

The OSD Logistics Fellows Program - A Glimpse From Above

By Bryan Jerkatis

A friend and retired USAF Command Chief would often use an analogy with young troops regarding the differences in their world views versus those of their leadership. “Your view of the ground (truth) depends upon the height of the branch in the tree upon which you are standing...” he would explain. Nearly three million men and women make up the Department of Defense (DoD); how few truly have opportunity for gaining insight and understanding of the origins of legislation, budget, policy, and oversight? The Office of the Secretary of Defense’s (OSD) Logistics Fellowship provides selected logisticians the opportunity to broaden one’s perspective and consider other points of view.

The OSD Logistics Fellows Program is open to field grade officers (04-05) and DoD civilian equivalent (GS 13-14) logisticians. This one-year, unit funded fellowship is a developmental assignment, with a goal to provide an atmosphere that fosters learning, growth, and experiential opportunities. The program is administered by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Logistics and Materiel Readiness. Fellows have the unique opportunity to participate in policy formulation and Department wide oversight responsibilities.

Fellows are fortunate to travel and tour both the public and private sectors in order to observe, contrast, and learn firsthand how logistics operations compare in private industry and benchmark best practices. Fellows, through visits to Congress, gain exposure and insight into the legislative processes. They’re also able to attend national level forums and engage in collaborative efforts with industry partners. Depending on assignments, Fellows may have the opportunity to visit and become familiar with other government agencies as well. Perhaps even more important, the fellowship affords participants opportunities to observe and interact with both appointed and career senior executives, and flag officers, including “one-on-one” meetings with senior logistics leaders in the military departments, Joint Staff, OSD and agencies.

The insights and “big picture” knowledge to be gained are virtually endless, and the Fellows themselves determine much of their training and class agendas. During my fellowship, I was tasked to resolve a long standing logistics policy challenge within the Department and was also given considerable leeway to gain needed expertise, and formulate a recommendation, which led to publication of a new Department of Defense Directive. Other fellows led financial accountability program initiatives, participated in Department level awards processes, led world-wide maintenance symposiums, participated in source selection committees and a number of other Department-level initiatives. Lastly, there’s a fellowship component to the OSD Logistics Fellowship. Fellows share a common bond, form a support structure and face many diverse challenges together. The OSD Logistics Fellows Program provides an opportunity to forge life long bonds and friendships with other logistics professionals and build networking capabilities which will serve them for the remainder of their careers and beyond. Upon completion, fellows return to their sponsoring organizations or follow-on assignments with increased management skills, technical expertise, and networks that span the department.

The OSD Logistics Fellows Program provides DoD logisticians not only a rich experiential odyssey but, perhaps more important, the opportunity to obtain a deeper understanding of the OSD perspective and how it affects the DoD enterprise.

Mr Jerkatis was a member of the OSD Logistics Fellows Class of 2015-2016.