



Air Force Logistics Readiness Officers: How to be Successful in a Joint Environment

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From July 2007 to June 2008, I had the privilege of attending the United States Marine Corps Command and Staff College. For nearly a year, I studied the Marines' (and the other Services represented in my conference group) doctrine, history, and current tactics, techniques, and procedures. During that same year, I often found myself at the *pointed end* of some pretty good verbal jabs from my leatherneck friends. What became apparent to me was that the current fight does not lend itself to Air Force success stories. Instead of touting the efforts of our expeditionary combat support personnel, the Air Force has been forced to go on the defensive. The Secretary of Defense actively called-out the Air Force to do more in supporting the Global War on Terror (his comments were directed almost exclusively at the rated community). Where the Air Force has succeeded is in providing top-notch logistics support to our Joint comrades. Many sister Service members recognize the efforts of the Air Force logistics readiness community in the deployed environment. They see us on convoys, sitting in Joint operations centers, and often venturing outside the wire. Even though Air Force logisticians are viewed favorably in the Joint environment, there are certain steps logistics readiness officers (LROs) can take to ensure that they command the respect they deserve from their peers in the Army and Marine Corps. This short article addresses five keys to LRO success in a Joint environment.

First, be smart on Air Force Doctrine (and not just the 2-4 series). In the other Services (except for the Navy, where doctrine does not exist), doctrine is not a buzzword or a shiny new toy. Doctrine is a way of life. Marine Corps and Army officers know what their branch and their Service are supposed to do. In fact, most of those officers know what the other Services are supposed to do, too. Sometimes they know our doctrine better than we do. That's embarrassing.

It's going to take some time for the Air Force to embrace doctrine the way the Army and Marine Corps do, but it's got to happen. Doctrine has to be read, understood, and implemented by all airmen. Being knowledgeable about the Air Force's capabilities and core doctrine statements will go a long way to earning much needed credibility.

The second key to success in a Joint environment is to possess a working knowledge of the tactics, techniques, and procedures, as well as the tables of equipment of the forces you are supporting. Understanding concepts of maneuver warfare, rates of advance, and rates of consumption by unit size will make any LRO a more valuable commodity. Logistics support of ground forces is, in my opinion, much more complex than supporting flying units from a fixed location. One of the best ways to get up to speed on this kind of information is to build and maintain a personal smartbook. There is a great deal of excellent information available through open sources; however, the best source of sister Service information will come from logistics professionals in that service. Make contacts and request briefings, slides, background papers, and anything that deals with combat support and combat service support. A slide show on the composition and airlifting of the Army's brigade combat team or a white paper on the Joint task force-port opening capability is out there if one knows where to look. The key is to keep the book up-to-date. As quickly as things change in today's world, last week's briefing may just be old news.

Third, don't feel like you have to apologize for how the Air Force does business. There are things you just can't do anything about. You can't control the length of our air expeditionary force deployments—don't be ashamed that you're only there 6 months when others are there for a year. That being said, be mindful of the sacrifices your comrades in the other Services are making. While 365-day taskings for LROs are on the rise, they have been the norm for the Army since this struggle kicked off. Be ready to correct perceptions that are flat-out wrong. Some folks think that the Air Force won't deploy anywhere there isn't a five-star hotel or a Starbucks. Show them the Joint manning document from the forward operating bases in the area of responsibility, highlighting where our airmen are. They might be surprised. This isn't to say a little self-deprecation isn't warranted now and again. Being able to poke fun at the Air Force will endear you to your Joint peers. Be ready, though, to stand up for what the Air Force brings to the fight. Remind folks that for the last 50 years, ground forces have enjoyed the luxury of not having to worry about aerial interdiction from enemy air forces.

You also can't do anything about how the Air Force viewed physical training (PT) in the past. Many of your Joint colleagues perceive the Air Force as being soft, a by-product of the much-

Article Acronyms

LRO – Logistics Readiness Officer
PT – Physical Training

maligned (and probably rightly so) cycle-ergonometry test. Run with them, ruck march with them, and that perception will start to fade. PT is slowly—very slowly—becoming part of our culture. As with doctrine, the Army and Marines are way ahead of us. There's work to be done, but the Air Force is on the right path.

The fourth key to success is to demonstrate your expertise. The quickest way to lose credibility in a Joint environment is to show up unsure of how to do your job. That said, a learning curve is inherent. The challenge is to make that curve shallow and short in duration. Make contact with the LRO you're replacing and find out what kind of things you can do prior to deploying (such as getting a Global Transportation Network account). The quicker an LRO can insert him or herself into the fray and demonstrate competence, the better. Unfortunately, the LRO concept has made this key a difficult one to accomplish. Simply put, the depth of knowledge is different now than under the old 21S/T/G construct. Your Joint peers don't care. They expect you to know what you're doing 100 percent of the time. To them, you are the expert in your field.

The fifth and final key may seem superfluous, but it's not. LROs need to be well-read. In dealing with the officers from the other Services, you will find that they are, as a whole, very well-read and very articulate. This is a result of the importance that the Army and Marine Corps place on their reading lists and internal professional military education programs. It is a rarity to find a senior company grade officer or field grade officer in

those branches that isn't versed on military history or current events. During my year at Quantico, I was blown away at the breadth of reading that my classmates had done. They actually read from their Commandant's reading list, and it pays dividends. Pick up a book by Thomas Barnett or Thomas Friedman, or fall back to a classic—*On War* by Clausewitz.

LROs have proven to be highly sought after individuals in today's Joint environment. We have demonstrated the ability to undertake various tasks and complete them in exemplary fashion. In fact, we've done so well, that we've become victims of our own success. Our 365-day taskings continue to increase while our personnel numbers stay the same or are reduced. Arguably, the LRO is the most visible and tangible link between the Air Force and the current fight against terrorism. Our Joint commitment will not diminish, nor will the expectations placed on us by our Joint colleagues. Take the steps necessary to show them that we deserve their respect and confidence.

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Bass Boats and a Man from Green Bay

Duane Anderson, USAF

Introduction

If you happen to drive onto Tinker Air Force Base on a summer Saturday morning, you will notice a strange phenomenon. On the south side of the flag pole, taking up two parking spots, are a large number of F150s, F250s, Dodge Rams, and Chevy Super Cabs, hitched to boats of all kinds, but mostly bass boats. Since I am a new Air Force civilian employee (having only worked a bare 10 years), I have been told by seasoned employees that there used to be many more boats in the parking lot on Saturdays, and that the bass boat population has especially declined.

Why all the boats? The answer is overtime. Often, overtime becomes more like base pay, simply part of the overall paycheck, subsumed by the family budget to cover groceries, clothes, shoes, and sports fees for the kids. It is also common for maintenance and other employees to work overtime to pay for leisure time amenities.

While this is good for the Bass Pro Shop, it may be another story for the Air Force. Civilian mechanics working overtime results in more expensive repair and throughput. Perhaps more important, overtime may lead to a loss of productivity and an increase in sometimes fatal safety incidents, for both civilians and our men and women in blue.

I have found that there is only a certain point to which an *outsider* can dig into the data concerning overtime—it is culturally sensitive at the depot. In quiet conversations I have learned that overtime is funded from a separate *bucket* than normal man-hours and is budgeted (at Tinker) at approximately

13 percent of total labor costs. This stovepipe creates many problems—one of which is for supervisors. Whether for fear of not using up all the bucket of money (and thus not being funded next year) or simple pressure from above to meet a production schedule, overtime may be scheduled somewhat loosely. "Why," the mechanic may ask himself, "should I bust my tail Monday through Friday, when, if I don't, I can make overtime on the weekend?" This is certainly not the norm, nor do I intend to express that mechanics themselves are trying to somehow *beat the system*. Rather, the system itself is set up to reinforce this sort of behavior.

The System Needs to Change

Unlike some civilians, I worked *on the outside* for a few years as a front desk supervisor and then later as an assistant general manager at a hotel. They were terrible jobs. In those days, managers were tied to pagers the way they are to Blackberries today. I can remember many a night when the pager would go off at 2 in the morning, and I knew I was headed to the hotel to fill out a police report, or to tell a group of drunken hoodlums that it was time to hit the road or pay the price. The general manager, my boss, was a meat-handed high school educated man who had once worked 10-hour shifts loading trucks in the dead of winter in Green Bay, Wisconsin. He was not a man with whom you wanted to argue. He had risen to his position by sheer force of will and hard, hard work. His suits were bought from Goodwill (which he bragged about), and somehow he never learned to tie a tie, so the end of it was always somewhere between his belly button and the middle of his chest.