

Combating the Coronavirus:

DLA Efforts to Defeat COVID-19, February 1, 2020 – June 30, 2020

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The author thanks the smart people who reviewed this paper. Any errors are his, not theirs.

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Introduction

COVID-19 provided Americans an education in supply chain management. People who had never thought about where things came from learned quickly that personnel protective equipment, ventilator availability, and small business fragility meant the difference between life and death. As the Defense Department's supply chain expert for medical material, subsistence, and construction & equipment, the Defense Logistics Agency helped protect the military from the virus. As part of the nation's whole of government response, it helped mitigate its spread.

Two factors drove DLA's response to COVID-19: decisions made in the past and decisions made during the crisis. Decisions made in the past determined the agency's capabilities and limitations. They were the result of deliberate planning and lessons learned. Decisions made during the crisis reflected guidance from the Pentagon, information on the virus, and what agency leaders thought important. This paper is the author's attempt to explain those decisions. Intentionally chronological, it portrays the situation as it unfolded, with the reader privileged to the same information decision makers knew at the time.

As the nation's combat logistics agency, DLA brought three capabilities to the coronavirus fight. First was contracting expertise. Years of negotiating with companies large and small had given the agency knowledge of the industrial base and skill at writing contracts. Second was on-hand quantities. Charged with ensuring military readiness, DLA had a strategy to provide personal protective equipment and ventilators during a surge event. Finally, the agency could manage crises. DLA ran operations through its Agency Synchronization and Operations Center, an integration cell capable of distributing information and painting a common operating picture.

COVID-19 did not affect all DLA entities equally. The supply chains most involved, construction & equipment, medical, clothing & textiles, and subsistence belonged to DLA Troop Support, a major subordinate command led by Army Brig. Gen. Gavin A. Lawrence and headquartered in Philadelphia. While Troop Support processed most pandemic requests, the deployment of Army and Navy hospitals generated repair part orders filled by DLA Land & Maritime, a major subordinate command led by Navy Rear Adm. John T. Palmer and headquartered in central Ohio. DLA Disposition Services, a major subordinate command led by Michael O. Cannon and headquartered in southern Michigan, obtained medical items from turn-ins and transfers. As it had since early in its history, the agency stored items for which it was executive agent. Material handlers in DLA Distribution, a major subordinate command led by Navy Rear Adm. Kevin M. Jones and headquartered in central Pennsylvania, ensured that deliveries went to the right people at the right times in the right quantities.

DLA Troop Support had the largest role because its provision of life-sustaining material made it a natural partner with the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The relationship began in 1962 when the Defense Department made DLA's predecessor responsible for supplying the Office of Civil Defense's fallout shelter program. It continued in the early 1970s when the Defense Civil Preparedness Agency replaced the Office of Civil Defense.¹ Because Americans needed the same items after weather events as they would have needed after an atomic attack, DLA Troop Support transferred its provision to FEMA upon that agency's formation in 1979.

While changes to the government's domestic response did not affect DLA, foreign conflicts did. The medical surge plan for the First Gulf War was to stock supplies in war reserve. None of this reserve was used during the conflict. Items were either expired, obsolete, or

¹ Rpt, Homeland Security National Preparedness Task Force, "Civil Defense and Homeland Security: a Short History of National Preparedness Efforts, n.d., Sep 2006, p. 4 [<https://training.fema.gov/>].

unwanted by medical professionals in combat.² In addition, few before the Gulf War understood how vulnerable the industrial base for nerve agent antidote autoinjectors was.³ After Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and tens of thousands of Americans deployed within range of his missiles, however, the vulnerability became apparent. The long-term fix was the Warstopper program. Part of DLA Acquisition, the Warstopper program paid companies to provide items for which no or limited market existed in peacetime. Also affecting DLA was the War on Terror. To support troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, the agency enlarged its customer-facing operations and established the Joint Contingency Acquisition Support Office.

The federal government responded to 9/11 by establishing the Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Northern Command. The Department of Homeland Security oversaw FEMA and agencies protecting the country's sovereignty. U.S. Northern Command provided military support to civil authorities. Following the command's plan to fight an influenza pandemic, the Defense Department would support both the Department of Health and Human Services and FEMA.⁴ DHHS is the parent organization of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Food and Drug Administration, and National Institutes of Health. It also oversees the Strategic National Stockpile, a reserve of ventilators and other equipment needed to fight a pandemic.⁵

The need for a Strategic National Stockpile became evident during the first decade of the new century. Multiple pandemics caught the attention of DLA acquisition officials. In particular, the 2009 H1N1 pandemic gave the DLA Warstopper medical team insight into the limitations of the N95 respirator market. N95 respirators are face coverings that prevent wearers from inhaling

² Interv, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, with Louis Villarreal, Chf, Warstopper program, DLA, 9 Apr 2020, Historian Files, Historian Files; Email, Luis D. Villarreal, Mngr, Warstopper program, DLA, to Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, 3 Aug

³ Ibid.

⁴ EXORD, CJCS, to DOD Components, "DOD Response to Novel Coronavirus," 1 Feb 2020, p. 2, Historian Files.

⁵ Brf, Peter Gaynor, Admin, FEMA, "Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic: Unified Coordination Group Response," 15 Apr 2020, p. 4, Historian Files.

droplets and are thus critical to combating respiratory diseases. In 2010, the program manager met with 3M's corporate leadership to find a way to provide warfighters this protective equipment.⁶ Four years later, the company agreed to place 5.5 million respirators in vendor-managed inventory and use commercial demand to keep the stock filled.⁷

In the same decade the Warstopper program built its respirator inventory, other parts of DLA formalized the agency's DHHS and FEMA support. In 2011, the enterprise formed a whole of government directorate. Six years later, the director, Army Lt. Gen. Darrell K. Williams, added whole of government as a line-of-effort in the agency's strategic plan.⁸ While DLA Troop Support continued to provide goods, it had help communicating and planning.

The agency took other steps that would help its coronavirus response. In the years before the outbreak, DLA Information Operations invested in telework resources, modernized the agency's information technology infrastructure, and provided communication and collaboration tools.⁹ Resources such as Virtual Desktop, iPhones, and web conferencing allowed employees to support missions regardless of their location.¹⁰ More recently, the directorate acquired a collaborative meeting platform and a program for forwarding phone calls.¹¹ For its part, DLA Logistics Operations modeled an infectious disease plan after the U.S. Northern Command

⁶ Email, Luis D. Villarreal, Mngr, Warstopper program, DLA, to Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, 3 Aug 2020, Historian Files.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Email, Stephen Dubernas, Dir, Whole of Government Directorate, DLA, to Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, 21 Apr 2020, Historian Files.

⁹ Email, Roseanna M. Praydis, Chf, Strategic Communications, J6, to Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, 28 Jul 2020, Historian Files.

¹⁰ Email, George Duchak, CIO, DLA, to J6 Workforce, "Note from the CIO: Reading the Weak Signals," 4 May 2020, Historian Files.

¹¹ Article, DLA Information Operations, "DLA's IT Modernization Paved the Way for Mass Telework," *DLA Today*, 19 May 2020.

plan.¹² While never subjected to a tabletop exercise, it was disseminated early in the agency's response.¹³

Escalation (February 1 – March 18)

The advantage of following a plan is that initial actions do not feel rushed. Thus, DLA maintained a normal operating tempo after the Defense Department directed U.S. Northern Command to execute its pandemic plan on February 1.¹⁴ The agency spent most the month reporting on-hand PPE and researching ways to assist American citizens returning from China.¹⁵ DLA Disposition Services, for example, gathered data and placed holds on its medical supplies and equipment until their release could be coordinated with DLA Headquarters.¹⁶ By the end of February, however, the enterprise was reacting to Defense Secretary Mark T. Esper's guidance to protect the workforce, defend the country, and support efforts to defeat the virus.

All three planks in Esper's guidance affected DLA. The need to protect the workforce prompted United States Forces Korea, operating on the first continent hit by the virus, to cancel training. DLA participated in the command's larger exercises. Defending the country remained paramount because COVID-19 did not stop adversaries from seeking advantage over America.

The agency had to maintain a combat focus throughout the crisis.

¹² David R. Kless, "Defense Logistics Agency Pandemic Plan," 6 Feb 2020, pp. 9-15, Historian Files.

¹³ Email, Adam Silverman, Dep Chf, Plans, Exercises, and Readiness, DLA, to Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, 8 Apr 2020, Historian Files; Email, Rebecca Farris, Chf, Plans, Log Ops, DLA to Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, 8 Apr 2020, Historian Files.

¹⁴ See EXORD, CJCS, to DOD Components, "DOD Response to Novel Coronavirus," 1 Feb 2020, p. 2, Historian Files.

¹⁵ Info Paper, Marine Corps Maj Greg Dueterhaus, Battle Cpt, DLA, "Defense Logistics Agency Support to Department of Defense Coronavirus Disease 2019," 4 Mar 2020, p. 1, Historian Files.

¹⁶ Email, Jake Joy, Public Affairs Specialist, DLA Disposition Services, to Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, 14 Aug 2020, Historian Files.

DLA took several steps to support efforts to defeat the virus. On March 1, it formed a COVID-19 working group.¹⁷ In less than a week, this group had matured into a task force. On March 2, the agency shifted from preventing and protecting to containing and mitigating.¹⁸ Through its Agency Synchronization and Operations Center, it analyzed the Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Act and reacted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff assigning COVID-19 purchases a 3AZ project code.¹⁹

By design, both the DLA COVID-19 Task Force and Agency Synchronization and Operations Center fell under the same senior leader. The executive director of operations, Mr. David R. Kless, served as the agency's crisis response manager and supervised communications with key partners, to include the military services, U.S. Transportation Command, and whole of government agencies. Adding the task force to his oversight expanded both roles. As the crisis response manager, Mr. Kless proposed responses and developed talking points for briefings to the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment. As the person Lt. Gen. Williams relied on to ensure consistent messaging, he personally approved answers to White House, Congress, and media queries. By establishing a system to govern information flow in early March, DLA prepared itself for the vast increase in missions it expected to come its way.

Escalation began in earnest after the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus a pandemic on March 11. The Joint Materiel Priorities and Allocation Board convened the following day to discuss United States Forces Korea's request for ten days of PPE for 75,000

¹⁷ Email, Battle Cpt, DLA, to ASOC Interest Grp, DLA, "DLA COVID-19 (Mitigation) Response Posture," 2 Mar 2020, Historian Files.

¹⁸ Email, Battle Cpt, DLA, to ASOC Interest Grp, DLA, "DLA COVID-19 (Mitigation) Response Posture," 3 Mar 2020, Historian Files. DLA modified its order on March 6 to reflect this change. See EXORD, DLA, "MOD 2 to EXORD 02-03 for Support to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Outbreak," 6 Mar 2020, Historian Files.

¹⁹ Email, Battle Cpt, DLA, to ASOC Interest Grp, DLA, "DLA COVID-19 (Mitigation) Response Posture," 5 Mar 2020, Historian Files; Email, Battle Cpt, DLA, to ASOC Interest Grp, DLA, "DLA COVID-19 (Mitigation) Response Posture," 9 Mar 2020, Historian Files; EXORD, DLA, "MOD 3 to EXORD 02-03 for Support to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Outbreak," 9 Mar 2020, p. 7, Historian Files.

people.²⁰ The board reduced the number to 60,000 and directed DLA to provide 1.2 million pairs of exam gloves, 514,200 surgical masks, and 60,000 bottles of hand sanitizer.²¹ A day later, President Trump declared COVID-19 a national emergency, relaxing restrictions on what the military could do domestically.²² The same day, his deputy defense secretary issued a stop movement order, freezing rotations for a third of the agency's 1,200 uniformed members and curtailing DEFENDER 20, the year's premier training exercise.²³ A test of the Defense Department's ability to surge forces, DEFENDER 20 would have identified gaps in the agency's end-to-end support.

DLA Troop Support used prime vendors to fill most items in the United States Forces Korea request.²⁴ Prime vendors eliminate the need for DLA to store and transport items. The command provided the remaining items through Warstopper-funded contingency contracts and regular orders. Two DLA Troop Support supply chains processed the regular orders: construction & equipment provided N95 respirators and clothing & textiles provided 600 boxes of disposable gloves and 200 full-body protection suits.²⁵ As foreseen by Warstopper team in 2009, N95 respirators had become critical to arresting the spread of the virus.

Events at home continued to put the agency on a wartime footing. On the March 13, DLA used money from the Supplemental Act to buy PPE for the military. Items purchased included 5 million N95 respirators, 15 million pairs of gloves, 1 million isolation gowns, and 1.5 million

²⁰ Info paper, ASOC, DLA, "COVID-19 PPE Assessment," 4 Mar 2020, pp. 1-2, Historian Files.

²¹ Memo, Air Force Lt Gen Giovanni K. Tuck, Dir, Log, Joint Staff, to OSD(A&S), sub: United States Forces-Korea (USFK) COVID-19 Non-medical PPE Request," 12 Mar 2020, p. 1, Historian Files.

²² Email, Battle Cpt, DLA, to ASOC Interest Grp, DLA, "DLA COVID-19 (Mitigation) Response Posture," 13 Mar 2020, Historian Files.

²³ Memo, David L. Norquist, Dep, SECDEF, to DoD components, sub: "Stop Movement for all Domestic Travel," 13 Mar 2020, Historian Files; Email, Battle Cpt, DLA, to ASOC Interest Grp, DLA, "DLA COVID-19 (Mitigation) Response Posture," 13 Mar 2020, Historian Files.

²⁴ RFI response, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, 1 Jul 2020, p. 1, Historian Files.

²⁵ Ibid.

bottles of hand sanitizer.²⁶ In all, the agency spent more than \$24.5 million.²⁷ Then, on March 16, Lt. Gen. Williams informed the agency that eligible employees were authorized to telework. The following day, the Office of Management and Budget mandated it.²⁸ At the same time, DLA Troop Support began researching new sources for N95 respirators. On March 17, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began expanding healthcare facilities across the U.S.²⁹ These projects generated pharmaceutical orders for DLA Troop Support's medical supply chain.

The following day was just as eventful. On March 18, President Trump signed the Families First Coronavirus Response Act and invoked the Defense Production Act. The Families First Act guaranteed administrative leave for federal workers who had to stay home due to age, medical condition, or parenthood. The Defense Production Act dated to the Korean War. Managed at DLA by the Warstopper program, it allowed the federal government to prioritize defense contracts and subsidize material necessary for national security.³⁰ At agency level, DLA readied a Rapid Deployment Team to support U.S. Northern Command.³¹ It also responded to a request from the command's land component for a Joint Contingency Acquisition Support Office support team. Unfortunately, March 18 was also the day DLA's clothing & textile vendors also started closing. While the agency had stock to cover requests, shutdowns were concerning

²⁶ Email, Lee Dvonch, Cf, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, to Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, 15 Apr 2020, Historian Files.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Russell T. Vought, Act Dir, OMB, to Heads, Departments and Agencies, sub: "Federal Agency Operational Alignment to Slow the Spread of Coronavirus COVID-19," 17 Mar 2020, p. 1, Historian Files.

²⁹ Brf, ASOC, DLA, "COVID-19 Senior Leader Sync," 17 Mar 2020, p. 3, Historian Files; Email, Battle Cpt, DLA, to ASOC Interest Grp, DLA, "DLA COVID-19 (Mitigation) Response Posture," 17 Mar 2020, Historian Files.

³⁰ Technically, Warstopper and Industrial Capability (Defense Production Act) are separate programs overseen by the same manager. Email, Luis D. Villarreal, Mngr, Warstopper program, DLA, to Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, Historian Files.

³¹ OPOD, DLA, "MOD 5 to DLA Exord for DOD Support DOS for COVID-19," 18 Mar 2020, p. 6, Historian Files.

because of the number (21), limited industrial base (259 companies), and fact that most vendors lacked the capital to survive stoppages.

DLA had reacted assertively to the outbreak. It spent February gathering information and reporting quantities. Along with the rest of the military, it received a wake-up call when United States Forces Korea submitted its massive PPE request.³² Occurring before widespread transmission in the U.S., this alarm prompted units to order PPE. DLA's focus through mid-March was on fulfilling these orders – a significant but standard role for the agency. Two things changed this pattern in the second half of the month. First, military units began deploying to support the domestic population, making the agency's support to the Services support to the nation at large. Second, DLA began supplying Americans directly through FEMA and DHHS.

Supporting Americans (March 19 – April 5)

DLA's coronavirus response entered a new phase when U.S. Northern Command activated the hospital ships *Mercy* and *Comfort*.³³ The *Mercy*, homeported in San Diego, would sail to a location on the west coast. The *Comfort*, homeported in Norfolk, would sail to New York. Both vessels required medical supplies, repair parts, and fuel. By supporting them, the agency was supporting the Americans hit hardest by the virus.

California was important for reasons other than the *Mercy*. On March 19, Governor Gavin C. Newsom issued a statewide stay-at-home order.³⁴ The state was home to three DLA depots – Barstow, San Diego, and San Joaquin – and many defense contractors. With more states

³² Interv, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, with Army Brig Gen Gavin A. Lawrence, Cdr, DLA Troop Support, 1 Jul 2020, Historian Files.

³³ Notes, Michael Van House, CoS, J3, DLA, J3 Wrap Up, 19 Mar 2020, Historian Files.

³⁴ Exec Order, Gavin C. Newsom, Gov, CA, 19 Mar 2020, Historian Files.

looking to follow California's lead, wholesale acquisition could stop. Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment Ellen Lord prevented this calamity by requesting the industrial base stay open and local governments consider its workers essential.³⁵

Another development changed the way the agency delivered material. Except for DLA Troop Support using prime vendors in Korea, all provision to date had been via standard procedures. FEMA changed this consistency March 20 by issuing mission assignments. While not automated, mission assignments were an established method of requesting support involving upfront payments adjustable during reconciliation. DLA's three assignments helped both the emergency agency and the public. Liaison support entailed detailing representatives to FEMA's National Response Coordination Center. Buying 100,000 human remains pouches ensured that mortuary affairs teams across the country used FDA-approved bags. Finally, providing shelf-stable meals allowed Pennsylvania to feed its vulnerable populations.

The public concerned DLA when citizens reported that the agency's commercial sale contract holder was auctioning masks it had received from DLA Disposition Services before the outbreak. Reacting to demand, the company had advertised the masks, which were expired, for exorbitant prices. Fortunately for the agency, the Michigan-based command had a good relationship with the company and the masks were returned after a phone call.³⁶

DLA leaders were concerned about their own personnel as well as the public. Local and state orders were forcing employees to adopt new habits. For those who could work from home, quarantine meant less time commuting but other distractions. Parents of young children, for

³⁵ Memo, Ellen M. Lord, USD(A&S), to Defense Industrial Base, sub: "Defense Industrial Base Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce," 20 Mar 2020, pp. 1-2, Historian Files.

³⁶ Article, Tim Hoyle, "DLA Disposition Services Makes Excess Military Items Available for COVID-19 Response," 16 Apr 2020, DLA Today.

example, had to be DLA employees, teachers, and cafeteria aides all at the same time.³⁷ For those who had to report to work, social distancing and personal protection changed how they did their jobs.³⁸ DLA Human Resources responded to these changes by requiring that supervisors submit daily personnel reports. It also cancelled fitness leave so individuals could devote more of their eight-hour day to work.

Personnel issues did not affect developments on Wednesday, March 2. First, the Pentagon mobilized three Army combat hospitals. The 531st out of Fort Campbell and 9th out of Fort Hood would go to New York City and the 627th out of Fort Carson to Washington State.³⁹ Next, a sailor aboard the USS *Theodore Roosevelt*, an aircraft carrier recently departed Vietnam, contracted COVID-19. The same day, DLA Troop Support signed agreements for four vendors to deliver 8,000 ventilators over half a year. Able to help patients breathe, ventilators had become vital for hospitals inundated with coronavirus patients. Although models differed in complexity, even the simplest had hundreds of parts and cost nearly \$1,000. While 1,400 a month constituted a significant portion of the country's manufacturing capacity, it appeared woefully inadequate given the need.⁴⁰

The FDA addressed this shortage by issuing an emergency use authorization.⁴¹ The administration admitted that the substitutes examined, positive pressure breathing devices and

³⁷ Input from a "bring your own coffee" sensing session Lt. Gen. Williams held with select employees on 23 April. Email, CMDCM Shaun I. Brahmsteadt, Senior Enlisted Adviser, DLA, to Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, "Fact Check on Coronavirus Paper," 17 Jun 2020, Historian Files.

³⁸ The DLA Office of Inspector General experienced a 20% spike in complaints, primarily from warehouse workers regarding protection and personnel policies. Email, Andrew J. Duszynski, Dep IG, Ops, DLA, to Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, 3 Aug 2020, Historian Files.

³⁹ Article, Kyle Rempfer, "Three Army Field Hospitals Ordered to New York, Washington States," *Army Times*, 24 Mar 2020, Historian Files.

⁴⁰ Interv, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, with Army Brig Gen Gavin A. Lawrence, Cdr, DLA Troop Support, 1 Jul 2020, Historian Files.

⁴¹ Ltr, Public Health Service RADM Denise M. Hinton, Chf Scientist, FDA, to Manufacturers and Other Stakeholders, 24 Mar 2020, p. 1, Historian Files.

anesthesia gas machines, were poor.⁴² Even so, with Governor Andrew M. Cuomo stating that New York needed 30,000, not the 440 FEMA was giving him, DLA could very easily have wasted money purchasing replacements.⁴³ Instead, it consulted experts in the Defense Health Agency and exercised fiscal discipline.⁴⁴

By late March, the United States was registering over 25,000 new cases and 800 deaths per day. Prompted by the need to social distance, the agency opened its contingency site in central Ohio.⁴⁵ Manned by Air Force Maj. Gen. Allan E. Day, the DLA Logistics Operations director, the facility was located on the same property as DLA Land & Maritime. DLA's training site in Lorton, Virginia, staffed by the vice director and other key leaders, served as a tertiary headquarters.

Late March is also when DLA Troop Support recommended a new forum for prioritizing support to military units. With demand outpacing supply, the command consulted with the Defense Health Agency and Joint Staff Surgeon's office to come up with the idea of converting the Joint Materiel Priorities and Allocations Board, traditionally used to divide munitions among the Services but employed earlier in the month to adjudicate the United States Forces Korea request, into a permanent PPE decision-making body.⁴⁶ Brig. Gen. Lawrence, the DLA Troop Support commander, elevated the idea to Lt. Gen. Williams, who took it to Lt. Gen. Giovanni K. Tuck, the Joint Staff Director for Logistics.⁴⁷ Tuck, a former DLA Energy commander, used the

⁴² Ibid., p. 2; Notes, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, "5x8s," 1 Apr 2020, p. 6, Historian Files.

⁴³ Article, Noah Higgins-Dunn and William Feuer, "Gov. Cuomo Says New York Needs Ventilators Now, Help from GM and Ford 'Does Us No Good,'" CBC Markets, 24 Mar 2020, <https://www.cbc.com>.

⁴⁴ Interv, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, with Roxanne J. Banks, Dep Dir, DLA Acquisition, 8 Apr 2020, Historian Files.

⁴⁵ Email, Guy C. Beougher, Dep Dir, DLA Logistics Operations, to HQ Executive Board Principals, DLA, sub: "Social Distancing COOP Site," 27 Mar 2020, Historian Files.

⁴⁶ Inter, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, with Army Brig. Gen. Gavin A. Lawrence, Cdr, DLA Troop Support, 21 Aug 2020.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

idea to develop the Defense Medical Logistics Enterprise Working Group. This group categorized requests, determined need, evaluated material status, and set priorities.⁴⁸

Other developments indicated a maturing response. DLA leaders learned that the agency would receive \$500 million from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) and \$400 million from FEMA.⁴⁹ In addition to supporting government agencies, the CARES Act provided financial help to individuals and – important for DLA – small businesses. The agency also completed some initial provision when it supplied the United States Coast Guard with 47,200 N95 respirators and 50 hospital gowns and the USN *Mercy* and USN *Comfort* with \$2 million in medical supplies, \$868,000 in sustenance, and 975,000 gallons of fuel.⁵⁰

A news story over the weekend brought to light ways in which previous DLA efforts were supporting the nation. An article on the Wane TV website reported that tents provided by DLA Disposition Services' Law-Enforcement Support Office were helping the city of Celina, Ohio, establish an ad hoc medical facility.⁵¹ Reliance on these tents was hardly an isolated story. The LESO program had been supporting communities for 23 years, giving police departments the surplus military equipment they needed to respond to emergencies. DLA also connected with the country when an employee died of COVID-19. The death would not be the agency's last.

⁴⁸ Brf, Navy Cpt Dion English, Dpty Dir, Supply & Distribution, JS J4, et al., sub: "Defense Medical Logistics Enterprise Working Group," 29 Mar 2020, pp. 4, 6, Historian Files.

⁴⁹ Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, COVID Senior Leader Sync, 27 Mar 2000, p. 3, Historian Files. The \$500 million was used to bolster the agency's cash position, which was stressed by orders outnumbering payments at the time. RFI response, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, 1 Jul 2020, p. 1, Historian Files.

⁵⁰ Notes, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, "5x8s," 26 Mar 2020, pp. 4-6, Historian Files. The *Mercy* would receive DLA Energy-supplied diesel and aviation fuel from the USNS *Matthew Perry*. The USNS *Comfort* received fuel from Defense Fuel Support Point Craney Island, the largest Navy fuel point in the United States and a DLA Energy property. Email, Irene M. Smith, Public Affairs Officer, DLA Energy, to Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, 13 Aug 2020, Historian Files.

⁵¹ Article, Staff Writers, "Tents Set Up Outside Ohio Medical Facility in Case of COVID-19 Surge," 24 Mar 2020, [<http://Wane.com>].

Four developments March 31 deepened DLA's involvement in the crisis. First, FEMA sent a mission assignment for more shelf-stable meals. DLA Troop Support's subsistence supply chain obtained these meals from established vendors and DLA Distribution Susquehanna delivered them to nearby Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Second, the agency began returning at risk personnel from Afghanistan. DLA Disposition Services was helping extract equipment from the country, a key component of America's agreement with the Taliban. The command also transferred 156,000 N95 respirators from the Department of State's Humanitarian Assistance Program to DHHS. While those running the program are to be credited for realizing they had excess, their knowledge of where and how to turn it in reflected years of DLA's Michigan-based command making itself known in the logistical community. Finally, DLA released 1.1 million N95 respirators from its Warstopper medical readiness 3M contract.⁵²

Developments were not all positive. Since the USS *Theodore Roosevelt* first confirmed a coronavirus case in early March, 600 sailors, or 12% of the crew, had become sick. DLA Indo-Pacific responded by coordinating ready-to-eat meals, PPE, cots, test kits, and nasopharyngeal swabs.⁵³ While DLA Troop Support sold test kit analyzers on its medical electronic catalog, its support was mostly in providing swabs and transport tubes.⁵⁴

DLA Troop Support obtained its swabs from Italy. Material from overseas usually arrived on flights scheduled by U.S. Transportation Command. The command needed protective equipment for picking up material and returning American citizens from overseas.⁵⁵ DLA

⁵² Email, Luis D. Villarreal, Mngr, Warstopper program, DLA, to Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, 3 Aug 2020, Historian Files; Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, COVID Senior Leader Sync, 1 Apr 2020, p. 5, Historian Files.

⁵³ Ibid.; Brf, ASOC, DLA, "DLA COVID-19 Senior Leader Sync," 2 Apr 2020, p. 23, Historian Files; Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, Senior Leader Sync, 2 Apr 2020, p. 4, Historian Files.

⁵⁴ Interv, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, with Army Brig Gen Gavin A. Lawrence, Cdr, DLA Troop Support, 1 Jul 2020, Historian Files.

⁵⁵ Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, J3 Wrap Up, 3 Apr 2020, p. 4, Historian Files.

Distribution supported this important logistics partner by shipping 154,000 masks and 370 air-purifying respirators to Scott Air Force Base in Illinois.

DLA's support was receiving notice from both the public and the Pentagon. On April 3, Sandor Boyson wrote a complimentary article in *The Hill*.⁵⁶ That same day, the agency detailed four employees to Navy Rear Adm. John P. Polowczyk's Supply Chain Stabilization Task Force and another four to Ms. Lord's Joint Acquisition Task Force. Requests for DLA expertise reflected not only the importance of supply chain logistics but also the agency's reputation.

While California and Washington State were the first U.S. locations to experience COVID-19, New York City had become its largest hotspot by early April. In addition to ventilators, the region needed medical personnel and facilities. DLA was already supporting two Army hospitals and a Navy ship in the region. It now began delivering pharmaceuticals to a facility the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was building at the Javits Center in Manhattan. DLA Troop Support's construction & equipment supply chain provided workers erecting the site with N95 respirators, gloves, hand sanitizer, disinfectant, and thermometers.⁵⁷

Supporting active duty medical personnel involved supply chains other than medical and construction & equipment. Even if equal burden sharing were not possible, however, all components had employees with the virus and suppliers closing factories. DLA Aviation, for example, had even more closures in its supply chain than clothing & textiles. Headquarters staffs, for their part, enabled commands and made their transactions efficient, timely, secure, and transparent.

⁵⁶ Sandor Boyson, "A Defining Moment in our Medical Supply Chain Crisis," *The Hill*, 3 Apr 2020, DLA Media Clips for 6 Apr 2020.

⁵⁷ RFI response, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, 1 Jul, p. 1, Historian Files.

The Advantage of Managed Supply Chains (April 6 - 13)

The coronavirus had completely changed what commands and staffs did by the first full week in April. The year had begun with Defense-wide Review and audit reconciliation. COVID-19 put both on hold.⁵⁸ As units cancelled training, isolated infected members, and enforced social distancing, they placed fewer orders for fuel and repair parts and more for facemasks and other PPE. A sudden and unpredicted demand resulted in backorders.

Cloth masks proved a work-around for N95 shortages. Although not able to prevent someone from catching the virus, they could stop the wearer from transmitting the disease. They also had logistical advantages. Cloth masks provided business to clothing & textile companies, all of which were small and 11 of which were important to the Puerto Rican economy. They were also popular with the military. With both demand and supply, DLA Logistics Operations assigned the masks stock numbers and posted them for sale.⁵⁹

COVID-19's effect on military operations became better known on April 6 when DLA Energy reported that base restrictions had delayed five Energy Performance projects, suspended one, and paused six.⁶⁰ The command also reported that energy companies were contacting it for sales.⁶¹ Reduced demand had given them excess gallons. Unlike DLA Troop Support, DLA Energy's problem was surplus.

DLA's increasing involvement in combating the coronavirus prompted the Agency Synchronization and Operations Center to isolate FEMA mission assignments and DHHS

⁵⁸ Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, J3 Wrap Up, 9 Apr 2020, p. 2, Historian Files.

⁵⁹ Notes, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, "5x8s," 7 Apr 2020, pp. 10-11, Historian Files.

⁶⁰ Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, COVID Senior Leader Sync, 6 Apr 2020, p. 4, Historian Files; Brf, ASOC, DLA, "COVID-19 Senior Leader Syc," 6 Apr 2020, p. 22, Historian Files.

⁶¹ In addition to the coronavirus, a price war between OPEC and Russia affected oil prices.

requests separately. Not only were the organizations different but so too was the way they reimbursed. FEMA provided money before delivery; DHHS after it. To cover costs, DLA relied on the Defense-wide Working Capital Fund, an account against which it could obligate money.⁶²

DLA had two outstanding requests from DHHS. One was receiving a lot of press. To mitigate America's mask shortage, DHHS had accepted a proposal from Battelle Memorial Institute to sanitize respirators. Sanitization entailed spraying masks with hydrogen peroxide in 40-foot trailers. In direct support of DHHS, DLA wrote a \$415 million contract for 60 units and six months of service.⁶³ The second DHHS request was for 3,000 ventilators. Ventilators continued to be in short supply. DLA could not source the entire country because need exceeded capacity.⁶⁴ The Trump administration addressed this shortage with the Defense Production Act.⁶⁵ To cover the interim, DLA agreed to give DHHS its first 3,000.⁶⁶

The Agency found other sources of material. First, DLA Disposition Services collected ventilators from units not using them. Next, the DLA Research and Development Technology Accelerator team used its existing effort to scale rapid manufacturing for PPE. The first product: 11,000 laser cut face shields that were cheaper than standard models and could be produced in 48 hours or less. While not medically coded, these shields prevented transmission among first responders in New York City.⁶⁷

⁶² Brf, J8, DLA, "J8 Answer to Historian Question," 30 Apr 2020, p. 1, Historian Files.

⁶³ Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, COVID Senior Leader Sync, 7 Apr 2020, p. 1, Historian Files.

⁶⁴ Notes J3 DAG, DLA, COVID Senior Leader Sync, 31 Mar 2020, p. 4, Historian Files; Notes, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, "5x8s," 1 Apr 2020, p. 1, Historian Files.

⁶⁵ Article, Eric D. Lawrence, "Ford, GE Get \$136M Contract to Make 50K Ventilators by July 4," *Detroit Free Press*, 17 Apr 2020, <https://www.freep.com>; Interv, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, with Army Brig Gen Gavin A. Lawrence, Cdr, DLA Troop Support, 1 Jul 2020, Historian Files.

⁶⁶ Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, J3 Wrap Up, 7 Apr 2020, p. 3, Historian Files; Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, COVID Senior Leader Sync, 8 Apr 2020, p. 1, Historian Files. According to the interdepartmental agreement, DLA would provide 2,500 Zoll Impact 731s and 500 Vyaries for \$50 million. Notes, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, "5x8s," 17 Apr 2020, p. 1, Historian Files.

⁶⁷ Interv, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, with David M. Koch, Dir, Research and Development, DLA, 14 Apr 2020, Historian Files; Email, Jessica Husemann, Senior Admin Consult, J6, to Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, 27 Jul 2020, Historian Files.

The face shield orders were precedent setting not only because of their manufacturing process but also because of their contracting mechanism. DLA Research and Development entered into an agreement with its supplier using a device called an other-transaction authority. Other-transaction authorities, like so much that benefited DLA during the crisis, existed because senior leaders had recognized a need in less exigent times. Concerned that opaque federal contracting rules were scaring away technology companies, acquisition officials invoked exceptions to the Defense Federal Acquisition Regulation Supplement to simplify the process.⁶⁸ Emplaced before the crisis, other-transaction authorities represented a capability enacted in normal times that permitted agile responses during extraordinary ones.

Other extraordinary responses followed. On April 7, Michael D. Scott, vice director, reported that the DLA Foundation would give the workforce 2,000 facemasks.⁶⁹ To prevent what had happened on the *Theodore Roosevelt*, the Navy's Pacific Fleet mandated pre-deployment quarantines for vessels. DLA Troop Support's sustenance supply chain supported these lockdowns by prepositioning 30,000 sandwiches on Guam and delivering 2,000 cases of meals-ready-to-eat to the *USS Ronald Reagan*.⁷⁰

Support continued even though most DLA employees worked from home, leaders operated out of contingency sites, and segments of DLA Distribution and DLA Disposition Services could not isolate. Despite these constraints, present-for-duty numbers remained high.⁷¹ Unfortunately, the workforce also suffered its second coronavirus death the first week in April.

⁶⁸ Interv, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, with Roxanne J. Banks, Dep Dir, DLA Acquisition, 8 Apr 2020, Historian Files.

⁶⁹ Notes, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, Prep Session for JATF Sync, 7 Apr 2020, Historian Files.

⁷⁰ Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, COVID Senior Leader Sync, 8 Apr 2020, p. 3, Historian Files. Also sent were over \$122,000 in gloves, N95 respirators, surgical masks, test kits, and gowns. Email, Navy Cdr Shani S. Leblanc, Cdr, DLA Troop Support Indo-Pacific, to Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, 26 Aug 2020, Historian Files.

⁷¹ Notes, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, Prep Session for JATF Sync," 8 Apr 2020, Historian Files. This trend would continue throughout the crisis. See Brf, ASOC, DLA, "COVID-19 Senior Leader Sync, 29 May 2020, p. 11, Historian Files.

Two actions April 8 gave this dedicated workforce new capabilities. First, Lt. Gen. Williams signed non-availability determinations permitting purchases from foreign vendors.⁷² A second action made DLA a purveyor of information. On April 8, the DLA Metrics Branch and DLA Program Executive Office started designing a common operating picture for medical material. As executive agent, the agency was responsible for tracking availability across the Defense Department. By the end of the first week in April, the combined effort had delivered the Federal Medical Material Common Operating Picture.⁷³ Its next goal was to automate feeds, without which the displays would not be worth the labor they took to compile.

The day after work on the Federal Medical Material Common Operating Picture began, DLA accelerated other efforts. First, Lt. Gen. Williams decided to release 1.8 million Warstopper N95 respirators from the 3M contract.⁷⁴ While this release accounted for a significant portion of the program's remaining 5.3 million balance, the agency had military backorders to fill. Other actions included DLA Logistics Operations comparing PPE sources with the Army and DLA Disposition Services locating 3,512 human remains pouches.⁷⁵

An advantage of managed supply chains is experts. After meeting Rear Adm. John Polowczyk, head of the White House's Supply Chain Task Force, Lt. Gen. Williams added Air Force Brig. Gen. David J. Sanford, DLA Aviation commander, to the thirty-plus personnel he had advising federal partners.⁷⁶ In all, the agency was liaising with five entities. Sanford and his team provided expertise to the Supply Chain Task Force, the deputy director of DLA Mission

⁷² One was for N95 and surgical masks; the other for BioSmart fabric. Notes, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, "5x8s," 9 Apr 2020, p. 1, Historian Files.

⁷³ The DoD view was called DM2C (DoD Medical Material Common Operating Picture). Email, Sean F. Ahrens, Chf, Metrics Interpretation Branch, DLA, to Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, 21 Apr 2020, Historian Files.

⁷⁴ Notes, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, Prep Session for JATF Sync, 9 Apr 2020, Historian Files.

⁷⁵ Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, COVID Senior Leader Sync, 10 Apr 2020, p. 4, Historian Files; Brf, ASOC, DLA, "COVID-19 Senior Leader Sync," 9 Apr 2020, p. 28, Historian Files.

⁷⁶ RFI response, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, 1 Jul 2020, p. 3, Historian Files.

Support led a team advising Ms. Lord's Joint Acquisition Task Force, the 13 people on Rapid Deployment Team Blue reported to U.S. Northern Command, the four people on Joint Contingency Acquisition Support Office Mission Support Team 2 advised U.S. Army North, and DLA Acquisition detailed two employees to the Defense Production Action product team in the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Industrial Policy.⁷⁷ This consulting was in addition to normal interactions by regional commands, national account managers, and the agency's whole of government directorate.

Supply chain expertise allowed DLA to address concerns. One was the security of the chains themselves. Throughout the pandemic, the investigations division of the DLA Office of the Inspector General established a procedure for coordinating COVID-19 requests with the Defense Criminal Investigative Service. The division worked with the investigative service and DLA Fraud Council to minimize disruption of critical tasks. Supply chain expertise also proved advantageous when receiving donations. On April 9, the agency learned that Ford Motor Company might provide face shields.⁷⁸ Donations entailed decisions to accept, letters of agreement, assigning stock numbers, receipt, listing items for sale, and determining transportation costs. Another concern was the Battelle contract. Battelle was a small company whose ability to meet contractual obligations was in doubt.⁷⁹ While acquisition officials expected investigations by the Defense Department and Government Accountability Office, DHHS's subsequent decision to engage DLA for \$1,460,000 in general support indicated that the contract's originator was satisfied.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Email, Kimberly A. Villarreal, Chf, Acquisition Sppt Grp, DLA, to Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, 2 Aug 2020, Historian Files.

⁷⁸ Notes, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, "5x8s," 10 Apr 2020, pp. 2-3, pp. 12-13, Historian Files.

⁷⁹ Notes, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, Prep Session for JATF Sync, 15 Apr 2020, Historian Files.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Interagency agreements like those between DLA and DHHS were new. Money had long flowed from one part of the federal government to another without details on how that money would be spent. The Bureau of Fiscal Service addressed this problem a year before the crisis by releasing Forms 7600A and 7600B. Form A stated terms of the agreement; Form B transferred money. Time spent preparing these agreements in 2019 paid off in 2020.

DLA support for DHHS received attention April 10 in a way that could only have been awkward for the agency's liaisons. That Friday, Representative Elissa Slotkin of Michigan's Eighth Congressional District announced the Strategic National Stockpile Reform Act.⁸¹ Among other things, the act proposed to move the stockpile from DHHS's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response to DLA.

Undersecretary Lord helped DLA respond to outside proposals, allowing it to focus on provision. On April 10, the agency shipped 10,000 N95 respirators to the USS *Nimitz*, a Pacific-based aircraft carrier like the *Theodore Roosevelt* and *Ronald Reagan*. More PPE came from DLA Troop Support executing one-time buys from non-Trade Agreement sources.⁸² These purchases were often with companies Trade Agreement-compliant in other sectors. Some DLA acquisitions went to its own workforce. With the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommending cloth masks when respirators were not available, DLA Distribution, DLA Disposition Services, and DLA Installation Management all placed orders.⁸³ DLA was also able to assist the State Department. Using its global network, DLA Energy refueled aircraft returning American citizens from overseas hotspots.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Article, WLNS TV (Lansing, MI), "Slotkin Announces Made in America Medical Supply Chain Initiative," 9 Apr 2020, <https://www.wlns.com>; Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, COVID Senior Leaders Sync, 10 Apr 2020, p. 6, Historian Files.

⁸² Notes, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, "5x8s," 13 Apr 2020, p. 1, Historian Files.

⁸³ Brf, ASOC, DLA, "COVID-19 Senior Leader Sync," 10 Apr 2020, p. 21, Historian Files.

⁸⁴ Email, Irene M. Smith, Public Affairs Officer, DLA Energy, to Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, 13 Aug 2020, Historian Files.

At the same time the agency was protecting itself, it was applying expertise to transformative projects. DLA Research and Development had already added advanced manufactured face shields to the supply chain. Now its Technology Accelerator Team was researching mask sterilization and respirator alternatives. These alternatives were lightweight, securely fastened, and made from entirely domestic components.⁸⁵ The DLA Analytics Center of Excellence also enjoyed early success, designing a tool for estimating PPE usage.⁸⁶ Its other projects included studying strategic alliances and regional suppliers.⁸⁷

By the second full week of April, the entire United States was under stay at home orders. More than 2,000 Americans were dying of COVID-19 every day, a rate not seen since the 1918 influenza pandemic. Health-care workers, mail personnel, food deliverers, and checkout clerks all became heroes while others became unemployed. Crime across the United States dropped and the country entered a brief period of solidarity.

Unfortunately, the pandemic's unifying effect was not worldwide. DLA had to remain prepared to execute its combat mission even when focused on the virus. Leading the agency in this vigilance was DLA Intelligence. Throughout the crisis, the directorate informed leaders of threats and identified attacks on networks and information technology. Along with DLA Public Affairs, DLA Intelligence ensured that released information did not jeopardize operations; along with DLA Information Operations, it helped employees telework safely.

⁸⁵ Email, Jessica Husemann, Senior Admin Consult, J6, to Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, 27 Jul 2020, Historian Files.

⁸⁶ Brf, J67, DLA, "DLA DACoP CDO Fireside Chat: COVID-19 Efforts in the D&A Community," 29 May 2020, p. 14, Historian Files.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

From Stability to Nursing Home Provision (April 14 – May 17)

With the entire agency either combating the pandemic or conducting normal missions in an abnormal environment, DLA entered a period of stabilization. For the first time since the Agency Synchronization and Operations Center started holding daily coordination meetings, senior leaders devoted a session to business performance.⁸⁸ One observation was that fewer orders and steady deliveries were decreasing backorders and increasing material availability.⁸⁹ While positive, the trend also meant less money, risking to offset the all-important balance between obligation authority and cash.

DLA had recent experience managing this balance. Defense reforms over the previous year had taught the agency that it could not isolate just one aspect of automated payments. They also revealed the difference between DLA-direct and customer-direct obligating authority and which cash levers worked and which did not. As important, it forced the Agency Synchronization and Operations Center to predict the effect changes to the Defense-wide Working Capital Fund would have on the agency's business model.

Stability meant repeated actions. DLA learned on April 16 that it would receive another donation, this time 7.5 million cloth facemasks from Hanes. DLA Logistics Operations uploaded purchasing information within hours of notice. Also on the 16th, FEMA issued DLA another pharmaceutical mission assignment, albeit to a new location: with temporary medical facilities established in and around New York City, FEMA's attention had shifted to Detroit.

⁸⁸ Brf, ASOC, DLA, "COVID-19 Senior Leader Sync," 14 Apr 2020, pp. 4-23, Historian Files.

⁸⁹ Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, COVID Senior Leader Sync, 14 Apr 2020, p. 1, Historian Files. The Agency Synchronization and Operations Center, commands, and staffs never stopped tracking performance; it just had not been the primary topic of a meeting since the coronavirus response began.

Unfortunately, another COVID-19 trend continued that day. For the third time, DLA lost an employee to the virus.

Casualties notwithstanding, the agency continued supporting partners. On April 17, DLA Disposition Services received 119,500 procedural masks from Defense Finance and Accounting Service, 50,000 of which it shipped to the Pacific Fleet. Also sent were 15,000 swab kits for the *Nimitz*, *Ronald Reagan*, and *Theodore Roosevelt*.⁹⁰ The masks and kits were in addition to 28,160 N95 respirators, 43,584 ready-to-eat meals, 25,000 pairs of gloves, 5,760 face shields, and 30,000 frozen sandwiches already sent to the carriers.⁹¹

More repeat actions followed. On April 19, President Trump again invoked the Defense Production Act, this time to increase swab supply. When the company chosen to produce the item had expanded operations, it would double monthly output to 40 million. The same day, Lt. Gen. Williams authorized another tranche of Warstopper vendor-managed inventory.⁹² In other repeat actions, DLA Disposition Services received 13 ventilators in repairable condition and DLA Land & Maritime supplied a part for the USS *Mercy*.⁹³ The Columbus-based command shipped thermal insulation hours after receiving the request by coordinating with its Norfolk detachment and DLA Distribution. In another iteration, FEMA gave DLA its third mission assignment for prepared meals. While the request had been made before, its recipient was new: unemployed oil workers.

That same Monday saw the first small step toward normalcy when Secretary Esper revoked his ban on service members changing stations. While military personnel accounted for less than 5% of the DLA workforce, they held most commands. Their rotations, usually

⁹⁰ Notes, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, “5x8s,” 20 Apr 2020, p. 7, Historian Files.

⁹¹ Notes, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, “5x8s,” 17 Apr 2020, p. 3, Historian Files.

⁹² Notes, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, Prep Session for JATF Sync, 19 Apr 2020, Historian Files.

⁹³ Brf, ASOC, DLA, “COVID-19 Senior Leader Sync,” 20 Apr 2020, p. 17, Historian Files.

scheduled for summer, had been held in suspense, to include that of Lt. Gen. Williams and his successor. Other leadership changes affected by the order included the DLA Energy commander, DLA Distribution commander, DLA Land & Maritime commander, DLA Indo-Pacific commander, and several depot commanders.

With military rotations stabilizing, DLA received a new task. A third of coronavirus deaths were occurring in assisted-living communities. To address this tragedy, the White House announced that it would provide the nation's 15,403 registered nursing homes with seven days of PPE. While the rush to support this vulnerable population meant that details – who paid, who kitted, who delivered, if requisitions trumped military ones – had yet to be decided, DLA knew it would be involved.

The agency had long been involved with ventilators. DLA Troop Support's purchase of 8,000 on March 24 had constituted a significant portion of America's manufacturing capacity. Concerned that the military was monopolizing a scarce resource, the White House Task Force had asked DLA to send DHHS its first 3,000. On April 21, the department inquired about increasing this number by 1,188.⁹⁴ Supporting this request meant subtracting 4,188 from the original order.

DLA faced another problem the same day. A misunderstanding over whether Ford Motor Company or DLA Distribution would deliver face shields resulted in the agency advertising them as free of charge.⁹⁵ When the agency learned that it would be responsible for distribution, it

⁹⁴ Notes, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, "5x8s," 22 Apr 2020, p. 9, Historian Files.

⁹⁵ Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, COVID Senior Leader Sync, 21 Apr 2020, p. 4, Historian Files; Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, COVID Senior Leader Sync, 24 Apr 2020, p. 4, Historian Files; Notes, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, "5x8s," 22 Apr 2020, p. 14, Historian Files; Notes, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, "5x8s," 24 Apr 2020, p. 9, Historian Files; RFI response, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, 1 Jul 2020, p. 2, Historian Files.

added shipping costs, causing units to cancel orders.⁹⁶ DLA's national account managers had to go back to the Services and explain that the shields, while no longer free, were still a good deal.⁹⁷

At the same time, DLA was reversing itself on the Ford donation, it was realizing an advantage more fortuitous than planned. Judged by purchase requests and dollar value, Industrial Hardware was the agency's smallest supply chain. Once boasting its own supply center, it had been subordinated to DLA Troop Support in the 1993 Base Realignment and Closure round. Searching for efficiency, Lt. Gen. Williams decided in late 2019 to divide its business between DLA Land & Maritime and DLA Aviation. Starting shortly before COVID-19, this transfer allowed the Columbus and Richmond commands to lighten DLA Troop Support's load.⁹⁸

Another development dealt with swabs. On Wednesday, April 22, DLA Troop Support reported problems getting the item aboard the USS *Theodore Roosevelt*, then stationed off Guam. The swabs were in Alaska and the next flight to the island was not until Saturday.⁹⁹ Such situations require people who know how to solve problems. Fortunately for DLA, Navy Captain Kristin Acquavella and her DLA Indo-Pacific team got the order moving.

DLA made progress on a significant mission and learned that it could receive a new one April 23. That Thursday, DLA Troop Support awarded a \$110 million contract for nursing home PPE.¹⁰⁰ The company chosen would kit and deliver a two-week supply of gloves, gowns, goggles, testing kits, and other items to over 15,000 nursing homes.¹⁰¹ DLA Troop Support entered into the agreement the same day that Representative Jamie Raskin of Maryland's Eighth

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Brf, ASOC, DLA, "COVID-19 Senior Leader Sync," 21 Apr 2020, p. 8, Historian Files.

⁹⁹ Notes, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, Prep Session for JATF, 22 Apr 2020, Historian Files.

¹⁰⁰ Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, COVID Senior Leader Sync, 23 Apr 2020, p. 3, Historian Files.

¹⁰¹ The contract included two tranches, the first priced at \$43.3 million and the second at \$66.7 million. Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, COVID Senior Leader Sync, 24 Apr 2020, p. 3, Historian Files.

Congressional District introduced a bill that, among other things, would establish a Health Equipment Production Board under DLA.

The agency spent April 24 preparing for normal operations. DLA Human Resources established a working group to develop courses of action. With employees in multiple worldwide jurisdictions, developing options was not easy. In a sign that military units were making similar preparations, U.S. Army Forces Command requested 300 non-invasive thermometers.¹⁰² DLA planned to ship the instruments from Distribution Depot Susquehanna April 25.

Developments over the weekend continued to indicate progress. On Saturday, U.S. Northern Command placed the continental United States in Phase IV, Stabilize.¹⁰³ On Sunday, DHHS and the Department of Veterans signed an agreement that matched Battelle's excess capacity to the department's need for respirators.¹⁰⁴

DLA had to develop its own solutions April 27. That Monday, DLA Troop Support briefed that its contractor for the nursing home operation would not be able to fulfill its agreement. Adjusting quickly, the command chose a vendor that had submitted a more expensive bid.¹⁰⁵ Brig. Gen. Lawrence worked with Brig. Gen. Sanford on the Supply Chain Task Force to secure additional money. Another decision April 27 regarded swabs. Many substitutes for this testing kit item were appearing on the market. In his morning meeting, Lt. Gen. Williams informed leaders that DLA would buy from only Copan Diagnostics until the medical health community approved other manufacturers.¹⁰⁶ Fortunately for DLA, Air Force Maj. Gen. Lee Payne, an assistant director at Defense Health Agency, had just been detailed to the Supply

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ FRAGO, USNORTHCOM, 121.083 to OPORD 01-17 (Response to COVID-19), 25 Apr 2020, p. 1, Historian Files.

¹⁰⁴ Brf, ASOC, DLA "COVID-19 Senior Leader Sync," 20 Apr 2020, p. 5, Historian Files.

¹⁰⁵ Notes, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, "5x8s," 28 Apr 2020, p. 1, Historian Files.

¹⁰⁶ Notes, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, Prep Session for JATF Sync, 27 Apr 2020, Historian Files.

Chain Task Force as the nation's testing kit tsar.¹⁰⁷ Having Sanford also on the task force meant the agency had an inside source to authoritative information.

Coordination at the federal level gave DLA a new mission. On April 28, the White House Task Force decided the agency would procure PPE for FEMA and DHHS.¹⁰⁸ FEMA needed to focus on the hurricane season and DHHS wanted both the Strategic National Stockpile and state stockpiles refilled. In all, DLA Troop Support would purchase for 78 locations: 10 for FEMA; 12 for DHHS; and 56 for states, territories, and the national capital. DLA Distribution would conduct deliveries.

While FEMA and DHHS wanted N95 respirators, military units preferred cloth masks. At first, they ordered the white masks donated by Hanes, with 5.3 million requested by late April. Later, black masks made by a Puerto Rican clothing & textile manufacturer proved more popular. The company shipped the masks to DLA depots, which routed them in accordance with a plan devised by the Defense Medical Logistics Enterprise Working Group and communicated by national account managers.

Progress on other transactions marked the last three days in April. On the 29th, FEMA gave DLA \$690,000 for disposable face shields. The mission assignment stipulated that the agency deliver 750,000 on May 12 and 750,000 on May 24.¹⁰⁹ On the 30th, the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment announced that DLA would buy \$75.5 million worth of swabs from the company activated under the Defense Production Act.¹¹⁰ Also on April 30, DLA Acquisition began researching if it could accept a hand sanitizer donation

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Notes, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, "5x8s," 5 May 2020, pp. 1-2, Historian Files.

¹⁰⁹ Notes, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, Prep Session for JATF Sync, 27 Apr 2020, Historian Files.

¹¹⁰ Article, Aaron Mehta, "Defense Department Starts Investing in Companies that Make Test Kit Materials," *Washington Examiner*, 30 Apr 2020, DLA Media Clips, 1 May 2020.

from Anheuser Busch.¹¹¹ The next day, 1,400 ventilators arrived. As negotiated, the agency distributed them to FEMA-designated locations.¹¹² Finally, DLA Troop Support's nursing home contractor began receiving items at its warehouse in eastern Maryland.¹¹³

Before the kits left, DLA learned that New York City no longer needed a medical facility at the Javits Center. The structure was disassembled while the 9th and 531st Hospitals departed. In all, DLA Troop Support had provided material worth \$192,000 to the facility.¹¹⁴ As the week continued, ventilators re-emerged as a problem. While the agency had delivered the respiratory devices to the FEMA warehouse in Atlanta, it learned that the Defense Department was going to investigate its purchases.¹¹⁵

Other actions that week showed the agency responding with agility. On May 6, operations officers began planning for international support. With President Trump determined to share America's abundance with other nations, DLA had to be ready for a massive increase in PPE, ventilator, and testing equipment demand. On May 7, the first nursing home received DLA-provided material.¹¹⁶ Receipt occurred only 17 days after the White House announced its intention to assist.¹¹⁷ On Sunday, May 10, DLA learned that it had to recall 515,000 facemasks it had provided the Army. The masks came from China and, despite what was written on the labels, were not certified. DLA returned the masks to DLA Distribution Susquehanna while the contractor absorbed the loss.¹¹⁸

¹¹¹ Brf, ASOC, DLA, "COVID-19 Senior Leader Sync," 1 May 2020, p. 26, Historian Files.

¹¹² Notes, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, Prep Session for JATF Sync, 1 May 2020, Historian Files.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Brf, ASOC, DLA, "COVID-19 Senior Leader Sync," 4 May 2020, p. 13, Historian Files.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 5; RFI response, ASOC, DLA, 1 Jul 2020, p. 3, Historian Files.

¹¹⁶ Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, COVID Senior Leader Sync, 7 May 2020, p. 2, Historian Files.

¹¹⁷ Notes, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, Prep Session for JATF Sync, 11 May 2020, Historian Files.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

Developments on long-term projects demanded DLA responses Monday, May 11. That morning, Brig. Gen. Lawrence briefed that the company delivering PPE to nursing homes had run into subcontractor and customs problems.¹¹⁹ To ensure it could buy gowns, DLA Troop Support shared contacts with industry and the State Department.¹²⁰ The same day, Brig. Gen. Lawrence joined Lt. Gen. Williams and Mr. Matthew R. Beebe, the agency's senior procurement executive, in discussing DLA's assumption of FEMA's PPE mission. The assumption involved DLA General Counsel because the agency, unlike government purchasers outside the Defense Department, could use foreign vendors only if no alternative existed. While subjecting more federal orders to this restriction was legally complicated, it had the potential to increase business for domestic manufacturers.

Large Replenishments and Small Businesses (May 18 – June 30)

DLA's coronavirus response entered a new phase in mid-May. The shock to the system – an abrupt change in mission and work environment – had been absorbed. Stability in provision had been achieved; experts in DLA Logistics Policy and Strategic Programs, DLA Research and Development, and the DLA Analytics Center of Excellence were devising tools to help the fight. After mid-May, support continued but questions on obligating authority began to be raised, discussions on when and how to bring the workforce back dominated meetings, long-ago pouch and ventilator orders began arriving, and replenishment strategies were devised.

¹¹⁹ Interv, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, with Army Brig Gen Gavin A. Lawrence, Cdr, DLA Troop Support, 1 Jul 2020, Historian Files.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

Replenishing the Strategic National Stockpile involved massive purchases. The agency would obtain items but not warehouse them: a partial realization of Representative Slotkin's plan. On the day DLA received this mission, John B. Larson, a colleague of Slotkin's representing the First District of Connecticut, introduced a bill to have DLA lead the medical portion of the nation's testing program. With the agency already purchasing swabs and transport tubes, the bill would grant its current activity legislative authority.

Testing, universally recognized as key to arresting the virus, was not the only federal effort being pursued. Institutions across the globe were racing for a vaccine. On May 15, the Trump administration initiated a public-private partnership to accelerate efforts.¹²¹ The chief operating officer of Operation WARP SPEED was General Gustave F. Perna, a former DLA Troop Support commander. His program focused on three areas: development, manufacturing, and distribution. DLA expected to provide PPE for clinical trials and possibly participate in distribution.

The administration established Operation WARP SPEED over the weekend. On Monday, the agency took two actions and registered one development. The first action was the work of DLA Troop Support. With the agreement to replenish the Strategic National Stockpile about to be finalized, the command held an industry day to judge contractor interest. Lt. Gen. Williams took the second action when he sent the nursing home contractor a letter expressing concern over its slow delivery. The company responded by running three shifts and opening a second kitting

¹²¹ Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, COVID Senior Leader Sync, 15 May 2020, p. 2, Historian Files; Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, J3 Wrap Up, 18 May 2020, p. 2, Historian Files; Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, J3 Wrap Up, 21 May 2020, p. 4, Historian Files.

facility.¹²² Finally, DLA learned that another 872 ventilators had arrived at the DHHS warehouse in Atlanta.¹²³ This second delivery occurred only 55 days after ordering.

Corporate developments defined the following day. First, the agency received \$22 million in Title III money for its clothing & textile supply chain.¹²⁴ Help was needed because 19 of the 259 clothing & textile companies had yet to reopen.¹²⁵ Agency leaders decided to invest the money in four dress and six utility companies.¹²⁶ The agency also learned that it would receive \$450 million for Tranche 1 of the Strategic National Stockpile replenishment and be responsible for refilling Army prepositioned stock on the Korean peninsula.¹²⁷ Hit early by COVID-19, United States Forces Korea had pulled PPE from its wartime inventory as well as requesting it from the states.¹²⁸ With the command experiencing few cases by the third full week of May, attention shifted to future outbreaks.

Developments the week before Memorial Day returned DLA's focus to the United States. On Wednesday, May 21, the agency learned that the Department of Veterans Affairs wanted to establish its own Warstopper program.¹²⁹ Success is imitation by others. On Thursday, Ms. Lord accepted the Anheuser-Busch's hand sanitizer donation on DLA's behalf.¹³⁰ The brewing company, not the agency, would distribute bottles.¹³¹ The following day, the Defense

¹²² Notes, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, Prep Session for JATF Sync, 19 May 2020, Historian Files; Interv, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, with Army Brig Gen Gavin A. Lawrence, Cdr, DLA Troop Support, 1 Jul 2020, Historian Files.

¹²³ Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, COVID Senior Leader Sync, 20 May 2020, p. 4, Historian Files.

¹²⁴ Notes, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, "5x8s," 19 May 2020, p. 4, Historian Files.

¹²⁵ Notes, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, Prep Session for JATF Sync, 19 May 2020, Historian Files.

¹²⁶ Notes, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, "5x8s," 19 May 2020, p. 4, Historian Files.

¹²⁷ Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, J3 Wrap Up, 18 May 2020, p. 2, Historian Files; Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, COVID Senior Leader Sync, 20 May 2020, p. 3, Historian Files, pp. 3-4.

¹²⁸ RFI Response, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, 1 Jul 2020, p. 1, Historian Files.

¹²⁹ Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, COVID Senior Leader Sync, 20 May 2020, p. 4, Historian Files.

¹³⁰ Notes, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, "5x8s," 27 May 2020, p. 4, Historian Files.

¹³¹ Notes, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, Prep Session for JATF Sync, 27 May 2020, Historian Files.

Department comptroller informed the agency that it would receive \$1 billion in obligating authority for COVID-19 purchases and \$25 million for non-COVID ones.¹³²

The day after Memorial Day, DLA Disposition Services released noteworthy data on its inventory. To date, the command had processed 2,877 coronavirus-related orders. Totalling \$14,660,082.38, these transactions constituted a major contribution to America's defense against the virus. They also illustrated that DLA brought stewardship as well as contracting experience to the national response.

Despite success at scaling up operations, DLA had not been resourced to support a government-wide mission.¹³³ The Warstopper program had backorders it could not fill. Worse, the company providing N95 respirators for the program had to request a six-month extension to its restocking agreement due to a conflicting order from the White House.¹³⁴ To discuss a response, Mr. William J. Kenny, DLA Troop Support's lead procurement officer; Mr. George W. Atwood III, the DLA Logistics Policy and Strategic Programs director; and Mr. Beebe considered six proposals for a future-state solution and chose three for further study.¹³⁵

DLA's overall response was also being studied. The agency had been composing after-action reviews throughout May. Helped by the DLA Center for Lessons Learned, the Agency Synchronization and Operations Center had started identifying strategic lessons in late April and continued until Lt. Gen. Williams briefed Pentagon leadership on May 26.¹³⁶ Outside studies

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ While DLA's charter, Department of Defense Directive 5105.22 (29 June 2017), lists support to "federal agencies" as part of the organization's mission, it mentions that communications "with other federal agencies" should be "as appropriate" and according to DoD [Department of Defense] policy." DODD 5105.22, "Defense Logistics Agency (DLA)," 29 Jun 2017, pp. 3, 12 [<https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals>].

¹³⁴ RFI response, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, 1 Jul 2020, Historian Files.

¹³⁵ Notes, J3 DAG, J3 Wrap Up, 27 May 2020, p. 4, Historian Files.

¹³⁶ See Brf, Joe Brooks, ASOC, DLA, "DLA Joint Lesson Learned: COVID-19 (Session 1)," 30 Apr 2020, Historian Files and Brf, Army Lt Gen Darrel K. Williams, Dir, DLA, "DLA Coronavirus Support: Lessons Learned," 26 May 2020, Historian Files.

included investigations by the Defense Department and the Government Accountability Office, each with five lines of inquiry.¹³⁷

Responding to these investigations did not stop DLA from solving problems. On May 29, DLA Acquisition and DLA Information Operations finished developing a corridor on the agency's e-commerce platform through which small businesses could purchase PPE, something they had heretofore found difficult. Building the corridor entailed design, testing, deployment, and advertising. To locate vendors, acquisition officials looked for companies that had registered with the agency but missed out on earlier orders.¹³⁸ They identified 138 possibilities.¹³⁹

DLA dealt with several problems 4 June. First, limited demand forced the agency to reduce its ventilator order from Combat Medical.¹⁴⁰ DHHS wanted only 1,200 of the 2,500 the company was prepared to make. DLA Troop Support also considered cancelling its contract with Hamilton, as only the Army expressed interest in the model. In the end, DLA requested just 1,188 of the 2,500 the company said it would produce.¹⁴¹ Subtracting ventilators not ordered left 5,388, or 2,612 fewer than the 8,000 planned.

While ventilators were less a problem than first expected, PPE was more so. Tranches 3 and 4 of the nursing home operation would be massive, with more recipients and more items per recipient than the first two tranches.¹⁴² Combined with replenishing the Strategic National Stockpile and Army prepositioned stock in Korea, supplying nursing homes would task the

¹³⁷ Brf, ASOC, DLA, "COVID-19 Senior Leader Sync," 27 May 2020, p. 23, Historian Files.

¹³⁸ Notes, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, "5x8s," 27 May 2020, pp. 5-6, Historian Files.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Notes, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, Prep Session for JATF Sync, 4 Jun 2020, Historian Files.

¹⁴¹ Notes, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, "5x8s," 22 Jun 2020, p. 5, Historian Files.

¹⁴² Notes, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, Prep Session for JATF Sync, 4 Jun 2020, Historian Files.

country's industrial base.¹⁴³ Even with the director signing non-availability decisions, the worry national leaders once expressed for ventilators could become a reality for PPE.¹⁴⁴

Other problems kept leaders concerned. One was the industrial base. While some companies had reopened, 75 had not.¹⁴⁵ Their status – about to reopen, considering a partial reopen, planning to stay closed – affected supply chains. Employees from DLA Acquisition had called every company that had shut its doors; on June 9, they started calling again.¹⁴⁶ A second concern was the small business corridor on the agency's e-commerce platform. Only 1 of the 138 suppliers identified as having potential interest had registered. Ten other companies had attended a meeting about the proposal but expressed concern over lack of upfront money.¹⁴⁷ DLA Acquisition considered including suppliers not yet registered.¹⁴⁸ Doing so might be necessary, as Defense Department General Counsel had just approved the corridor's extension to state and local governments.¹⁴⁹ More small business buyers required more small business suppliers.

DLA's use of small businesses thus far had been impressive. As of June 15, 56.5% of coronavirus expenditures came from the sector, a share outpacing the agency's already-high averages.¹⁵⁰ DLA cared about not just the sector but also the companies in it. Soon after the crisis hit, the agency's Procurement Technical Assistance Centers, part of the DLA Small Business Programs, fielded questions about closures.¹⁵¹ The centers counselled customers while their parent office pulled in new ones – all through virtual means.¹⁵²

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, COVID Senior Leader Sync, 20 May 2020, p. 4, Historian Files.

¹⁴⁵ Notes, COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, "5x8s," 9 Jun 2020, p. 3, Historian Files.

¹⁴⁶ Notes, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, Prep Session for JATF Sync, 9 Jun 2020, Historian Files.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Brf, ASOC, DLA, "COVID-19 Senior Leader Sync," 17 Jun 2020, p. 7, Historian Files.

¹⁵¹ Interv, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, with Dwight Deneal, Dir, Small Business Programs, DLA, 2 Apr 2020, Historian Files.

¹⁵² Ibid.

Unfortunately, market conditions limited the degree to which the agency could rely on small businesses going forward. Although the backbone of the American economy, these companies did not produce enough PPE.¹⁵³ With the agency authorized to spend \$781 million for Tranche 2 of the Strategic National Stockpile replenishment, it had to consider foreign vendors.¹⁵⁴ To address this contingency, DLA Troop Support pursued a tiered strategy in which all domestic sources – large and small – were exhausted before looking at semi-domestic and foreign ones.¹⁵⁵ Small American businesses were lumped with larger ones but, with volume considerable, assured orders.

DLA's small businesses would also receive a boost from the agency's special e-commerce corridor, which was having fewer problems than first suspected. By June 16, four vendors had registered and seven more were in the process.¹⁵⁶ By June 19, six had registered and seventeen were interested.¹⁵⁷ Focus shifted to advertisement. The corridor had to be known for it to be used. Fortunately for DLA, it had a small business office to spread the word.

Worries that vendors would not be found for the Strategic National Stockpile replenishment also proved unfounded. The White House Supply Chain Task Force had prioritized the Strategic National Stockpile replenishment ahead of other replenishments. Without having to worry about Army requests or nursing home deliveries, DLA Troop Support made progress.¹⁵⁸ On June 6, it awarded a contract for 18,407,900 gloves at \$16.6 million to an

¹⁵³ Notes, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, Prep Session for JATF Sync, 9 Jun 2020, Historian Files.

¹⁵⁴ Brf, ASOC, DLA, "COVID-19 Senior Leader Sync," 12 Jun 2020, p. 29, Historian Files. DHHS advanced DLA money for both the first (\$459 million) and second (\$781 million) replenishment trache. The Defense-wide Capital Fund could not cover expenses that large.

¹⁵⁵ Email, Kimberly A. Villarreal, Chf, Acquisition Sppt Grp, DLA, to Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, 2 Aug 2020, Historian Files.

¹⁵⁶ Notes, DLA COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, "5x8s," 15 Jun 2020, p. 5, Historian Files.

¹⁵⁷ Notes, DLA COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, "5x8s," 22 Jun 2020, p. 2, Historian Files.

¹⁵⁸ Interv, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, with Army Brig Gen Gavin A. Lawrence, Cdr, DLA Troop Support, 1 Jul 2020, Historian Files.

existing prime vendor.¹⁵⁹ On June 10, it awarded similarly-large contacts for face shields and goggles.¹⁶⁰ The vendor was domestic.¹⁶¹ Bids for isolation gowns and surgical masks had also received many proposals.¹⁶² By the third full week of June, it looked as if DHHS would have its PPE replaced before a second coronavirus wave hit in the fall.

After a month and a half in which nursing home deliveries and DHHS replenishment had characterized the agency's response, FEMA sent DLA a new mission assignment. The Department of Homeland Security subordinate had received 5,000 pallets of surgical gowns in late June.¹⁶³ DLA agreed to store them at its Albany and New Cumberland depots until December 31.¹⁶⁴

With no additional mission assignments or interagency agreements expected, half a year into 2020 is a convenient place to close this paper. Nationally, deaths from the virus, which had once surpassed 2,000 per day, were now a quarter that number. Businesses were reopening and race protests competed with the coronavirus for press coverage. Some agency teleworkers began returning to their offices and military units responding to the crisis were asking for less fuel from DLA Energy.¹⁶⁵ DLA had closed its ventilator orders and started replenishing stockpiles. Ending in June has another advantage. The agency's response to the coronavirus had been driven by the experience, leadership, and personality of Lt. Gen. Williams. With his departure pending, it makes sense to end this history with the end of his tour.

¹⁵⁹ Notes, DLA COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, "5x8s," 27 Jun 2020, p. 4, Historian Files.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Email, Kimberly A. Villarreal, Chf, Acquisition Sppt Grp, DLA, to Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, 2 Aug 2020, Historian Files.

¹⁶² Notes, DLA COVID-19 Task Force, DLA, "5x8s," 27 Jun 2020, p. 4, Historian Files.

¹⁶³ Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, COVID Senior Leader Sync, 25 Jun 2020, p. 1, Historian Files.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ In all, DLA Energy had issued 4.4 million gallons of fuel in support of efforts to defeat COVID-19. Email, Irene M. Smith, Public Affairs Officer, DLA Energy, to Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, 13 Aug 2020 Historian Files.

Conclusion

Much of what helped DLA respond to the coronavirus involved its structure, role in the Defense Department, and lessons learned. The biggest advantage the agency held dated to its formation in 1961. Placing the wholesale provision of common supplies under one headquarters allowed that headquarters to respond to crises. While DLA Troop Support's supply chains bore the burden of procurement, their connection with the rest of the agency gave them breadth, redundancy, and efficiency they never would have had if still under Navy bureaus and Army quartermaster departments. In addition, the headquarters' 24-hour Agency Synchronization and Operations Center provided coordination possible only under a consolidated logistical command.

The second biggest advantage was also in existence since the beginning of DLA. While only one item used to counter the virus – ventilators – was expensive, the vast quantity of relatively inexpensive equipment meant that the agency had to spend billions. Mission assignments from FEMA were not a concern because DLA received upfront money. Neither were large expenditures such as the Strategic National Stockpile replenishment, which came with cash advances. Other purchases, however, were paid for only after delivery. Of the \$927 million obligated for COVID-19 in April, for example, only \$131 million was advanced.¹⁶⁶ The working capital fund covered the remaining \$796 million.¹⁶⁷

Creating a defense agency dedicated to logistical issues not only consolidated purchasing power but also permitted investments in analysis, technology, and information management. Concentrated under one headquarters, this expertise resulted in patterns of PPE usage being identified, PPE needs being predicted, displays of on-hand material being created, and additive

¹⁶⁶ Brf, J8, DLA, "J8 Answer to Historian Question," 30 Apr 2020, p. 1, Historian Files.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

manufacturing being used. Others in the headquarters monitored the industrial base, responded to investigations, worked the legalities involved in accepting responsibilities from other agencies, ensured that employees could telework, and planned for the safe return of the workforce.

DLA benefited from its experiences as well as its structure, funding system, and expertise. A learning organization, the agency had made improvements before the crisis that permitted it agile responses during it. Its work on G-invoicing paid dividends when supporting customers outside the Defense Department. Developing a contracting vehicle for high-tech companies allowed face shields to be produced by additive manufacturing. Most advantageous, however, was the Warstopper program. Devised in response to lessons learned during the first Gulf War, the program provided PPE when the Services and nation needed it most. It proved so successful that the Department of Veterans Affairs decided to mimic it and other agencies requested briefings.¹⁶⁸

Unfortunately for DHHS and FEMA, the Warstopper program could not cover all requests. The program was resourced for the military's go-to-war requirements and could not match national demand. COVID-19 presented a contagion whose deadliness the country had not seen since 1918. By the end of June, over 2,500,000 Americans had caught the virus and over 126,000 had died. Despite these numbers, it was difficult incentivizing suppliers to increase production.¹⁶⁹ Companies had to be convinced that the need was permanent. While anxious to help, they had to know it was profitable to do so.

Even factoring in problems with the industrial base, DLA's performance during the coronavirus was impressive. Combining FEMA mission assignments and DHHS interagency

¹⁶⁸ Email, Kimberly A. Villarreal, Chf, Acquisition Sptt Grp, DLA, to Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, 2 Aug 2020, Historian Files.

¹⁶⁹ Interv, Colin J. Williams, Historian, DLA, with Army Brig Gen Gavin A. Lawrence, Cdr, DLA Troop Support, 1 Jul 2020, Historian Files.

agreements, the agency had committed to providing \$1.8 billion in material.¹⁷⁰ This figure did not account for the PPE procured for the Services or the special United States Forces Korea request. Adding normal order processing, the agency had conducted over 13,000 contract actions.¹⁷¹

Contract actions took a great deal of work. Nonetheless, like the warehouse employees in DLA Distribution who worked no-notice overtime on Friday nights to ensure delivery suspenses were met, acquisition officials rose to the challenge. What is perhaps most impressive about DLA's COVID-19 response is that employees never forgot they were saving lives. More than anything else, it was the agency's culture – a widely held commitment to serving customers and country – that helped them remember. As Lt. Gen. Williams often said, people are the “secret sauce” of DLA. Organizational pride drove the agency's many accomplishments during the first five months of the coronavirus.

The past is prelude to the future. To ready DLA for what comes next, lessons must be incorporated as well as learned. If congressional interest is any indication, the agency will be responding to pandemics in the future. Leaders should embrace this possibility and determine if fulfilling domestic orders on the scale needed to combat an outbreak requires changing DLA's organization, authorities, or personnel. If so, then they should request that the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment update the agency's charter.

Any history of DLA's response to the coronavirus would be incomplete without mentioning cost. DLA has over 26,000 employees. Like the rest of the world, they had to social distance, stay at home, and wear masks. Tragically, 71 caught the virus and 3 died. Defeating this disease matters not just to the country but also to the legacy of those no longer with us.

¹⁷⁰ Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, COVID Senior Leader Sync, 25 Jun 2020, p. 2, Historian Files.

¹⁷¹ Brf, ASOC, DLA, “COVID-19 Senior Leader Sync,” 25 Jun 2020, p. 4, Historian Files.

Epilogue

DLA continued to support efforts to combat the coronavirus in July and August. DLA Troop Support worked National Stockpile reconstitution; became involved with DHHS's test site surge; and, as expected, provided PPE for Operation WARP SPEED. It also continued acquiring PPE for nursing homes and researched a contract for 150 million quick-return test kits for school children.¹⁷² This massive purchase, if approved, would occur in September. Unfortunately, the agency also suffered more COVID-19 cases and two more deaths.¹⁷³

¹⁷² Trnspt, Guy Beougher, Dep Dir, DLA Logistics Operations, "DLA Director's Global Town Hall," 25 Aug 2020, p. 24, Historian Files; Notes, J3 DAG, DLA, J3 Wrap Up, 26 Aug 2020, pp. 3-4, Historian Files.

¹⁷³ Brf, ASOC, DLA, "COVID-19 Senior Leader Sync," 20 Aug 2020, p. 11, Historian Files.