9 Personnel and Logistics

THE PERSONNEL AND LOGISTIC FUNCTIONS AND THEIR PLACE IN THE SINGLE-SERVICE ENVIRONMENT

Personnel and logistics (the P & L area as it has become known) are not in some ways obvious bedfellows. Logistics is in itself a comparatively new term. The top official military committee covering the main elements which comprise logistics – supply, maintenance, repair, storage, movements and accommodation – is still known as the Principal Administrative Officers Committee (PAOs). Two of the major elements of the logistics spectrum group themselves much more naturally with other organisational areas rather than with the personnel field; in-service supply, maintenance and repair have close affinities with the Procurement Executive’s functions; accommodation issues link directly with the Property Service Agency’s responsibilities for the construction and maintenance of all defence buildings. The responsibilities of the Principal Personnel Officers (PPOs) for the Serviceman and Servicewoman have a greater internal coherence, covering as they do all aspects of recruitment, basic training, postings and promotions, and all the supporting services, such as medical, dental, chaplaincy, pay and physical fitness, needed to keep the personnel effective. Admittedly the PPOs look to the PAOs to provide them with the material essentials such as food, clothing, accommodation and equipment. But the policy connections are not great.

At the same time there are two basic common factors. In terms of the end-product of the fighting man the two Board Members in each Service have traditionally been responsible for providing their Naval, General and Air Staffs with the wherewithal to produce effective units. In organisational terms there is perhaps a slightly negative but still valid reason for this P & L area having been a stable centre within the Board structure of each of the Services. In wartime, procurement functions have been removed to other specially created Ministries. As to the Naval, General and Air Staffs, they
have for long been caught up in the wider issues of joint planning and operations and of conflicting claims on resource allocation, all pointing to a centralisation in a defence staff. But the PPOs and the PAOs have been subject only very rarely to external pulls. There have been minor different practices of demarcation over training — though, even there, the essential logic has been to transfer training to the Naval, General and Air Staffs the closer it came to operational, as opposed to basic or trade, training. The one major amputation was the loss of works services to the Ministry of Public Building and Works, later converted to the Property Services Agency.

The organisational pattern which results in each Service having its own PPO and PAO heading a self-contained supporting structure, in turn working its way down through Command Headquarters and subordinate formations to the individual unit, is based essentially on the self-contained nature of each Service. This total Service environment has a long tradition, exemplified by the maxim that an army marches on its stomach. Expanded somewhat it is the line of argument that if a man is to risk his life and fight effectively, he must be confident that his superiors will look after him. Looking after him covers personal, physical and material needs. It includes maintaining his equipment to ensure that it is safe, and repairing it as quickly as possible; it includes medical support. The argument extends to subspecialisations in most areas of his support; it requires different skills to repair a tank and a destroyer; the medical effects of high-speed aviation are very different from exposure to prolonged conditions of heat or cold on land. Bringing these various considerations together, the argument runs that it is not just enough to have these specific specialised skills at unit or formation level in the field. The whole purpose of the Headquarters staff is to put together an effective fighting package. That needs staff officers who understand the environment of the individual Service. If a Chief of Staff is to be held responsible for the efficiency of his Service, he must have at his direct disposal specialists in the whole range of the support fields who command his confidence.

On the other hand, the critic, while accepting the case for subspecialisation, particularly so the closer one moves towards the operational unit, will point to the many common factors. He will also point to the benefits of scale, in particular in the savings of resources by bulk purchase and distribution. He will suggest that centralised purchasing does not necessarily invalidate specialised skills in handling the purchases. He will question whether there is any difference