
Logistics is the “economics of warfare. . . . It provides the substance that physically permits an army to ‘live and move . . .’ ” (p. viii). While it lacks the glamor of the planning of grand strategy or of the execution of tactical operations, it is as crucial in warfare as either. In The Sinews of War James A. Huston of Purdue University describes in detail and analyzes the role of logistics in the history of the army from 1775 to 1953.

Here is the other side of the customary military history. The bloody footprints at Valley Forge are familiar to every schoolboy, but that the clothing and food shortages were, in part, the results of the breakdown of the transportation system is not. Almost two centuries later the beginning of the Cold War would be a matter of controversy. Details of the logistical situation of the American forces in Europe in the late 1940’s indicate clearly that the mission of these troops was simply occupation duty. It was not until 1950 that the army moved its principal supply line from a position parallel to and within a few miles of the Soviet zone to a more defensible location.

This is not a book with which one settles down for an evening of escape. Obviously, this is not its purpose. A history of military logistics will never supplant the “still another” book on Gettysburg for entertainment. Yet, here are details which anyone interested in military history should delight in having available in his library. In August, 1944, there were 5,958 vehicles involved in the Red Ball Express supplying Eisenhower's armies in France. When the quartermaster general bought the first automobiles for the army in 1906, the Treasury Department ruled that he had exceeded his authority and charged the purchase to the general’s personal account. Union surgeons officially performed 29,980 amputations during the Civil War. In the spring of 1778, one of Washington's soldiers could look forward to a daily ration of one and one half pounds of bread, a pound of beef or fish or pork and beans, and a gill of whiskey. During the Korean War the army shipped 31,500,000 tons of supplies to the Far East—an amount more than twice the tonnage shipped to the American Expeditionary Forces in 1917-1918.

Such details aid in establishing a proper perspective of a time or of a specific problem.

From the days of the colonial militia to the more complicated 1950’s Huston has analyzed as well as described the development of logistics. Experts might note a minor gap here and there while some overlapping may bother a reader. But the same experts should be pleased that the author has indicated and criticized logistical failures, military organizational deficiencies, and the preparedness myth. He deserves praise for his achievement in overcoming the enormous problem of researching and writing a book of this broad, comprehensive nature.

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