi Arabia. On a car trip across the causeway from Bahrain to Saudi Arabia, I was accompanying a Reserve one-star (whose name, I simply cannot recall) when we were stopped at the border and “politely” detained. The guard’s limited English was better than my Arabic of “what a lovely rifle you have.” Nevertheless, we stumbled through a 90-minute Q-and-A period while sipping sickeningly sweet tea. Throughout this time, I tried to assure the admiral that “oh, this happens all the time.” We finally did get to the U.S. logistics sites in at Khobar, Dhahran, and Dammam, but just a bit off schedule and after the souk closed, so no souvenirs other than the memory.