

THE ROLE OF PACKAGING IN THE MILITARY

An Essential Element of the DoD Logistics System

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The *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* defines logistics as “the procurement, distribution, maintenance and replacement of materiel and personnel.” The DoD logistics system is much more than this.

In addition to the procurement, distribution, maintenance and replacement of materiel and personnel, the DoD logistics system also includes, but is not limited to, the disciplines of packaging, handling, shipping, storage and transportation. Its primary mission is to provide the soldier, sailor and airman—the ultimate users—with what they need, when they need it and where they need it, and to provide it in a usable configuration and condition.

A Vital Role

The role of packaging is to afford protection against physical damage and environmentally induced deterioration. Moreover, packaging must provide this protection within a context of unknown and varied conditions that exist in the handling, storage and transportation network.

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Packaging design must facilitate these handling, storage and transportation conditions and must provide for a means of inspecting and maintaining the materiel while in storage. Packaging personnel must be responsible for the safety, health and environmental impact of their decisions. They must be responsive to the needs and concerns of society as well as to the needs and concerns of the military personnel they serve.

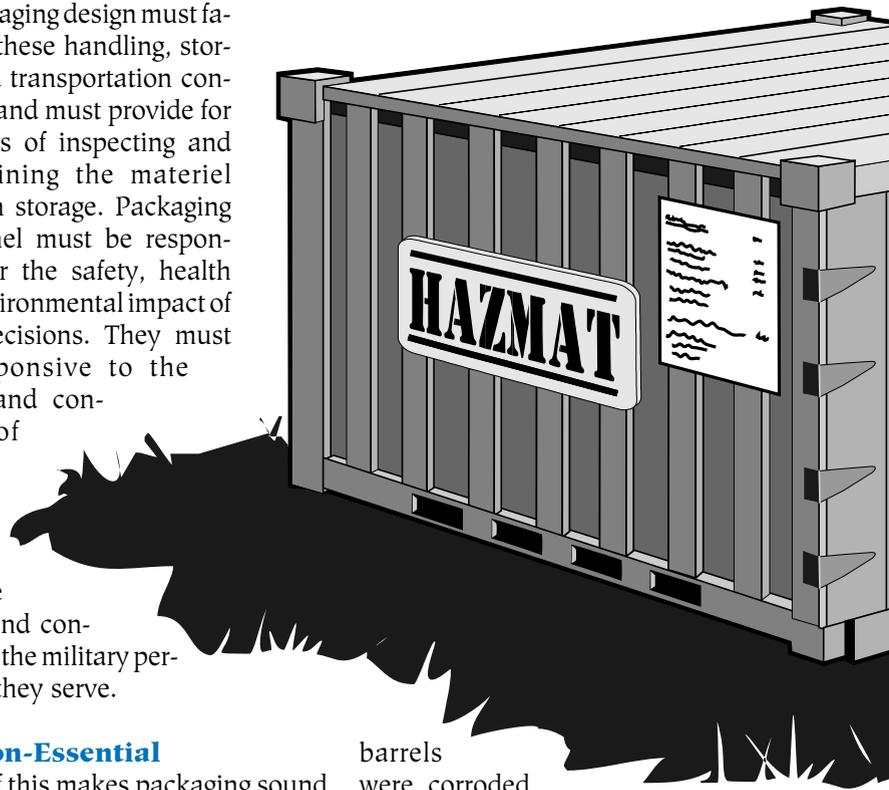
Mission-Essential

All of this makes packaging sound pretty important, doesn't it? Well, the truth is that packaging is a vitally important and essential element in the logistician's periodic table. If one of the other logistical elements fails such as shipping or storage, service members can still function for an extended period of time. However, if the element of packaging fails, they may not be able to function at all.

What would a tank crew members do if they found that their gun tube

barrels were corroded because someone failed to apply the required preservatives? Or what would a service members do if they couldn't get a canteen of drinking water because someone failed to properly preserve or pack the water purification equipment? Many more examples could be cited, but they would all invariably have a negative result.

The bottom line is that even though packaging is vitally important to our



success, most of us take it for granted. We don't think about it until something is received broken or corroded, or just doesn't work. That's when "the proof is in the packaging" becomes reality.

In the past, packaging was considered by many to be merely something that was nice to have—not mission-essential. If a commander had extra money to spend, he would rather buy an additional squad tent or extra field tables than buy a heat sealer or a pallet load of fiberboard boxes. Maybe that was okay 10 years ago, but it's not okay now.



Packaging for the Future

As the terms "downsizing, draw-down, reorganizing and base closure" become part of our everyday lexicon, we are faced with the reality of having to do more with less. This realization is never more evident than in the field of packaging.

The dollar value of materiel returned from Desert Shield/Desert Storm that was ruined because of improper or inadequate packaging protection may run into the hundreds

of millions of dollars. Recent studies showed decisively that depot-level reparable materiel returned for repair was often damaged or degraded as a result of improper or inadequate packaging or processing. Because of packaging's vital role in our everyday operations, military and civilian DoD personnel who process and pack materiel must be sufficiently trained if this negative trend is to be reversed.

Packaging personnel often find themselves in a Catch 22 situation. They may possess the necessary packaging skills, but do not have the packaging materials and equipment required to perform their packaging duties. Conversely, they may have the required packaging materials and equipment but do not possess the necessary packaging skills to perform a packaging function. The most important commodity in DoD's packaging community is its people—it takes people to successfully perform the packaging mission. The most sophisticated equipment in the world is worthless if no one is properly trained to operate it.

With DoD's implementation of the Stock Funding of Depot Level Reparables (SFDLR) Program, packaging in the military has never been more important, and the need for additional, in-depth, formal packaging training at all levels has never been more paramount. Under the SFDLR Program, units will receive a percentage of credit when they turn in serviceable and unserviceable materiel. The amount of credit received will be predicated on the condition of the materiel when it arrives at the servicing depot. When the SFDLR is fully implemented, the careless identification, packaging and transporting of reparable materiel will directly cost units from their stock funds. Some type of formal packaging training, therefore, is imperative for all mili-

Inside DSMC



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tary and civilian personnel who perform a packaging function.

In our continued efforts to do more with less, we must better utilize our resources, including our personnel. As the DoD moves toward a smaller, quicker, more mobile military, and as the role of packaging becomes more critical to its success, the need for trained packaging personnel has never been greater. We must now make the funds available for formal packaging training at all levels. We cannot wait for later. **LATER IS NOW!**