

Defense Distribution Center

The British Are Coming . . . Ok, They're Already Here.

By Polly Charbonneau

If you've seen someone in a khaki uniform that doesn't match any American military garb, it may be LtCol William Tonkins, Royal Logistic Corps, British Army. LtCol Tonkins is stationed at the Defense Distribution Center (DDC) until December 2002.

He is a member of the Royal Logistic Corps (RLC), which is equivalent to an amalgam of the U.S. Quartermaster Corp and Transportation Corp, plus a few others, Tonkins said. "The RLC, known as the Really Large Corps, is about 20,000 strong, but smaller than the U.S. Quartermaster and Transportation Corps, which are over 200,000 strong."

Tonkins' primary responsibility at DDC is improving stock positioning. Correct stock positioning is a major initiative for the DDC and all DDC distribution centers. Tonkins and his team determine where various stock is located now, where will it be used most often, and what is the most efficient way to get the stock from the manufacturer to the user, among other questions.

DDC's ultimate goal for stock positioning is to improve overall readiness. Correct stock positioning will streamline distribution and reduce customer wait time. Additionally, correct stock positioning will reduce stress on the Strategic Airlift during contingency operations and reduce transportation costs.

Tonkins' background in supply made him a good match for the American stock positioning work. "I understand the Inventory Control Point business, which directs much of the repositioning effort," Tonkins said. "I also came to the States having commanded a [Distribution] Center in UK for five years. During that time I implemented the closure of three of our Centers, including my own."

Closing the UK distribution centers, "meant relocating the stocks and functions throughout the remaining distribution network in UK," Tonkins said. "I also transferred 18 of our smaller depots from the Army to the Defence Logistic Organization (DLO) so I have a good understanding of all the issues involved."

The exchange officer program is fully reciprocal. "A US officer fills an appointment for me in UK," Tonkins said. "Currently more than 40 members of each army are in the program in almost every area of military life. Such interchange plays an important part in developing close understanding of each other's doctrine, organization and procedures. It is refreshing to learn that we share the same challenges."

The British government is also implementing their own version of A-76, called competing for quality. "I am a great fan of competition," Tonkins said. "It's something that we have learned from America. So much of our industry was Nationalized (operated by the British government, vice private industry) and it only got better, and it got a lot, lot better, once competition was introduced.

"The competition has to be fair, though, and people have to be allowed to be innovative," Tonkins added. "One thing is for sure, no one is interested in taking over the business if you are efficient. They [private industry] have to be able to make a profit!

"Fortunately our Distribution Centers in UK have been given [the opportunity to] make the efficiencies before industry does. It's painful though," Tonkins said. "The 18 minor depots that I handed over from the Army were all effectively closed with the exception of retaining a hub and spoke distribution capability. I helped to close three major depots before I left and since then they have closed a further major depot and have the equivalent of another major depot being closed this year."

Tonkins said they are reducing the storage volume by 40% in the next three years, most of which will be outsourced to direct supply from contractors. "By doing this they will have a hard core of business left," Tonkins said, "that industry is probably not interested in. This will be storing strategic and warlike stores only, which can be defended as inherently governmental business for government employees."

Additionally, Tonkins said, "DDC has a partnership with the British Defence Storage and Distribution Agency and there are benchmarking exchange visits to share practices and procedures. Plus members from the DLO in the UK visit occasionally to find out what key developments are taking place so that we can learn the best practices from you."

Tonkins is especially interested in the automation in use throughout the DDC. "I believe that we can learn a lot from your automation and data capture," Tonkins said. "We do not nearly have half so much information available. We are still using stubby pencils in a lot of cases!"

The British have something comparable to the DDC and the DDSP EDC called the Defence Storage and Distribution Agency. They have three Distribution Centers similar to DDSP and the EDC, but, Tonkins said, "Nothing quite so grand though."

The British government is also downsizing their military like the US has. Tonkins said, "The monumental upheavals in recent years (disintegration of the Soviet Union and democracy coming to the Warsaw Pact nations) has reduced dramatically the prospect of a major external threat to Western Europe. The 'Cold War' has been over for more than five years and Britain is now working with its former enemies towards a more peaceful and secure Europe.

"However," Tonkins added, "not all the consequences of the end of superpower rivalry have been positive. The low risk of global war has been replaced by a greater risk of smaller scale conflict and suffering. Britain is, therefore, facing this situation with a credible and effective defence policy that reflects today's fast moving world.

"We operate jointly," Tonkins said, "packing a bigger punch and making sure every pound (dollar) counts for defence. Recent



LtCol William Tonkins, RLC

developments include a Tri Service helicopter command; a joint Navy and Royal Air Force fixed wing harrier force, and a joint Army and Royal Air Force air defence. These powerful integrated forces are ready to react rapidly around the world. They are now prepared to go to the crises.

“Sometimes force will only contain a danger,” Tonkins said, “and then we often act in concert with our allies [like] the US and on behalf of wider community. This is to defend vulnerable civilians from repression and helping former war zones get back to normal life, maintaining peace and preventing dictators from massacring their own people.

“We are patrolling the no fly zones in Iraq with the USA. There are many other roles such as disaster relief and humanitarian aid helping those less fortunate than we are,” Tonkins

said. “Suffice it to say that Britain, despite the downsizing, is ready to meet challenges of modern world and act as a force for good by strengthening international peace and security.”

Tonkins asked for this assignment to be able to see more of his sister, who is a naturalized American. Though the hardest part about living in America, he says, is not seeing as much of the rest of his family as he would like to.

Prior to this assignment, Tonkins had visited the US many times, mainly Florida. He lives in Mechanicsburg now and enjoys central Pennsylvania and living in America generally. He says, “I like the fact that everyone is up front and takes you for what you are and not who you are. There are tremendous opportunities and just about everything is within everyone’s reach. Not a lot is exclusive.”

DDJC Canadian Exchange Officer

By Doug Imberi, DDJC Public Affairs

When Navy LT Ken Slade, Defense Distribution Depot San Joaquin, California’s (DDJC) foreign exchange officer from the Canadian Forces, was commissioned in 1986, he never thought he would be assigned to a depot in northern California. “I thought I’d be out to sea most of the time,” recalled Slade.

However, when the opportunity came up for an assignment with the U.S. Forces, he volunteered and was selected by a board of officers. He was looking forward to working for a large organization like the Department of Defense, living in a different culture and lots of military.

“I was expecting something like San Diego or Norfolk where there is lots of Navy,” said Slade. He was surprised to find out that he was one of only four military personnel at DDJC.

Slade is part of the Personnel Exchange Program between the DLA and the Canadian Forces. The three-year program provides a system of mutual exchange of service personnel between the two countries.

It is designed to establish an active relationship between U.S. Forces and Canadian Forces by which the experience, professional knowledge and doctrine of the services are shared.

With a background in finance and supply, it was doubtful he would be stationed at a distribution center. But, he said, that after coming off a ship “you are multi-talented and all-purpose.”

After serving as the Operations Officer for the Depot Support Office, he joined a team of distribution facilities specialists in the Commander’s office. This team performs distribution management analysis to determine the efficiency of logistics operations at the depot.

Each morning Slade presents a detailed analysis of depot production statistics from the previous day. He also projects the current day’s expected workload, operational capacity, and any workload carried over from the previous day.

He does this by logging onto the Distribution Standard System (DSS) first thing in the morning and looking at up-to-the-minute reports. He also looks at reports he developed himself, like the one that tells about the average daily pick tickets dropped.

Looking at historical reports and spreadsheets, and taking into consideration any special circumstances, Slade can predict the daily workload. From the information he provides, division

chiefs determine if they need to move personnel around or resort to overtime to meet the daily workload.

Slade is capable of accurately predicting the number of Material Release Orders dropped in four daily cycles by an average of 1-5 percent.

His daily analysis also provides the commander with an account of how goals were met the previous day or how the depot is performing during the month.

“Ken’s contribution cannot be overemphasized,” pointed out DDJC Deputy Commander David Ennis. “He has created operational tools, using DSS data, that gives all the players at DDJC a look into what to expect for the day’s workload while analyzing process areas for our attention and correction. He is invaluable.”

According to Slade, this assignment provides excellent experience and training. “I’m working in an atmosphere that promotes innovation with lots of opportunities for initiative. You are not stymied by traditional practices.”

Among the many benefits of the DDJC assignment, Slade points out how he has gained comprehensive knowledge of a large modern supply operation and increased his understanding of transportation systems.

Additionally, he has gained insight into state-of-the-art systems, equipment, techniques and concepts in large-scale distribution operations. “I have a much better understanding and appreciation for the process involved in getting the widget to the customer,” said Slade.

He is looking forward to taking this valuable experience to his next assignment, which will probably be in Ottawa, at Canada’s National Defence Headquarters’ Depot Operations Section.

“I cannot say enough about how well I have been treated throughout this posting at DDJC,” added Slade. “The opportunity to work with the Department of Defense and live in the U.S. has been tremendous.”



DDJC Canadian Exchange Officer, LT(N) Ken Slade.