



Logistics with a capital L



Foxhound being loaded on a C17 at Bastion airfield for return to UK



Or, 'Boats, trains, planes and automobiles'!

Gary Sullivan OBE MILT reports on the major logistics operation of the redeployment of the British armed forces from Afghanistan.

Gary Sullivan made his first report from Afghanistan in 2011. This will be his third and probably last report on the logistics support to Operation Herrick as the UK's combat support to the Government of Afghanistan comes to an end this year. He is a serving officer in the Engineer and Logistic Staff Corps, a reserve unit that provides strategic support to HM Forces.



AUTHOR

Gary Sullivan OBE MILT

FURTHER INFORMATION

See page 35

SECTOR HIGHLIGHTS





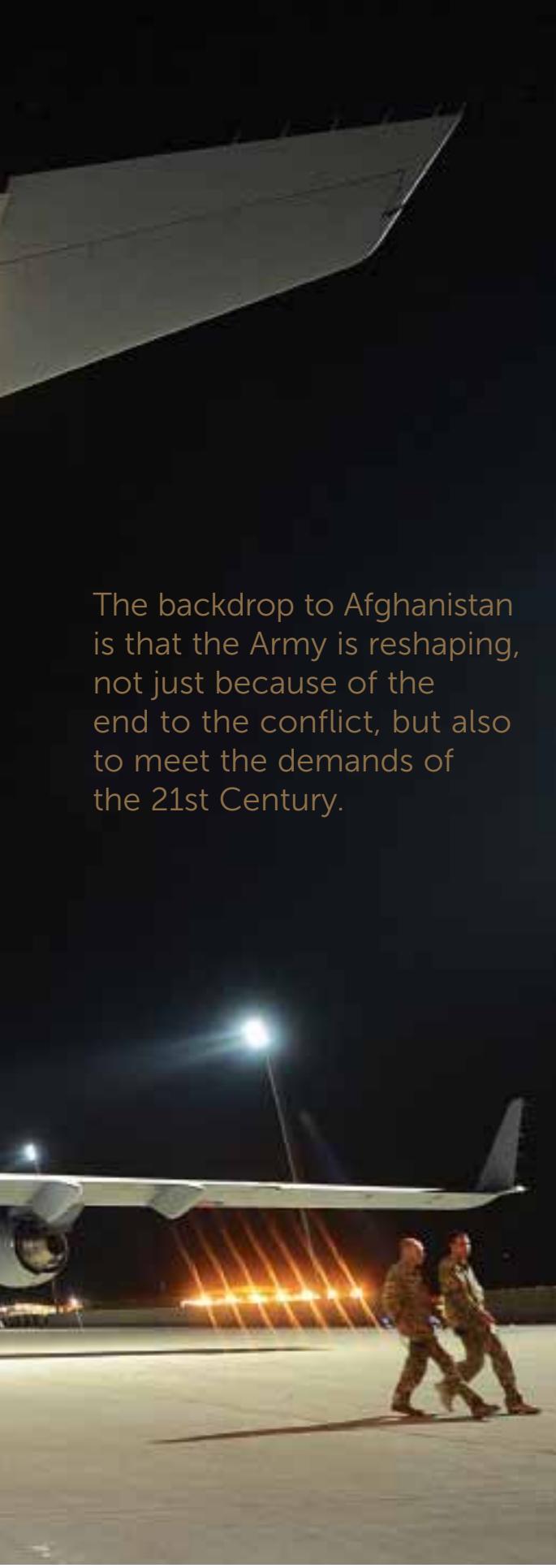
Is the redeployment of the British armed forces from Afghanistan the biggest logistics operation since the Second World War? It is definitely the fastest and the most efficient. Stating the blindingly obvious, the redeployment of people, vehicles and equipment has been planned with military precision, but more importantly this plan is working.

When the British Army left Iraq in 2009, there were major trunk roads to the sea ports, Kuwait as a near neighbour and a substantial logistics infrastructure created by the oil industry in the Middle East. No such luxury is available to the military logisticians planning our return from Afghanistan: a landlocked country with some very inhospitable terrain, very little in the way of infrastructure and 4,000 miles away.

The first deployments in support of Operation Herrick, the British codename for its part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), began in 2002 and gradually increased in scale to its peak in 2011/12. That peak was 137 bases across Helmand Province and Camp Bastion had grown to the size of Reading,

with some 10,000 UK troops, 9,800 ISO containers of military equipment, over 3,500 vehicles and a variety of consumables, including ammunition, food and proprietary products such as toothpaste and washing powder, all needing to be moved, stored and distributed.

There are more than a few officers around with higher rank, but Major Lucy Anderson certainly has a grip on all the logistics assets at her disposal and a grasp of how they fit into the intricate task of redeployment. With the use of planes, trains, boats and automobiles (trucks), in fact every conceivable logistics technique you can think of, the Royal Logistic Corps (RLC) Theatre Logs Group (TLG) has been tasked with the return of the many and various assets in Bastion, and Major Anderson is the Officer Commanding. There are many sub-units, all with acronyms and too numerous to name, but she describes them in intricate detail, explaining their relationships with great passion. This is clearly a jigsaw that is coming together.



The backdrop to Afghanistan is that the Army is reshaping, not just because of the end to the conflict, but also to meet the demands of the 21st Century.



Left: Gary Sullivan
OBE MILT, Chairman,
Wilson James Ltd

She says the strategy is simple, but the execution is a little more complex. Having deconstructed 136 bases and brought everything back to Bastion, the work outside the wire is largely done. The job now is to ensure that every bullet, vehicle, desk, hospital bed or sleeping bag is redeployed, sold, scrapped or gifted to the government of Afghanistan. The operation is practised and efficient and the stats back that up, with over 2,000 vehicles having already returned to the UK.

Brigadier Martin Moore, Commander Joint Force Support, explains the scale and complexity of the challenge, where logistics support into theatre is maintained so that the troops can continue to defend and feed themselves during this phase: 'There are still planes arriving every day to sustain the 5,000 plus people still in Helmand. It is a delicate balance of meeting the day-to-day needs of the operation, working out what can be taken out of service and what happens to it next in terms of its onward journey out of Bastion. It is definitely Logistics with a capital L.'

The backdrop to Afghanistan is that the Army is reshaping, not just because of the end to the conflict, but also to meet the demands of the 21st Century. Under a programme of change called Army 2020, the supporting elements traditionally provided by uniformed soldiers will be supplemented by the private sector. The deployment to Helmand and, perhaps more so, the redeployment has seen significant support from private sector companies, especially in the field of logistics. This is a real chance to test the 2020 plan. The RLC Logistic Supply Regiment has engaged a contract helicopter service to minimise the draw on military assets. Non-military hauliers have been used extensively to transport goods as diverse as construction material, food and fuel, and now in the redeployment phase support is coming from organisations including UK company Seafast and Kuwait-based Agility Logistics.

Agility won the contract to sell all surplus equipment. Once the MoD in London decides if the costs of transporting assets back to the UK (estimated cost is between £5,000 and £10,000 for 1TEU) outweighs the cost of buying a replacement, it is Agility's job to sell it on the open market, with items as diverse as portable buildings and washing machines. Gary Stockton, Agility's Logistics Director in Bastion, works closely with the Quartermaster's department to forecast what will be for sale and then work to drum up interest from local business folk from around Helmand.



Above: Soldiers of 7th Armoured Brigades 2 Logistics Support Regiment (2LSR) patrol to Main Operating Base (MOB) Lashkar Gah from Camp Bastion, there task was to haul the last remaining ISO containers containing military equipment from the base back to Camp Bastion

He is complimentary about the Afghan business community, describing them as imaginative, entrepreneurial and making a big contribution to the creation of jobs around the province. Starved of natural resources in a landlocked country, Afghans are hungry for the products that the Army is selling off. Agility fills an ISO container full of product, the Afghan traders are allowed to inspect it and then a sealed bid auction takes place. Once sold, the buyer arranges transport of the container out of Bastion. As you might imagine, there are strict security protocols to follow, but the sales have seen no shortage of potential buyers.

Major Oliver North, Quartermaster, is a career logistician and his manner and bearing tell you he has probably seen it all in his time. He is determined, as he puts it: 'to get out of Dodge with every bit of equipment and every item of clothing accounted for and delivered to the right place back in the UK.' As of 1st June 2013, there were 9,800TEUs to be processed, with an estimated 5,000 due for return to the UK. By April 2014, over 50% had been processed and redeployed. Major North goes on to explain how the new logistics software application, Management of the Joint Deployed Inventory (MJDI), has helped, with potentially 18,000 users across the Army, Navy and Air Force. Military logisticians are all using the same application, hosted on new hardware, no matter where they are located in the world.

Another complex logistics move involved the medics. The medical facility at Bastion has been recognised as the world's leading trauma hospital, but it, too, is downsizing and sending home its bedpans and MRI scanners. Colonel Ashleigh Boreham, as Commander Med, is now using his past logistics skills to great effect. A smaller facility has been built for the Afghan Army, one which it can sustain, whilst the ISAF hospital is taken down: 'It is a difficult balance of having the correct equipment available to deal with anything

from sprained ankles to combat injuries, whilst reducing our footprint to the point of closure,' he explains.

The process that has kit and equipment serviced, counted, packaged and assigned is largely run by the RLC, and it then has to be brought back to the UK. There are a variety of options for the logisticians to consider depending on what it is, military or non-military, classified or unclassified. Non-military kit is sent by containerised, contracted road haulage through Pakistan to Karachi, where it is put on a boat back to the UK. As always, the Army has a plan B, a longer route, but equally as effective, that is to go north by road to Uzbekistan and then by rail through Kazakhstan, Russia and Latvia to Riga and then by sea.

The only other way out is by air and the light blue loggies of the RAF play a pivotal role providing an air bridge; the options here involve both military and civilian aircraft. The Joint Movements Unit (JMU) based on the airfield at Bastion, manages freight and people. Sitting on the tarmac is a C17 transport aircraft and an Atlas Air Boeing 747 cargo plane, with capacity of circa 26,000ft³ (about 5TEU), and an average of payload of around 80t.

The 747 brings in food and non-military equipment such as vehicle spares. This particular load is all food and, as the last pallet of sausages is taken out of the giant hinged nose cone, the RAF team signs the paperwork and immediately begins the loading of non-military equipment for its reverse logistics journey out of Camp Bastion. The affable American crew have a pleasant surprise for their RAF friends: a gift of fresh milk, something that is in very short supply in camp and very welcome.

As the nosecone closes and the 747 begins its taxi towards the runway, the RAF loggies have switched their attention to the loading of the C17. The C17 is an amazing aircraft with a similar payload to the 747, but that can be configured in many ways, from freight to passengers to a mobile hospital. It also has special qualities in that it is highly manoeuvrable in the air and excellent for short take-off and landing in hostile environments. The air bridge out of Afghanistan also has options; that which is classified flies direct to RAF Brize Norton in the UK; and the unclassified vehicles and equipments are flown to the Middle East to be shipped by ro-ro to the RLC's sea mounting centre at Marchwood.

The key to the logistical success of Operation Herrick continues in its redeployment phase, that is the Joint Force logistics task. As the Vehicle Specialist Squadron of the RLC carefully positions the huge military vehicles in the fuselage, guided by the RAF loadmaster, as the proof of good order paperwork and airway bills are checked by the JMU, the aircraft is on the ground for the shortest time.

As the huge C17 aircraft lifts off from Bastion and climbs above the desert and the snow-capped mountains of the Hindu Kush and you witness the extraordinary landscape of Afghanistan, a real sense

of the scale of this operation is tangible; the hardships faced by our servicemen and women, and the feeling that we leave Afghanistan better than we found it. History will tell the rights and wrong of this conflict, but if you measure the scale of the challenge – to build a town as big as Reading in the middle of a landlocked desert, 3,000ft above sea level, to sustain 10,000 plus personnel for 12 years, then take it all down and bring back to the UK – that feels like a success. Much was made of the building of the London Olympics; this is truly on a different level.

The British Army is often described as one of the most professional armies in the world. To those not in the military that may be considered as a reference to our fighting troops. We should, however, remember the words of Winston Churchill: 'Victory is the beautiful, bright-coloured flower. [Logistics] is the stem without which it could never have blossomed. Yet even the military student, in his zeal to master the fascinating combinations of the actual conflict, often forgets the far more intricate complications of supply.'¹

Our armed services in total exceed the sum of their parts. However, it should be noted that in all walks of life, logisticians are often overlooked. When the dust has settled and the sandbags are arranged around the campfire while stories of Afghanistan are told, I hope the loggies get the recognition they deserve.

About the author

Gary Sullivan OBE is Chairman, construction logistics company Wilson James Ltd, and Chairman, Active Essex. He is co-author of *Managing Construction Logistics*. Wilson James provides a range of services including aviation logistics, secure logistics and specialist security logistics.



Above: Final combat logistics patrol returns to forward operating base Price

Life too short to type in these links? Download the *Focus* App to your device, and simply click on any link. For more information see www.ciltuk.org.uk/focus



REFERENCES

1. CHURCHILL, WINSTON, *The River War*, revised edition, London: Longmans Green, 1902

FURTHER INFORMATION

To find out more about the issues raised in this article, why not join our Defence Logistics Forum? See our website:
www.ciltuk.org.uk/forum/defence