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Book Review: War of Supply

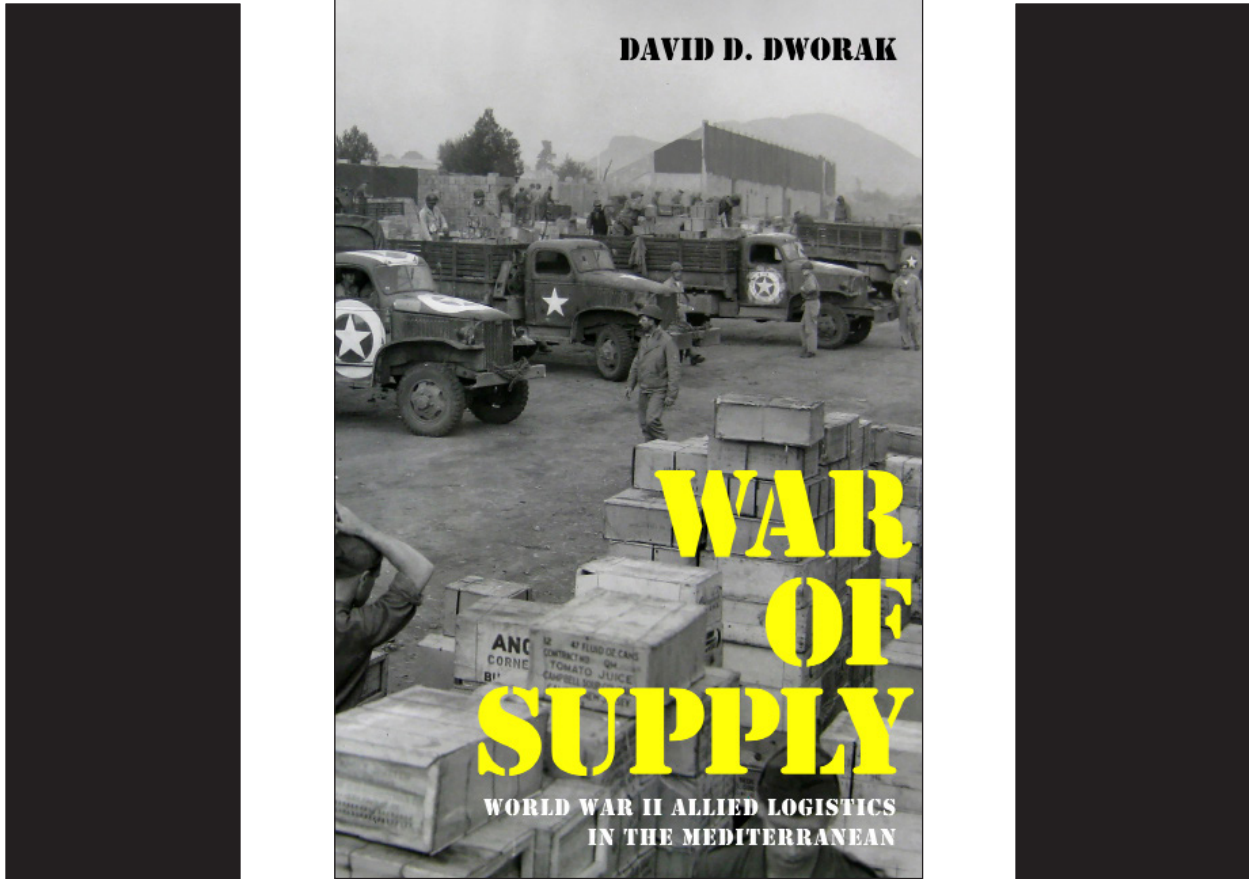
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Reviewed by Dr. John A. Bonin, consultant, US Army War College

Exceptionally well-researched, *War of Supply* discusses an atypical topic—theater logistics. Douglas Porch in *The Path to Victory* (Macmillan, 2005) claims the Mediterranean served as the pivotal theater that enabled Allied success in France by 1944. While there are thousands of books about World War II, there are relatively few on the war in the Mediterranean and fewer on its logistics. The author, David D. Dworak, would agree. Dworak served on active duty for 30 years as a professional logistician and now serves as the provost of the US Army War College. This work is based on his dissertation from Syracuse University.

Dworak follows a chronological narrative covering Operation Torch in North Africa; Operations Husky, Avalanche, and Shingle in Sicily and Italy; and Operation Dragoon in southern France. The relatively unknown hero of this book is the then Major General Thomas B. Larkin, the principal logistician in this theater for most of the war. Dworak concludes that “Larkin and the Mediterranean had figured out an effective theater-sustainment system” (210).

The logistical plans for the initial three Torch landings “were neither well synchronized nor entirely supportable” (14). Due to a shortage of shipping space, the then Lieutenant General Dwight D. Eisenhower, as the US Army theater commander, endorsed a decision to maintain the combat forces but to reduce the support units by half of their trucks. While the three task forces succeeded in putting Allied forces ashore and defeating the Vichy French, they lacked sufficient support units and especially trucks to maintain

a drive into Tunisia. Eisenhower stated that “the pause did allow an opportunity for the service units to build up the theater into an effective base of operations” (31).

Eisenhower provided the logisticians with challenges in early 1943. In accordance with Army doctrine based on the experience of the American Expeditionary Force, the Atlantic, Mediterranean, and later Eastern Base Sections were established to provide support to each separated task force. In addition, Eisenhower appointed Brigadier General (later Major General) Everett Strait Hughes to be commander of the overall US communications zone and as his deputy to relieve Eisenhower of administrative duties. In February 1943, Larkin was appointed commander of the North African Theater of Operations, US Army Service of Supply under Hughes’s supervision. Immediate challenges for this structure proved to be shortages of support troops—not only for the growing Army ground forces, but also for the Army Air Forces—and equipping some 300,000 French forces. For the invasion of Sicily, Larkin established the Island Base Section in September 1943, and to support the subsequent operations in Italy, he established the Peninsular Base Section two months later.

Intended to be conducted simultaneously with Operation Overlord, the invasion of southern France, Operation Dragoon, occurred in August 1944. For Larkin and his Service of Supply, this difficult undertaking required him to split his focus between supporting Seventh United States Army’s landing and the continued operations by Fifth Army in Italy. To support this operation, a Northern Base Section was established in December 1943 in Corsica. By September 1944, the Delta Base Section moved into Marseille while the Continental Advance Section supported General Jacob L. Devers’s 6th Army Group (Seventh US Army with 1st French Army) drive up the Rhône River valley. On November 6, 1944, after the link of 6th Army Group with General Omar Bradley’s 12th Army Group, Larkin’s Service of Supply in France became the southern line of communications subordinated to Lieutenant General John Clifford Hodges Lee’s European Service of Supply. Dworak contends that the shared experience from Larkin’s staff improved sustainment within Eisenhower’s European theater for the rest of the war.

Dworak asserts that “the Mediterranean allowed the Allies, especially the US military, the opportunity to develop and exercise new support concepts, organizations and equipment” (212). An important outcome of the Mediterranean campaigns was the increased appreciation by Allied planners and commanders of the numerous other types of units needed to support a combat division. The term of art used for this need was the divisional slice that proved very accurate for planning any large-scale operation. It was comprised of three parts—the combat division, the corps and Army-level combat and support forces, and the theater-level support forces. For the US Army in the Mediterranean, this divisional slice was 43,400 personnel per combat division, of which 18,700 were theater-level support (213–14).

War of Supply demonstrates the vital importance of sustainment to military campaigns. With the Russia-Ukraine War providing new evidence of this significance and the US military’s return to emphasizing large-scale combat operations, insights from the Allied campaigns in the Mediterranean still hold value. Military strategists and other defense professionals should obtain and read this book.

Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2022 • 282 pages • \$40.00

Keywords: World War II, Service of Supply, Mediterranean, Vichy French, Dwight D. Eisenhower