

Klingenberg: Logistics key to expeditionary operations, warfighting

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Mitchell Klingenberg, Ph.D., talks about logistics as key to expeditionary operations and warfighting in award-winning essay.

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Events unfolding in the Russia-Ukraine War demonstrate that logistics and sustainment are not small tactical considerations but operations that significantly impact strategic objectives. A USAWC research fellow, in his award-winning article, examined logistics and supply in a historic campaign, and why these aspects of military operations matter today.

Mitchell Klingenberg, Ph.D., received the 2021 Early-Career Paper Prize from the Editorial Board of the *International Journal of Military History and Historiography* and Brill Publishing for his article, “*In the Character of their Material, Animate and Inanimate, the Troops of the United States Excelled’: American Theatre-Level Logistics and Supply in the China Relief Expedition of 1900.*” Klingenberg reviewed the U.S. experience in supplying, on short notice, two regiments of infantry, a cavalry troop and artillery battery -- in addition to U.S. Marines, sailors, and humanitarian aid -- to save missionaries and diplomats under attack by Boxer insurgents in

China in 1900.

The article developed from a case study that Klingenberg authored for the Department of Military Strategy, Planning, and Operations. “I hope the article and case study will help USAWC students think through the projection of military power in time and space.

“Although there are more contemporary case studies in the curriculum, I was drawn to this expedition because it is at once old and modern,” he said.

Logistics are critical to enabling the projection of military power, said Klingenberg. How Americans got forces on the ground in China; how they operated national and international supply networks; how they moved animals, fodder, subsistence, and war materiel to soldiers in the field – all mattered for a successful campaign.

“There is a temptation to think that because a fight or a war is old, it was easy or simpler in the execution. But, when adding up the details—transporting equipment across the ocean on steam-powered ships, the food, the medevac, the triage—to get to the center of this military problem, it is not easy,” he said. “Proper attention to these details enables military forces to prevail in armed conflict. It is the business of everyone, working in concert, to make sure that the little things that appear easy in war are feasible.”

The China Relief Expedition was significant. Not only did it represent the projection of U.S. military power on a hemispheric scale, but the experience of operating in a multi-national coalition was new for American servicemembers.

At the turn of the 20th century, the U.S. military had moved beyond its Civil War experience, learned lessons in the Spanish-American War, and was looking to an uncertain future. The expedition forced the U.S. military, operating far away from North America, and in China and the Philippine Islands simultaneously, to work through counterinsurgency, combined arms operations, and joint warfighting.

“This expedition was a microcosm for what warfighting would be ... WWI, WWII, and even what we are seeing today,” said Klingenberg. The China campaign presented complexity to expeditionary forces who had to achieve their mission far from home, with slow communications and imperfect intelligence, all while encountering friction in war.

Klingenberg joined the USAWC faculty in 2020 as a post-doctoral fellow. He co-teaches the Military Strategy and Campaigning core course and several electives: Unleashing a Century of War: The Military Campaigns of WWI, The Commander's Art: Critical Thinking about Great Battles and Campaigns, and Online Presence and Publication for Strategic Leaders.

Klingenberg earned a Ph.D. in U.S. History from Texas Christian University and a B.A. in German and History from Hillsdale College.

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