

5 Reasons why explorationists can learn from military logistics and operations

Imagine the following:

Situation – You run an exploration camp in a high-altitude (>3,000m) and mountainous environment with very poor infrastructure.

Task – You have to guarantee a smooth operation, including the provision of water, food, electricity, entertainment etc. for everyone. This requires constant supplies from a base further away.

Solutions –

1. Rent and transport the equipment by helicopter (perhaps too expensive)
2. Have people carry everything uphill (time- and labour-intensive, potentially dangerous)
3. Use mules like the *Gebirgsjäger* (German Mountain Infantry)?
4.

From my experience, mineral exploration projects commonly have to some degree a considerable logistical touch. You, the project geologist or logistics manager, have to deal with getting all kinds of supplies from a town or base to the remote field camp. And often, you will be facing difficult situations like the one above.

I believe that we explorationists can indeed learn from military logistics and operations.

Why is that? – Because both scenarios require similar logistical expertise and skills.

I had the chance to work with and learn a great deal from experienced British ex-Armed Forces people. True, sometimes they do things their own (strictly organised) way, but that guaranteed a timely delivery of a camp, for example.

Let me explain which 5 striking similarities exist between mineral exploration and military logistics:

1. Camp management

To run exploration and military camps, you will need basics like: access options, accommodation and office facilities, running water, (hygienic) kitchens, food, electricity, fuel, security, communications & entertainment, local knowledge/ workers, spare parts, Both scenarios aim to provide basic (and improved) living conditions in remote areas whether it is for soldiers or exploration staff.



Typical field camp – ablution facilities are currently assembled in the background

2. Procurement

Guaranteeing a smooth operation requires the timely supply of all critical material from a base location to the camp (as outlined above). From experience, the actual purchasing of equipment from the supplier can be straightforward, however the transport from supplier to the camp location is challenging at times. This includes but is not limited to, mode of transport, import/ export regulations in different countries and unavailability of infrastructure.

3. Vehicles & Aviation

Whether a military unit operates in a remote location or geologists go mapping – the common theme is transport. In order to move quickly and reliably, you need not only off-road vehicles (e.g. 4x4s, (Russian) tanks and other SPVs) and aircraft, but also well-equipped vehicles. This includes safety devices like roll-over bars, fire extinguishers, trailers, enough storage space, satellite tracking etc. People with a military background therefore are in a good position to advise on all transportation-related matters, a subject that exploration staff normally only have limited knowledge about.



It's important to know what a vehicle can transport... or not.

4. Communications

Exploration and mining operations as well as military operations are more often than not located in unaccessible regions. It will consequently be quite a struggle to even get cell phone signals there. Communications systems improved over the years and mining and exploration companies started to use affordable satellite communication solutions in the field.

5. Health & Safety

In the last few decades, the health & safety (HSE) philosophy of both mining and oil & gas companies changed considerably. When working for such a company, you will probably come across slogans like “Zero Harm”, “Safety First” or “Think First, then Act”. Whilst “Zero Harm” is probably one-sided in the military, both exploration companies and the military would like to achieve a low overall injury rate. I could perhaps discuss the relevance of HSE for a long time, but let me focus on the delivery of health services. In the armed forces, there are medics or corpsmen looking after the health of fellow soldiers. In remote locations, this is equally important to exploration staff and many paramedics I have worked with have some sort of military background, being able to respond well to trauma scenarios and long evacuation routes.

I hope this article reflected well some of the similarities between exploration environments and military logistics. As always, I will be keen to hear comments from people with different backgrounds.

Best regards,
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