FISC Logistic Response Team enhances fleet mobility

By H. Sam Samuelson,
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If U.S. Fleet and Industrial Supply Center (FISC) Yokosuka were a commercial enterprise, one of its latest "products" would be bold enough to sport a slogan suitable for airing during this year's Super Bowl: "Wherever you need us – whenever you need us."

Of course, FISC Yokosuka is not a commercial enterprise and it does not need to attract "Super Bowl-sized" audiences. However, with a footprint covering a third of the earth's total sea-surface area, even a non-logistician might take a break from the chips and salsa and say, "Wait. It's a big ocean out there. How can they do that?"

Three letters: L-R-T.

A fairly new concept, Logistics Response Team (LRT) means people: qualified logisticians – wherever, whenever, however.

FISC Yokosuka Operations Department, itself established relatively recently as part of the enterprise's functional realignment, adopted the LRT concept to address dwindling human capital aboard ships and other military units operating in the Western Pacific, while facing steady, if not increasing, logistical demands from those units.

The amphibious command ship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) steams within sight of Mount Fuji. FISC Yokosuka's Logistic Response Teams fortify units almost anywhere in the FISC Yokosuka area of responsibility with needed logistics services.

"It's no secret that forward operating forces, especially the fleet, have been rapidly adopting 21st century efficiencies and reducing labor," said FISC Yokosuka Director of Operations Cmdr. Eric Bach. "Of course, that doesn't necessarily translate to a need for fewer repair parts, or a reduction in contracted support requirements, fuel services or support for humanitarian aid."

"So, we borrowed heavily from the 'when you absolutely, positively, have to have it,' concept. Remember that? Except, we're not talking overnight packages, here," Bach said. "We're talking 'overnighting' people, 'overnighting' capability."

"Anywhere; that's the concept," said Bach.

Here's how it works: In effect, FISC Yokosuka LRTs are like "micro FISCs," relatively small, easily formed logistics teams of almost any make-up that can be rapidly injected almost anywhere in the FISC Yokosuka area of responsibility (AOR), ready to fortify units on scene with the logistics services they need.

"Seriously, if we need a team in Papua New Guinea, or the Philippines, Cambodia – we could drop a team in there," said FISC's Operations Department's Exercises Officer Lt. Mike Augustine. "We recently spooled up to form contingency contracting in support of *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19). It was a monumental effort across our enterprise from Yokosuka to Singapore and even Hong Kong, with help from the C7F (Commander U.S. 7th Fleet) country teams and even the embassy in Tokyo. In the end, the demand signal for the team was turned off but it was a great exercise of our capability to surge at a short notice even to Vladivostok."

"The foundational concept is distance support. If a unit is operating in your backyard, no matter which corner, you have to be able to flex to support them," said Bach. "It wasn't so long ago, however, that ships' supply officers were left to their own devices."

Bach, who served as supply officer aboard the minesweeper *USS Patriot* (MCM 7) in the Western Pacific from 1996 to 1999, is a veteran of an older style Supply Corps, before e-mail was king, where supply officers aboard ship were often lone-wolf hunter-gatherers of provisions, equipment, services – whatever and sometimes, wherever.

However, with the reduction of, or, in the case of the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) and the elimination of Supply Corps billets at sea, eventually technology and some forward thinking had to come to the rescue.

That forward thinking came in the form of "distance support." Bach himself became a student of distance support while assigned to the Navy Supply Information Systems Activity (NAVSISA) in Mechanicsburg, Pa., just prior to his assignment to FISC Yokosuka.

"I attribute a lot of this to [Deputy Chief of Staff, Logistics, Fleet Supply and Ordnance, U.S. Pacific Fleet] Adm. [Thomas] Traaen ," said Bach. "I watched the whole concept of 'distance support' take root under [then] Capt. Traaen when he was at Naval Supply Systems Command. I got to see behind the curtain. The signal I was seeing was that change was on the horizon."

The LCS has provided a test bed platform for several distance support initiatives that have moved some supply "back office" functions ashore. Repair parts stock control and food service records-keeping are just two of the targets of opportunity that are moving off of the ship, as afloat supply manning continues to decrease.

"It's workload ashore with ties to a much more vast logistics network; that's the essence of distance support," said Bach. "Why couldn't that work for all facets of supply? We saw that as a huge target of opportunity."

More than that, there was another, greater human incentive to the LRT concept Bach added.

"One of the geniuses of the LRT concept is that it provides a superior ability to respond to calamities that befall the Western Pacific. This area is, literally, a hotbed for natural disasters: tsunamis, earthquakes, typhoons," said Bach, "There are events like this every year, and the onus for support, logically, goes right back to the tactical, last-mile level of logistics. When disaster struck in the past, everyone just assumed someone would spring into action, but the fact is, there really was no assigned entity to 'spring,' so, again, here is a perfect job for an advance group of logistics professionals, reaching back to a larger network of support."

Bach concedes that the LRT still remains in a developmental stage. "But that's alright," he said, "if we're going to grow it, we're going to grow it right."

As it stands now, there are three basic components to FISC Yokosuka's version of the LRT concept.

For larger multipurpose amphibious assault platforms, FISC Yokosuka still supports the ships' organic supply assets which, when moved ashore, are often called beach detachments, but ensures that, where necessary, they are supported when there is a shore need anywhere in the AOR and local area logistics expertise.

For smaller units and platforms, more robust LRTs can be formed and deployed where needed, again, especially in remote areas of the AOR and for special needs.

Lastly, contingency needs, such as an equipment breakdown, medical emergency all the way to the major disasters.

"It depends on the demand signal," said Augustine, "Whether that signal comes from a ship, a military unit or Mother Nature herself."

Lyden sends praise to Supply Corps after visiting Pacific Fleet

By Blake Vives, CFAY Public Affairs

Chief of the Supply Corps Rear Adm. Michael J. Lyden sent a message praising the work done in the Pacific Fleet area of responsibility (AOR) after visiting several commands including the U.S. Fleet and Industrial Supply Center (FISC) Yokosuka.

"My first 90 days as Chief of the Supply Corps have gone fast. I had the opportunity to hit the road and meet many members of our supply community, officers, enlisted and civilian, around the major fleet concentration areas," Lyden's message read. "I experienced first-hand the amazing work done by the supply team across a myriad of missions and environments."

Lyden also mentioned FISC Yokosuka's support of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions, among others, as an illustration of the Supply Corps carrying out the Navy's expanded missions. FISC Yokosuka's Detachment in Singapore carried out one such mission, providing relief after a tropical cyclone hit Bangladesh.

"It's fascinating to consider the size of the battle space in the PACOM (U.S. Pacific Command) AOR and to read about the great work our Supply Corps personnel are doing to overcome some unique logistics challenges and set the standard for Navy and Department of Defense."

Lyden also shared the details of a newly launched comprehensive study of the Supply Corps community, in his message and during his speech at the Supply Corps Birthday Ball in Tokyo.

"Modeled after a previous effort in 1990, Supply Corps 2010 Study, the intent is to assess the future demand signals, stakeholder needs and emerging opportunities for the Supply Corps," said Lyden. "With the Navy's evolving mission sets and force structure, the timing is right to ensure the Supply Corps is best positioned to provide superior support to naval and joint warfighters."

(Left) Chief of the Supply Corps Rear Adm. Michael J. Lyden, FISC Yokosuka Commanding Officer Capt. Michael J. Arnold and JMSDF Commander Maritime Material Command Vice Admiral Hiroji Miyaura perform a toast during the Supply Corps Birthday Ball Feb. 28.
Photo by Toshiyuki Ito