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Review of *Logistics: the Key to Victory* by Jeremy Black

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**Jeremy Black, *Logistics: The Key to Victory*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2021. xxxiv + 216pp. ISBN 978-1399006026 (hardcover). Price £25.**

The subject of logistics in military history has grown significantly during the last 25 years with up to four new book titles now appearing each year. However, missing until now is an updated meta narrative to the classic Martin van Creveld's 1977 *Supplying War*. In this new work, Jeremy Black has done an incredible job synthesising and summarising 2000 years of military logistics history in just 200 pages. Black is motivated by four omissions in previous studies including: pre 1600 logistics, non-European warfare, non-offensive phases of warfare (defensive, insurgencies), and omissions of naval and air power logistics. Further, he is concerned about a progressive and deterministic approach that historians sometimes take whereby technology has solved logistics issues, when in fact technology can have significant adverse and unexpected side effects. He is also to be commended for taking a much broader geographic view to military history to include non-European militaries such as in China and Asia. Temporarily, he also divides the first third of the book into chapters not based on the traditional European breakdown of the time periods. Instead, he chooses events in the Near and Far East as dividing points such as the end of Ming China and the fall of Safavid Persia. The rest of the book follows a more European temporal breakdown with chapters describing the periods of the French Revolution, the age of steam, the First World War, the inter war, the Second World War, and the Cold War. He also has chapters on the future and conclusions.

Black seamlessly discusses logistics at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels with subjects ranging from war finance and production to transportation to a theatre of war to baking bread in camp. He argues (p. 182) that logistics needs to be thought of in terms of

what really matters is the fitness of means of supplying and conveying an armed force with reference to its particular environment and situation. In many settings, complexity and technological sophistication are not advantages, either because of local ecology, the carrying capacity of the society in question, or because of the very great material costs that they impose with diminishing operational returns.

Therefore, he argues, the context is one of specifics and not necessarily linear continuity such as the basic logistics used by insurgents in the recent Afghan wars. Further, logistics now encompasses much more than food, water, and ammunition to include medical, information, and maintenance for increasingly complex weapons, and the ability to replace and resupply them. Of particular interest are his observations

that up until the end of the Napoleonic period, warfare was largely constrained by state finance, animal power, and the need to go on the offensive because of logistical constraints in supplying stationary armies. Practical application of logistics was widely uneven between nations and even the great Napoleon had three campaigns that failed because of logistics.(p 96) As widely acknowledged by many military historians, Black discusses how the industrial revolution brought significant changes to the size of militaries, weapons development, speed of movement, range, and capacity, all of which generated new problems that required time for problem solving to overcome.(p 115) These problems manifest in the industrialised warfare of the First and Second World War in which manufacturing capacity and alliances played key roles.

Black's use of sources is quite broad and is primarily a review of the secondary English literature except for the two chapters that fall within his temporal specialty of the 1700s. Here he cites primary source documents to support his points. While Black references titles right up to 2021, he does however miss a few 20th century war sources including Martin van Creveld's *Hitler's Strategy 1940-1941: the Balkan Clue* (1973), Bob Carruther's *Panzer Rollen* (2019), Kenneth L Privatsky's *Logistics in the Falklands War* (2105), and van Creveld's expanded First World War section in the second edition of *Supplying War* (2004). The other weakness is that Black has a tendency of introducing more recent 20th century examples into previous centuries' discussions to show continuity or contrasts. This technique requires the reader to pay close attention to prevent getting lost in thinking about the more recent conflict. It appears Black is sometimes caught between wanting to discuss themes or subjects versus a temporal approach. These minor caveats aside, Black has done a great service to the military history field providing what will surely become a new classic on military logistics.

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**Matthew Hefferan, *The Household Knights of Edward III: Warfare, Politics and Kingship in Fourteenth-Century England*. Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2021. xiv + 336 pp. 2 maps. ISBN: 978-1-783275649 (hardback). Price £75.**

The abundance of surviving records from fourteenth-century England continues to fuel a corresponding wealth of publications on England's military history during that period.