My Second Assignment in Germany – December 1976 - June 1980

In August 1976 and 4 years after the previous Army Major promotion list was released a new promotion list for Major was published. During that 4 years there was a period of 36 months when there were no promotions made to Major. I missed the cutoff for the previous list by 6 days.

When I was notified of my selection for promotion I was the project manager for development of a new computer system called Medical Stock Control (MEDSTOC) that would replace five obsolete computer systems and would be become the base line system to replace all automated and manual stock Medical control systems in Health Services Command (CONUS, Alaska, Hawaii and the Canal Zone). The project was in the final testing phase before roll out to the installations running with the obsolete systems. As often happens in the military, plans change.

With the release of the promotion list, there also came a call notifying Health Services Command that I was to be reassigned to Germany by the first of November to fill a critical assignment. After a series of International phone calls, a lot of hand wringing and a hastily rewritten system implementation plan, there was a three general officer conference call where it was decided that the transfer would be delayed to early December so that I could complete the roll out of the MEDSTOC system to the automated sites by Thanksgiving and turn the project over to a colleague to manage the balance of the implementation.

What was the critical assignment? To lead the training and conversion of USAMMCE Inventory and warehousing systems to the Army's newest Integrated supply management system, Standard Army Intermediate Level Supply (SAILS), which for the first time would be used for Medical Supply (Class VIII Supply). I had been involved in SAILS development, testing and training for over three years on a full-time and part-time basis. The Chief of Logistics at USAREUR Medical Command wanted a successful implementation of the system, he want a person he knew personally, he wanted a person who had demonstrated a comprehensive knowledge of the system, a person who had demonstrated the ability to lead an implementation and foremost a person who could remain in a key system operations management role at USAMMCE. It was an assignment I neither wanted or desired.

The MEDSTOC Project team completed the first phase of the MEDSTOC training and implementation by the 15th of November (the project was delivered early and under budget). I briefed in my replacement, turned over the project documentation and completed exit briefings with the HSC, DCSLOG and Command Group in time to depart Fort Sam Houston, Texas the day before Thanksgiving. I joined my wife and three children in Arkansas for two weeks of leave before going to Germany. The family would stay in Arkansas until housing could be arranged in Germany.

I arrived at USMMCE in Pirmasens Germany about the 10th of December 1976 or one month less than 24 years after my first arrival in Pirmasens, Germany as an Army officer's dependent. After completing in-processing, I arrived at my soon to be office. Among the people present was a German National civilian employee, Rudy Kraege. When I walked in the room he got from his desk and hurriedly approached me. As he stuck his hand out in greeting, he said, "you look very much like your father who I worked for when I first came to work at Rhine Medical Depot and now I will work you before I retire."

Implementation Training for SAILS was to begin on January 4. So for the remainder of December I was focused meeting and assessing personnel, evaluating the organization and assuring that the planned data conversion schemes were correct. I also had to introduce a

reorganization of the Inventory Management Division so that people were appropriately grouped to work with a modern Integrated Supply Management system. (The system being replaced was essentially the EAM based system my father had implemented when he was assigned to the Rhine Medical Depot in 1951.)

I also needed to coordinate with the supporting signal communication center to assure they were prepared to handle the volume of data traffic that would result from implementation of SAILS. Before my arrival in Germany, I had been assured by the Army SAILS project team that new equipment would be in place prior to implementation, but I wanted to verify that myself.

About a week after my arrival, I stopped by the local Signal Communications center. On my arrival, I could see no Magnetic Tape drive units in the operations area. When I met the Warrant Officer in charge of the Center I quite bluntly inquired, "Where are your Mag Tape units?" The WO replied, "We don't have any." I said,"We are bringing up a new army standard system next month and we will be sending and receiving about 20,000 card images daily, 5-6 days per week. Will you be able to handle that additional volume? I was assured that new equipment was being delivered and installed as stipulated in the DA Implementation plan."

The WO was shocked to hear about an increase in workload that he knew nothing about. Then he asked, "What unit are you with, Sir." My reply, "USAMMCE." He remarked. "Didn't your unit move up here from Kaiserslautern in the last year." I added, "Yes, and the DA plan was changed to reflect the location change." After a pause he said "I will have to check but I suspect that your tape drives are being installed in Kaiserslautern. What number can I reach you at, Sir."

I left the Communications Center more than disturbed but willing to let the Signal people check out where the problem was.

The next day I got a call from the Communication Center Chief. Indeed the tape drives had been installed in Kaiserslautern. He had also called the Signal Command in Worms and was told that Signal Command had not received any change in location information. As the Tape Drives were already in use in Kaiserslautern they would not be transferred to Pirmasens. The Signal Command was reviewing their inventory of card punch equipment and would be transferring newer, higher speed units to Pirmasens to meet the need.

Newer card punch equipment was transferred in to the Pirmasens Communications Center and the Communications channel serving Pirmasens was also upgraded to support the needs of USAMMCE with SAILS.

Lack of good staff coordination had almost caused a serious problem. This was only the first problem.

Implementation Training and Installation of SAILS for USAMMCE

The training of USAMMCE personnel began as planned in January.

Prior to this time, USAREUR Medical Command Computer Center had been having recurring problems meeting the daily processing needs of USAMMCE and on Wednesday of the first week of training the Computer Center Chief of Operations approached me and asked to speak in confidence. We went into an adjacent room where he told me that they were having problems and not yet run the USAMMCE cycle from yesterday and would I agree to consolidating the input for two days to run the cycle scheduled for today.

My question to him was why were your unable to run yesterday's cycle as scheduled. His reply was that his direction was that certain local systems jobs were the highest priority and they ran longer than planned. My response to this statement was , "This will be the last time this every will happened. SAILS is an Army Standard BASOP System and has the highest priority of any job in this data center. In fact the new computer in the data center is only here because of SAILS. You need to reexamine your schedule and make certain the time blocks as laid out in the Implementation Plan are followed. You can consolidate the two cycles but starting tomorrow the required USAMMCE processing will have to be your highest Priority." The young Captain Operations Chief left the room quickly and quietly.

About five minutes later, the LTC in Charge of the Data Center stormed into the room ranting that no Major was going to tell him how his Data Center was do its job. I calmly turned away and stepped to the large wall mounted chalkboard in the room. I then began drawing a time schedule starting on Sunday and ending on Saturday. I then began drawing and labeling boxes on the various days with hours required. Beginning on Sunday afternoon and continuing through Thursday, I put a box labeled "SAILS Daily". On Friday afternoon a box labeled "Begin SAILS Weekly" that continued over to Saturday Morning. Joining the box on Saturday morning and into Saturday Afternoon was a box labeled SAILS Bi-weekly, Monthly and Quarterly".

When I finished I turned to the LTC and said, "Sir, this is the new Scheduling plan. Any time left over will be available for local systems. Your computer is for BASOPS and SAILS is your only BASOPS system and SAILS is your new priority. If you do not like this schedule then you can take it up with my Commander and the Medical Command DCSLOG. ... And the conversion processes will begin as is set forth in the schedule this weekend that you have been furnished."

The LTC was sputtering and uncertain what to do about this assertive Major telling him what he was going to do. About this time someone called that I had a phone call from my Commander.

I left the room to take the call from my commander. He was upset that I had agreed to the cycle consolidation stating that only the MEDCOM DCSLOG made that decision. My response was that I felt it was the proper decision and I that was brought here to make decisions and get SAILS running. He said that I should immediately go to Heidelberg and talk to the DCSLOG.

I did go to Heidelberg and MEDCOM HQ where I went directly to the office of the DCSLOG. The Colonel who was the DCSLOG stated my decision to consolidate cycle was a decision he made. I replied that it was the right decision, that he brought me here against my will to make decisions and get SAILS running which is what I was doing and I would repeat if was the right action at the time. He smiled and said next time call me as soon as you make the decision. I agreed.

Then the DCSLOG said my speech at the Data Center about SAILS and BASOPS having Priority for the Computer had stirred the pot in the HQ. He had just come from speaking with the Commanding General after the LTC at the Data Center called complaining about an upstart

Major dictating a future operations schedule. Apparently the General had assuaged his hurt feeling and called the DSCLOG to come talk. When the DCSLOG reminded the General about the telephone conference in September concerning the Officer that the DCSLOG felt was critical, the General responded and that Major is here doing the job. When the DCSLOG nodded assent. The General said something like,"Good, the LTC needed to be cut down to size. Tell the Major to try and be more diplomatic."

So ended the first of my counseling sessions with the DCSLOG.

INVENTORY MANGEMENT IMPROVEMENT

Once SAILS was up and running at USAMMCE, the rest of my assignment was comparative easy. The first four to six months after SAILS was implemented I was focused on training the Inventory Managers on how to utilize the system to the maximum. This included hours of training in general management theory and even more hours in the details of the SAILS Forecasting and Levels Computation Logic. It also entailed convincing people that it is possible to do their job by setting decision parameters for the computer so that only real exceptions required a hands on evaluation and decision. When we ran the end of June 1977 Quarterly Inventory Stratification reports, the inventory mangers had become believers as they saw that we were meeting or exceeding every management goal for customer service while we reducing the operating inventory about 40% from the pre-SAILS inventory level. Also, they were finding that they could focus their efforts on making decisions about items that with the highest dollar turnover value or highest volume turnover items. They also found they were experiencing a much smaller inventory loss due to expiration of item dating.

By the end of the Fiscal Year in September, the inventory had decreased another 10% while sales were up about 12% for the fiscal year. These trends continued for the rest of my assignment.

SAVE MONEY, SHIP EVERYTHING MEDICAL TO EUROPE BY AIR

In Late 1978, USAMMCE was notified that an agreement had been reached by the Army, Air Force and Defense Logistics Agency that routine movement of medical materiel from CONUS to Europe would be by Airlift. This change would apply to all DLA stocked medical category items and all medical category items procured by DLA direct from commercial sources not already being sent to Europe via US Postal Service. (DLA already had commercially sourced medical category items where the individual item or unit qualified for USPS parcel service sent by US Postal Service.) A PO addressed mail was already being shipped by air from CONUS to Europe.

This policy change occurred because the Logistics staff of the Army Surgeon General learned that the Air Force had at least one C5A flight each day from Dover AFB, Delaware to Ramstein AFB, Germany. They learned that these flights were the minimum number required to keep a sufficient number of certified rated pilots for the C5 fleet. The flights were being made with with less than 10% of the cargo capacity utilized. Adding all medical category materiel would only increase the utilization to about 22-25 percent. Changing Medical category supply from sea to air would reduce the transit time from an average of 20 days to three days by eliminating the port accumulation time and the port to final destination from an average of 4 days to 1 day.

The policy change was to be effective 2 January 1978. In Late December, USAMMCE modified all its system order and ship time parameters to reflect the change in transportation mode so that orders created the last week of December1977 would reflect the change in transportation mode.

The first air shipments arrived at USAMMCE about the January 6, 1978. Unfortunately, the Aerial

Port Freight Terminal at Ramstein did not take note of the marking for this cargo that stated the cargo had to be protected from freezing. They left the cargo outside overnight after unloading. When the cargo arrived at USAMMCE about 80% of the cargo had to destroyed because it was frozen. When USAMMCE notified the Aeriel Port Freight Terminal about the loss and the need for Medical Category cargo to be protected from freezing there was a small panic. As more medical category cargo was arriving within hours, they had to free up inside protected storage space immediately. The Air Force rose to the challenge and did find protected storage space to hold cargo overnight and no further losses occurred.

What was the real impact of the change from Surface (Sea) to Air Transportation for Medical Category Materiel? In the 31 March Quarterly Inventory reports the average Order and ship time had decreased from 35 days to about 9 days. In 1978 the reduction was about $2.85 million without any increase in cost for the Department of Defense.

The rest of my assignment was pretty much of a cake walk. I returned to the United States in June 1980. I would return to USAMMCE and Germany two more time for short business trips before I retired from the Army in June 1986.