The Logistics goes to fight as first, but comes back as last – motto of Polish Logistics Units

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ABSTRACT

The following article is a brief version of “case study” about warfare and its common recognition as a game similar to playing chess by various enthusiasts of the history of Art of War. Its main aim is to show a vivid image of an army in action, with an emphasis on the issue that no military force can act without forage and armoury which must be, more or less, regularly provided. The explanation of how much logistic effort costs to hold even a small unit or garrison full-operational should allow soldiers and civilian researchers to look beyond a schematic image of *armi militis*.

*Keywords*: logistics, army, DOS, supplies, GIRO base, Polish Army, Poland, Afghanistan

1. INTRODUCTION

A lot of people in general, and men in particular, like war stories, warfare, and the art of war. They like to watch war movies or documentary programmes, and later have long, heated discussions about strategy, tactics, strategems of commanders with such expression and “level of war experience” that Caesar or Napoleon should be truly embarrassed by. But, if one hear most of it, it is significant that usually the interlocutors make one, fundamental mistake. Due to the fact that various documentary programmes are a mix of pictures, black-and-white or colourful fragmentary movies and maps with tactical signs that virtually relocate on the screen – people are used to treat army in action in the same way. They do not realize that army does not exists in void. It is a living organism and as all life forms it must eat, drink and rest to be
functional. Without those fundamental elements it will simply fall. Far more that one battle was lost without one single shot or skirmish when an army was forced to stop in hostile territory, behind enemy lines and was cut away from any supplies. In those moments one, sometimes hidden issue turns out to be crucial – logistics (van Creveld 2004).

2. DISCUSSION & RESULTS

If we go back in not so distant time when Polish military forces was based on compulsory enlistment, nearly half of men citizens had to go through the “soldier’s path”. if someone would ask them what was the main problem that they remember and could induce them to open mutiny, the answer of most of them will be not discipline, not the lock in garrisons or missing their families, but: “lack of forage”.

Nevertheless, the term “forage” in the eyes of a private is only a good start, but going deeper we will show that it is only the top of the iceberg. For instance: to keep a mechanized company (on KTO “ROSOMAK” – i.e. APC: ‘wheeled’ Armoured Personnel Carriers) operational during the standard military manoeuvres we need to provide approximately no less than 4 tons of ammo, 3 tons of fuel, 0.25 ton of food. Next, the numbers rises, as for a battalion it would be 15 tons of ammo, 12 tons of fuel, 1 ton of food. And a brigade will consume 87 tons of ammo, 71 tons of fuel, 13 tons of food and water (Kurasiński 2014, pp. 87, 96, 107).

All the amounts mentioned above are only an average need per day (the so-called DOS – Day of Supply of a unit; look: Ijioui, Emmerich, Ceyp 2008, pp. 44–45) and what should be highlighted – in the time of peace exercises on the own terrain of a national army when it protects its own people and the environment is friendly.

Using this rationale, the question is: what happens when the army is not defending its own or allied country, but has to station somewhere in a hostile area, hundreds or thousands miles away from the homeland, with very poor road network and where nobody wants to cooperate? The answer is simple: the ‘road of life’, meaning the lines of supply start to be longer and longer. What is more important – they are no safe anymore, because the enemy will do everything in their power to cut them and incapacitate the opponent. In consequence, the army starts to suffer deficiency (see AJP-4(A) 2003, p. 57 - oryg. 3-5).

Furthermore, if we will go level up in difficulty, our army not only stays untouched in enemy’s territory, but runs into direct combat with the enemy or may be under siege. However, it still has to be constantly supplied, otherwise it will be overpowered and could be annihilated.

The best example of that last and ultimate situation according to Polish Forces was the several assaults on FB (Firebase) GIRO in Afghanistan in south-eastern part of Ghazni province (Bowman 2009, p. 70; Jalowiec 2011, p. 88). The Poles “inherited” it from the US Army at the end of 2007. The place was a tiny outpost including merely tree buildings – two of them were still under construction, circled with 2 meters high wall and a helipad next to it. The whole garrison counted circa one hundred soldiers, 16 KTO “ROSOMAK” vehicles and a couple of HMWWV [High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle].

The conditions of accommodation were a bit harsh due to problems with water, but the Polish Army had to stay there only temporary (some of sub-units only for two weeks).
Eventually, they stayed far more longer than that and the first mortar attack took place on 24th December at 16.44 just in the Christmas Eve (Boziński 2012).

Since that time the GIRO base began to be a symbol of permanent siege location where periods of several days of violent fights were alternated with moments of peaceful coexistence with locals. The intensity of that process reached the Xth rotation of the ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) in 2011/2012. The losses grew and the Firebase still had to be regularly supplied.

Nevertheless, during these five years Polish logistics from National Support Element responsible for all Polish garrisons in Afghanistan not only were able to provide supplies, but also to develop infrastructure. Substantial funds were invested – around 1.3 mln Polish zloty (app. 30 000 £) per year only to keep GIRO in battle readiness. The construction of two other buildings was finally completed, the supply of hot water for showers was secured, the entertainment, like a gym, was provided and the garrison crew was extended to three full-operational platoons with very effective technical and medical support. Moreover, the team of instructors from Police Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (NATO Fact sheet 2010) started to operate in the base and the Poles help to establish local school.

3. CONCLUSIONS

As it can be seen, to maintain only little outpost far away from the homeland costs such as strong country as Poland casualties in men, considerable amount of money and five years of hard work. It included: material support, technical support, medical support, transport and infrastructure – to not mention huge diplomacy commitment.

That short “case study” or rather a simple example should, in my opinion as an officer, be enough tip for every enthusiast or fan dedicated to war and warfare. I believe that it would help them to look at the Art of War not only through the documentary programmes and the tactical signs moving on the map, but see it as it is. Maybe then the old saying:

*Logistics is not everything, but without it everything else is nothing.*

will make more sense.
[*the whole article is based on my memoirs, notes and own experience as a quartermaster of the Polish Army with 28-years of duty].

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