



Feeding Victory: Innovative Military Logistics from Lake George to Khe Sanh by Jobie Turner.

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Although scholarly attention to military logistics is more common than it once was, we should celebrate a careful new study like Jobie Turner's *Feeding Victory*. It is a welcome addition to the relatively small collection of books that explore how logistics shapes the course and outcomes of military conflicts.

Turner is a recently retired US Air Force pilot with a tactical airlift background.¹ His book addresses several interrelated questions about how transportation technology has been decisive (or not) on battlefields over the last few centuries. Specifically,

[has] the relationship among technology, logistics, and warfare (i.e., feeding the “great consumer”) changed? Did technological innovations from the industrial age to the information age—the railroad, the machine gun, artillery, the airplane, the nuclear weapon, the computer, and many more—alter the equation? And if so, what was the impact on geopolitical dynamics through the aegis of combat power? (2)

Turner's thesis is that the influence of logistics on a given military campaign depends on the (then) dominant mode of transportation—land, water, or air—and how effectively belligerents used it to supply their forces. His most striking claim is that the “Modern Era [1945–present]”² represents a clean break from the previous three centuries” in the sense that, in this age, “ideas trump the material forces of war” (271).

The book comprises an introductory chapter, five chapter-length case studies, and a concluding chapter. The earliest case is Lake George (1755–59), the latest Khe Sanh (1967–68). In between are the Western Front (1917), Guadalcanal (1942–43), and Stalingrad (1942–43). Each study runs about fifty heavily footnoted pages. They are presented in a traditional narrative style, with key facts and information presented chronologically rather than thematically. This makes it easy to read the cases as discrete units, but harder to grasp their place in the book's central argument (which does not appear in detail until the final chapter). Turner does include a section or two intended to link each case to the book's main thread, but these are short and do not always follow naturally from the historical narrative.

The analysis of the Lake George campaign stands out as particularly useful since it has rarely been studied elsewhere, let alone from a logistical perspective. The remaining studies concentrate on previously examined campaigns, but Turner's thoughtful and engaging presentation makes them well worth reading. In particular, the clarification of the interplay of various modes of transportation and their shifting significance over time makes for compelling military history.

1. When his book appeared early in 2020, he was still the Commanding Officer of the 314th Operations Group, a unit that flies C-130 cargo aircraft. *Feeding Victory* is a revision of Turner's Air University doctoral dissertation.

2. See p. 3, table 1.1.

The book is weakest when it tries to interweave the case studies while defending an overarching thesis. The cases were not selected to rule out alternative explanations, but because “the logistics of the belligerents were at their limit,” and so “give a good accounting of the logistics for each era and the inflection points between success and failure” (3). These are fine goals in and of themselves, but they seldom yield reliable generalizations. The author offers some tantalizing numbers throughout, especially in his concluding chapter and appendix, but never fully develops his core argument. This is a common problem: other scholars have made persuasive general claims about the influence of logistics on military campaigns, but without the specificity that social scientists crave.³ As histories per se, each is valuable and interesting, but none reliably establishes when and whether logistics is likely to be decisive on the battlefield.

Nevertheless, *Feeding Victory* will appeal to anyone interested in how logistics has influenced past campaigns as well as those with a professional interest in one of its case studies.

3. E.g., Thomas M. Kane, *Military Logistics and Strategic Performance* (NY: Routledge, 2001); Julian Thompson, *The Lifeblood of War: Logistics in Armed Conflict* (Lincoln: U Nebraska Pr, 1991); James A. Huston, *The Sinews of War: Army Logistics 1775–1953* (Collingdale, PA: Diane Publ, 1966).

For more on the current state of theory in the study of military logistics, see my “Logistics and Military Power: Tooth, Tail, and Territory in Conventional Military Conflict” (diss., George Washington Univ. 2020) 29–33.