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DISTRIBUTION PLAN -- ARMY AND AIR FORCES

22 October 1946 1947-29

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DISTRIBUTION PLAN--ARMY AND AIR FORCES

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COLONEL HORNER:

One may ask why we, here in the Industrial College, are studying the Distribution System of the Army, Navy, and Air Forces. It seems that this subject should be more properly studied in the National War College and so it should; however, the lack of appreciation during the planning years between World War I and World War II of the impact upon production attributable to distribution caused our procurement agencies many headaches and denied to the field forces vital supplies when they were needed.

The various factors of distribution play a very important part in affecting our production effort. For the purposes of the course, we grouped certain elements, that is, Transportation, Packaging and Packing, Maintenance and Repair, Communications, and Storage under the heading of distribution. On each of these elements there have been or will be lectures and seminars under the guidance of far more eminent authorities than I. You will undoubtedly gather from these lectures and your studies the fact that in certain fields, such as Packing and Packaging and Maintenance and Repair, there was little or no development by the Army, and, certainly, in the packing field no real program developed by industry prior to the war. This lack of a program not only affected the supplies being delivered but also caused an uncontemplated drain on raw materials needed for the accomplishment of this program.

The lack of appreciation was probably due to many factors. After World War I we were so conscious of our deficiencies during that War that we placed great emphasis on correcting those deficiencies. We had fought a stabilized trench warfare and not one of movement hence the wastage factor in distribution was very small. Again we had fought the war on only one front and while our Supply lines were longer than ever before they were insignificant in length as compared to the Supply lines of World War II.

The aeroplane was in its infancy, the tank was a new instrument of war and automatic weapons were restricted to small calibres.

Again as we gradually geared ourselves to peace or what we called a normal way of life our concepts were naturally influenced by the conditions under which we lived. The great surpluses which we had in peacetime and the confidence that we had in our Industrial potential lulled us into a false sense of security.

None of the factors which are paramount in war are evidenced during this time. In fact, from every practical standpoint the opposite method of accomplishing any peacetime military mission seems to be in order. For

instance, the transportation network in our country is more than adequate to take care of not only the civilian requirements but also the very limited military traffic. In fact, competition between common carriers of all classes was most keen due to the very low tonnage shipped during these years when we compare it to our overall wartime requirement.

Our National manpower is not only adequate for our peacetime needs but is in reality surplus. Through the years 1929 to 1939 the government was forced, by creating a public works program, to supplement the employment of manpower which private industry could not use.

The Communications network in the United States had never been taxed and as new technological improvements were made it seemed likely that the system would be able to stand any conceivable amount of traffic.

Storage facilities in the U. S. were ample and excellent and there again one could find little justification for real concern over a shortage of space in this country.

It was upon these economic factors and very limited appropriations that our peacetime Distribution system was organized and it was with these tremendous surpluses in mind that we undoubtedly failed to visualize the possibilities, except in a few items, that anything really could be short.

World War II taught us that for any future planning we must consider supplying our allies. This was not taken into consideration during our previous planning and probably there was little reason for us to realize such a problem would present itself in as much as we ourselves were supplied by our allies in great part during World War I. Because we must plan to supply our allies in any future war, and because each war causes a greater expenditure of supplies and services, and since it was forcefully brought home to us in World War II that our resources were fast reaching exhaustion; we must in planning for any future war organize ourselves to conserve in every possible direction. We must also plan for a global war with long lines of supply and thus our Distribution System must be planned to operate as economically as possible, but with proper allowances made for the factors which will enter an atomic global war. We must foresee the expanded use of our transportation system. We must plan new and broader uses of our communication system, we must reduce replacement by a far more efficient maintenance and repair program. We must foresee the extensive change required in our storage facilities and develop and overcome the problems still facing us unsolved in the Packaging and Packing field. The other variable factors not here considered but which directly effect the distribution of supplies and our production effort such as climate, terrain, distances, industrial capacity of the enemy must be taken cognizance of and properly evaluated in order to produce the kind of supplies needed and conserve to the utmost all of our resources.

The organization for Distribution is a very definite contributing factor towards waste or conservation.

It is felt that by establishing general depots in the Army during the last war we were, for the Army, able to conserve storage space, personnel, transportation and supplies. In the zone of the interior little was accomplished in establishing a depot or distribution system which would serve both the Army and Navy.

In our overseas theaters where necessity demanded it, the barrier was broken and not only were general depots established for the Army but in instances the Navy drew its supplies from the same sources.

With the advent of the Atomic Age and the constant necessity for the dispersion of supplies, which, in itself is wasteful, it will become more necessary to concentrate or rather integrate our distribution system so that each dispersal area is a complete and self-supporting unit in itself.

As I have previously stated there is much antagonism to general depots within the Army. We met this opposition even in the theaters of operation where the stress of war was most appreciated. Though we had established in the European theater, general depots in England prior to our invasion of the continent, it was determined that the distribution system on the continent would be accomplished by the use of branch depots. This sytem performed its mission in the early days of the invasion while we were still on the beaches. However, with the break-through out of Normandy, when the supply lines lengthened, supplies became more critical, transportation became overtaxed and was ready to collapse, and communications were nil and time was a most important factor, it became necessary to integrate the various branch depots into a general depot.

Early in September 1944 it was decided that all supplies for the Third Army would be centered under one person, that of the Commanding Officer, 62nd QM Base Depot. The supply situation improved and this depot took over the supply not only of the Third Army but also of the Ninth Army, Ninth Air Forces, and the Advanced Base Section. Trucks which had, until this time, proceeded from the beaches to the various branch depots with only a half load arrived with their full tonnage. The manpower required to operate the depot was decreased because of the ability and authority to shift labor rapidly from the medical section, to the quartermaster section, to the ordnance section or where ever else it was needed. By concentration of authority and overhead more personnel were released to the operational level. Instead of eight people being responsible for the supply of the Army in the field, one person was responsible for the distribution of supplies. Expenditures of labor and materials for utilities, packing and security were reduced. Any surplus of transportation, labor, materials handling equipment or supervisory personnel were efficiently switched to the places where shortages existed. Telephone calls were channelled and a saving on the very inferior and much overtaxed communication network was accomplished. If a similar system were followed, not only in all theatres of operation but also in the zone of the interior, and where ever possible instead of general depots for the Army, Armed Forces depots were established and charged with the storage and distribution of supplies to all of the armed forces, the necessary reserves

set up by both the Army and Navy could be substantially reduced. There would be an even greater saving of transportation, communications, supervisory personnel, labor and storage facilities which would in turn effect a reduction in our raw material requirements and production effort.

At this time I must say that in order to thoroughly coordinate or integrate the system both the Army and the Navy will have to set their individual houses in order. The problem of common nomenclature standardization and cataloguing must be carried out. In this connection I believe we can look with profit to the Air Force and the Bureau of Aeronautics as well as the Medical Corps and the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery as pioneers in this direction. I believe that much has been accomplished by these services and they should serve as an excellent example to the other Bureaus and Technical Services as to what may be accomplished in this field.

So much for the overall theory of distribution. I should like now to review very hastily the distribution system of the Army over a period of years and attempt to give a background for the problems we faced at the outbreak of World War I, again in World War II, as well as those with which we are faced at the present time, and will certainly face unless corrected if we should enter a World War III.

Like the Navy Technical Bureaus our supply system in the Army has for over a hundred years been based upon the various Technical Services. Each of these Technical Services have been created by law and are charged by law with certain missions. Throughout the history of our Army the Technical services, like the Technical Bureaus of the Navy, have become almost autonomous and have acquired power which they have no desire to lose. During years of peace they have, with very small appropriations, been able to accomplish the supply mission of our very small Army in a most efficient manner, however, in World War I the supply system broke down due to lack of coordination. It became necessary to place a common head over the Technical Services, in the very powerful personality of General Goethals. Because of pressure and the complete break-down of supply, the organization was knitted together and gave a reasonably creditable account of itself during the balance of that war. With the cessation of hostilities efforts were made to improve and make permanent this organization; however, the political power of the Technical Services was too great, the central control agency was abolished and again the Technical Services became the supply agencies of the Army, with very loose coordinating control exercised by the Assistant Secretary of War and G-4 of the War Department General Staff, each of whom often were played off one against the other.

With the outbreak of World War II we saw history repeating itself. Each Technical Service was out to accomplish its mission, get its supplies and distribute them to the troops irrespective of what affect it had upon the other Technical services, much less the affect on the Navy. It was soon realized that a coordinated policy and central control was necessary and

and that without a central directing agency our supply system was doomed to disaster. This situation caused the creation of the Services of Supply later known as the Army Service Forces. Whether this organization was a model on which to base future planning or not only time and history will relate; however, I feel that organizationally it was sound and that the mistakes, errors, and faults attributed to this organization were due principally not to the organization but perhaps to personalities or to the manner in which it administered the job it was called upon to do.

With World War II behind us and we hope an ear of peace ahead, the War Department in the spring of 1946 reorganized with the hope that they could create an organization which could function economically and efficiently in peace and be rapidly expanded to accomplish a maximum effort in war. This organization was the result of many months study by several of our outstanding officers. It attempted to eliminate the objectionable characteristics of ASF and the old G-4 War Department General Staff and combine their good qualities. This reorganization took place 11 June 1946 and the Director of Service, Supply and Procurement was established. The War Department circular which accomplished this reorganization is No. 138 dated 14 May 1946 and while I do not intend to read it to you at this time it is well worth your perusal and I shall only state that it envisioned centralized control of the Army's Distribution system. Its effectiveness we shall see during the balance of this lecture.

You heard a week ago Monday a most excellent exposition by Admiral Buck on the present distribution system of the Navy. I am sorry that my lecture cannot be more direct or emphatic as to the present Army Distribution system. I have no charts to present to you and, like Admiral Buck, I do not have a system. Frankly, today the Army has no supply system. The Office of the Director of Service, Supply and Procurement has for many months endeavored to establish a system but to date nothing has come out of that office. The reasons probably are that the office itself is new, economy is in full swing, surpluses are occupying a great portion of the spotlight, and the Technical Services are all striving to regain their autonomy which they lost to a certain extent by the creation of Army Service Forces during the war. An example of this is the action of the Ordnance Department which has, when told to close Depots, been able to change the name of those Depots to Arsenals and under authority of a statute passed over a hundred years ago denies that an arsenal may be closed. Similarly, the Quartermaster Corps has dug up a statute that places responsibility for all storage upon that Branch of the Service and refuses to relinquish control of the General Depots.

The War Department at the present time is anxious to establish a sound supply system which will serve our forces in time of peace, through waves of economy, and yet be capable of expansion during times of emergency. It is quite evident to the War Department that some sort of centralized control over the supply system is necessary; however, the technical services feel that each one is capable of paddling its own canoe. The situation at the present time reminds one of a group of fractious horses lined up for a race with each one being jockeyed for position. Each time the starter seems

ready to send them off one breaks away and they must be called back to the post because of a false start. They had hoped in the Director's Office to publish a plan prior to this time and I was promised a copy of this plan to present to you provided it was approved prior to this morning. Inasmuch as I have received no call it is evident that we are still without the approved plan. In fact for those of you who will work on the Distribution system of the Army, hope was expressed and a request made that a copy of your report with your conclusions and recommendations be forwarded to the Distribution Branch of the Office of the Director of Service, Supply and Distribution for their consideration.

While I was not permitted at this time to see or obtain information on the proposed plan, I was able to unearth some of the salient features of the plan.

The Depot system will consist of six General Depots located one each in the six Army Areas. These Depots will have satellites or Sub-Depots under their control which will be known as Distribution Depots. The General Depots will be supplied by Reserve Depots which usually will be Branch Depots located throughout the country without regard to geographical boundaries for their distribution.

The Air Force will be supplied with those items common to themselves and the Army by the General Depots or one of their satellites. For supplies peculiar to the Air Forces there will be ten air depots which will supply the Air Areas. The control of stock levels in these ten air depots will be administered by Wright Field but once supplies are physically located in these ten depots they then come under the control of the Commanding General of that area.

It seems from all I can gather on the subject that the plan for the physical layout of the supply system of both the Army and Air Forces has unanimous support and agreement; however, the fly in the ointment appears to be in who has control. Temporarily, at least, the Air Force has solved that problem; however, in the Army there is still lack of any overall control.

The Ground Force Commander feels that the Army commanders should control the General Depots and their satellites; the Director of Service, Supply and Procurement feels that it should rest at a General Staff level, and the Technical Services, long powerful and autonomous, feel that they should retain control of their supplies.

A casual glance at the situation and the arguments presented by each sound most logical. The Director of Service, Supply and Procurement points out that during the war coordination of the Technical Services was required in order to accomplish the mission which, as has been pointed out, caused the creation of Army Service Forces. The Army commanders assume that they must control the supply of their armies or they will never be assured of

proper logistic support of their operations. The Technical Services point out the economy wave already begun and which will be greater as the era of peace progresses and show that they must control the supplies for which they are responsible in order to make the very limited appropriations go around.

There are, of course, many other arguments presented and as of this date no final policy has been agreed upon.

Before reaching my conclusion I wish to invite your attention to a chart prepared by two very radical thinking students of the last class. I do not present this to you as the approved solution but somewhere between the present uncoordinated system and this completely integrated system must lie the solution which is politically acceptable to the services and Congress and is operationally sound for peace or an atomic war.

In conclusion, I should like to leave with you a few principles which you should consider when conceiving a plan for a Distribution System.

1. Volunteer cooperation is fine but it seldom works as well as controlled coordination.

2. Atomic warfare will call for a dispersed yet completely contained Distribution system.

3. The next war will tax our national resources more severely than any previous war.

4. The Distribution system developed must be politically acceptable to both the services and The Congress and must be one which will conserve our resources to the utmost yet efficiently get the supplies to the troops when and where they need them.

(8 Nov. 1946---350)L.