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Combat engineers of the 902nd Engineer Company (Vertical), 15th Engineer Battalion, 18th Engineer Brigade, 21st Theater Sustainment Command, build the skeleton of a pole barn baggage storage area at Mihail Kogalniceanu Air Base, Romania. (Photo by 1st Sgt. Clifton Morehouse)

ransit Center Planning
perational Level

■ By Maj. David L. Thompson

U.S. Army Europe prepared for the closure of the transit center at Manas Air Base in Kyrgyzstan by establishing a new transit center in Romania.

As operations ended at the passenger transit center at Manas, Kyrgyzstan, U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR) planners had an opportunity to shape the fight in Afghanistan and prepare for future force projection contingencies while working through resourcing constraints.

In August 2013, the U.S. European Command (EUCOM) directed USAREUR to establish a passenger transit center at Mihail Kogalniceanu (MK), a small community with an international airport near Constanta, Romania, along the eastern coast of the Black Sea.

The location in Romania already had a remote forward operating site adjacent to the MK International Airport. A small U.S. Army presence kept the site minimally operational in anticipation of a contingency operation, for which it could increase base operations if necessary.

The Army used the site to exercise several small-scale proofs of principle that tested the Army's ability to transload deploying and redeploying personnel. Those exercises, however, did not increase the infrastructure or establish a permanent mission command for a larger, enduring transload mission. Planning, establishing, and executing a passenger transit center proved to be an extremely significant effort.

Intermediate Staging Base

Current Army doctrine defines an intermediate staging base (ISB) as a secure staging base established near, but not in, an area of operations. An ISB is task-organized to perform staging, support, and distribution functions as specified or implied by the service support plan or annex in support of the combatant commander's war plan or operation order.

Although joint doctrine discusses the concept of the ISB, it lacks a framework for planning. Once an ISB is established, the theater logistics headquarters continues to assess the ISB's mission and adjusts its organization in view of sustainment requirements and available resources.

For operations at MK, the only requirement was for passenger transload from commercial-to-military and military-to-commercial aircraft. This significantly reduced the requirements for materials-handling equipment and staging areas needed for vehicles and containers at a typical staging base. The scope of personnel required to manage and operate the site also could be scaled down.

Predeployment activities typically performed at the transit center at Manas would not be transferred to MK. By eliminating all equipping and training activities, the transient time on the ground was reduced to no more than 48 hours. The existing MK infrastructure allowed for flexibility, but the ISB needed to expand or its limits would create serious congestion.

Initial Planning

With fewer than 150 days until the initial operating capability milestone, the USAREUR operational planning team (OPT) established a rigid planning timeline. The timeline focused efforts on site visits, engineering efforts, and course of action (COA) decisions linked to mission command, manning, and equipping to meet the minimum initial operating capability (IOC) requirements. The planning timeline also included a rehearsal of concept drill and a key leader terrain walk.

The October 2013 government shutdown created a planning gap of more than two weeks. As planning transitioned into COA development, fiscal realities created a forcing function to look for the most responsible solutions that met requirements within the time constraints to IOC.

Within 30 days of the warning order, action officers from EUCOM, the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), the U.S. Transportation Command (TRANSCOM), and USAREUR met at MK for a site visit and initial planning conference. Representatives from the Romanian

Soldiers with the 902nd Engineer Company (Vertical), 15th Engineer Battalion, 18th Engineer Brigade, 21st Theater Sustainment Command, build a roof during a construction project at the MK Air Base Passenger Transit Center on Jan. 14, 2014. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Warren W. Wright Jr.)

Ministry of Defense and MK airport also participated, providing their perspectives on current and emerging planning factors. The site visit allowed planners to facilitate shared understanding across the supported and supporting commands.

One month later, senior USAREUR staff officers conducted a site visit focused on processes and capabilities. The visiting USAREUR engineer and logistician analyzed the existing capability and the processes required to receive, integrate, and process passengers for movement. After returning to USAREUR headquarters, they issued detailed guidance to the OPT during COA development.

Deploying personnel would arrive on commercial aircraft at a transit center, where their baggage would be downloaded, separated, and palletized based on their final location in theater.

Redeploying personnel, who made up the bulk of personnel transitioning through MK, would arrive with baggage requiring customs clearance before it could be loaded onto commercial aircraft. All personnel, deploying and redeploying, would require clearance through Romanian immigration.

Course of Action Development

As planners developed the operational approach to attaining IOC, four lines of effort became clear. To meet its lead agent responsibilities, USAREUR must house, feed, care for, and move all inbound and outbound personnel. However, the problem set existed in an environment with fiscal constraints, sequestration, competing global missions, and a focus on an expeditionary footprint.

The commanding general of USAREUR provided guidance directing planners to ensure MK did not mirror the transit center at Manas in terms of large numbers of personnel and extensive infrastructure. This refined the planning effort and eliminated any dialogue on capabilities beyond the four lines of effort. (See Figure 1.)

House. Existing facilities at MK would house about 70 percent of the transient population. Planners

worked through limiting factors, including square-footage issues, bringing preventive medicine measures up to standard, identifying facility engineers to expand public works capacity, and integrating contracting personnel into the OPT.

Feed. Half of MK's existing dining facility was used as a passenger terminal during previous proof of principle exercises. A much higher transient population would require a stand-alone passenger terminal and increased serving and seating capacity at the dining facility. Expanded hours and a fourth meal period were added to the services contract in order to accommodate 24-hour passenger transload operations during the full operating capability period.

Care for. As a remote and somewhat austere forward operating site, MK had no responsive emergency management capability. USAREUR planners conducted a comprehensive emergency management working group to identify medical treatment and evacuation requirements, fire response capabilities for the base camp and airfield, and available law enforcement support.

The emerging issues generated substantial human resources requirements that exceeded USAREUR's organic capability because of competing missions. Separate working groups generated equipping requirements and solutions for the medical, fire response, and law enforcement shortfalls.

Move. The fourth line of effort, move, was based on the requirement to establish a joint movement coordination center. Serving as the heartbeat of all passenger transit center operations, the joint movement coordination center would integrate all inbound and outbound activities with base operations capabilities while coordinating with CENTCOM for requirements and TRANSCOM for strategic capabilities.

Passenger Movement Facilities

Numerous options existed for establishing the customs facility, passenger terminal, and joint movement coordination center at MK. MK as a forward operating site consists of three distinct areas: the permanent forward operating site, the temporary forward operating site, and MK International Airport. Romanian immigration requirements created a mandatory stop for all personnel at the temporary forward operating site.

To centralize reception and departure activities, planners developed options using existing infrastructure, new temporary facilities, or a combination of both. In all cases, the logical flow of inbound and outbound transient personnel served as the driver for facility locations.

As rapid COA development continued, the key decisions were the physical location of essential reception and departure activities and the mission command construct. USAREUR moved forward with both decisions the week it received the joint staff and EUCOM execute

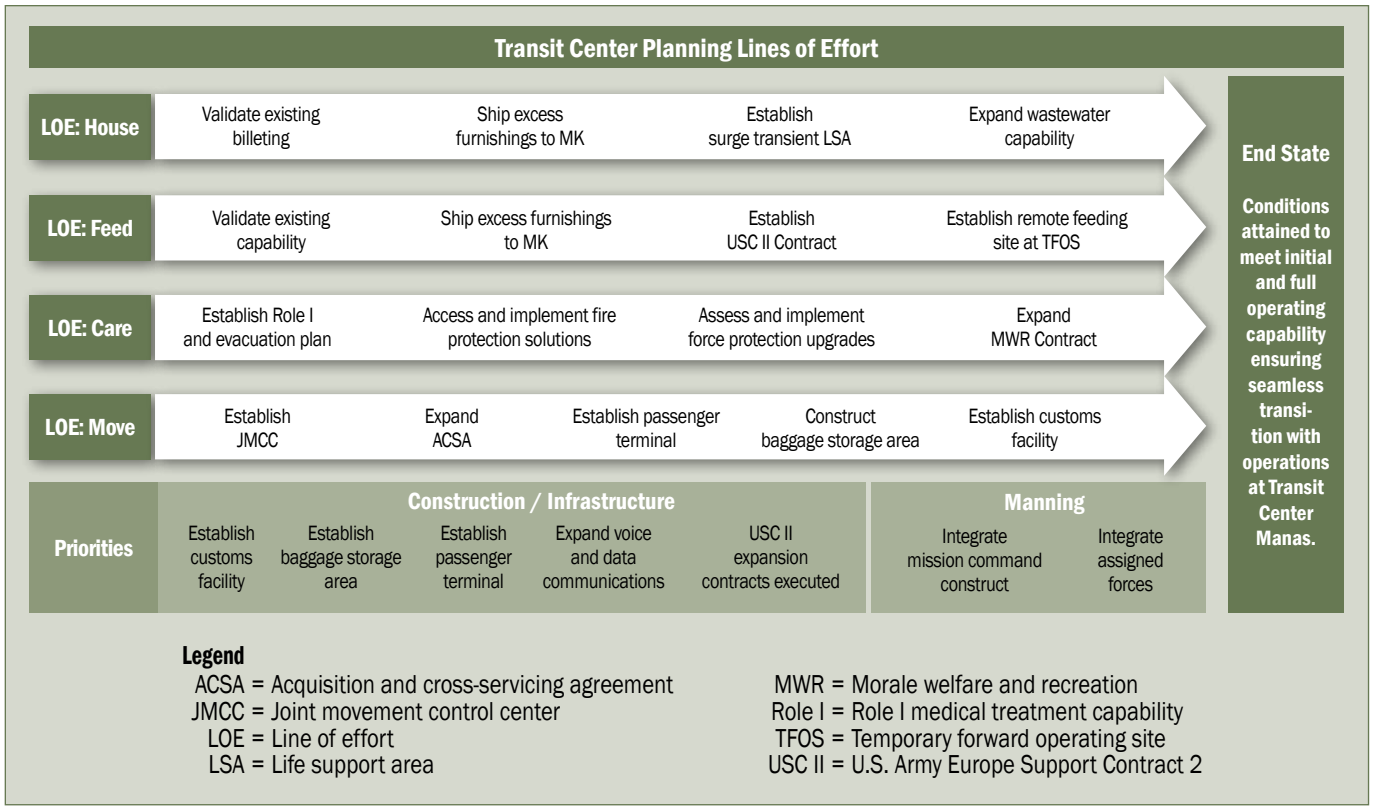

Figure 1. This chart compiles the actions taken to establish the transit center at MK Air Base in Romania.

orders, about 90 days before IOC.

USAREUR published its operation order three weeks later, directing the 21st Theater Sustainment Command (TSC) to provide overall mission command for passenger transit center operations. The order also directed contracting and engineering activities to establish the passenger terminal, customs facilities, and baggage storage areas on the temporary forward operating site. Once the COA was established and the infrastructure designed to facilitate the logical flow of transit center operations, manning and resourcing capabilities became the key concerns for the success of the operation.

Human Resources

All operational planners should apply the global force management (GFM) process. Understanding the flow and timeline of the GFM and Secretary of Defense Orders Book process is crucial for all planners in an operational headquarters.

For operations at MK, USAREUR's available force pool did not have all the capabilities needed to meet the mission requirements identified during mission analysis and COA development. For example, all movement control teams assigned to USAREUR were either deployed or in the Army Force Generation reset phase.

In conjunction with the USAREUR G–3/5 GFM branch, planners created requests for forces (RFFs) to meet movement control, law enforcement, customs, human resources, postal, facility engineering, religious support, and firefighting requirements. Before receiving the joint staff and EUCOM execute orders to conduct the passenger transit center mission, USAREUR provided EUCOM with the draft RFF.

For MK, the shortfalls identified and submitted using the RFF would eventually be validated and filled through joint staff sourcing directives. However, USAREUR worked with all subordinate organizations to generate short-term solutions to avoid mission failure at IOC. The bridging solutions allowed for a scaled-back capability that would meet the IOC requirement directed by EUCOM and the joint staff until the RFF-sourced organizations arrived.

Indirectly linked to the human resources planning effort is the overarching protection requirement for a passenger transit center. Within the USAREUR G–3 is the G–3/4 Protection Branch, consisting of theater-level antiterrorism, force protection, law enforcement, and emergency management planners.

As the situation and requirements at MK developed, the G–3/4 planners further codified the numerous protection gaps. In many cases, the gaps could be mitigated by having personnel conduct the necessary protective measures. However, the GFM process was used heavily to requisition the appropriate forces for fire response and law enforcement.

The USAREUR team, in conjunction with the U.S. Air Forces in Europe, sent emergency management planners to MK early in order to adequately assess requirements and existing capabilities and then develop COAs.

Mission Command

Although the OPT developed several options for mission command, the only logical COA was to use the TSC. The TSC is best suited because it links strategic-to-tactical support organizations. In execution, it would serve two fundamental purposes: to develop the detailed plans and processes required to support the USAREUR mission and to execute the common user logistics responsibilities.

Developing and refining the mission command construct as early as possible proved challenging for the OPT. Continuous horizontal and vertical dialogue on mission command ensured shared understanding across the formation, but a formal decision on the mission command construct was not attained until 90 days before IOC.

The USAREUR Black Sea Area Support Team provided mission command at MK during steady-state operations before the assumption of the passenger transit center mission. This team consisted of a small element with one military director and a civilian staff to coordinate life support for exercises and potential contingency staging. The team managed base operations similar to those of a garrison command, with the TSC-led mission command element that integrated movement control, aerial port, and base operations into a holistic, unified effort.

Equipping and Engineering

Because of MK's austere footprint, it lacked the equipment and facilities required to establish IOC. Specifically, USAREUR identified requirements in a number of core areas, including customs, a passenger terminal, communications, nontactical vehicles, surge transient billeting, and wastewater management.

Through coordination with U.S. Army Central, USAREUR G–4 planners resourced baggage and body scanners from the CENTCOM area of responsibility. Both organizations verified the serviceability of the existing equipment and coordinated movement from the point of origin to its destination in Romania. USAREUR also established a service contract for the equipment.

Communications equipment across Germany was located, centralized, and shipped to Romania. The closure of dozens of U.S. bases in recent years helped this effort. For automation, however, the USAREUR G–6 worked closely with CENTCOM, TRANSCOM, EUCOM, and other components to ensure automation requirements would be met.

Communications planners worked closely with engineers to stay abreast of construction timelines because of the shortened timeline between construction and IOC. USAREUR established a team to baseline all automation on site in Romania and

establish the expanded and redundant network.

From the first OPT session, USAREUR engineer planners began efforts to capitalize existing MK infrastructure while looking at potential troop construction requirements. Three areas made up the bulk of the engineering concept: the customs facility, the passenger terminal, and the baggage storage area. Although the existing facilities on the temporary forward operating site would handle a small transient population, they were inadequate for surge requirements and created potential traffic management problems.

Engineer planners from the 21st TSC conducted site visits and assessments to begin developing construction requirements, resulting in a detailed plan that covered materiel, personnel, materials-handling equipment, and the overall timeline. Less than 30 days after receiving the mission and approximately 30 days before IOC, engineers deployed to MK and began building the customs facility, passenger terminal, and baggage storage area.

From Plans to Operations

Following publication of the USAREUR operation order, the OPT continued weekly meetings to work through emerging issues. Within three weeks of the order being published, the lead G–3/5 planner provided the USAREUR G–3/3 current operations branch with a comprehensive handover brief to formally put the plan in operation. A USAREUR G–3/3 current operations action officer, who had spent a month at MK, attended the recurring OPT meetings and effectively took over responsibility for moni-

Soldiers from the 2nd Brigade Combat Team (BCT), 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), depart a bus and walk toward a C–17 transport plane at the MK Air Base Passenger Transit Center, Feb. 3, 2014. Soldiers with the 2nd BCT were the first group of Soldiers to use the passenger transit center as a transition point on their way into and out of the U.S. Central Command area of operations. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Warren W. Wright Jr)

toring MK operations on behalf of the command.

Army Doctrine Reference Publication 5–0, The Operations Process, lays out the plans-to-operations transition concept. However, this concept is rarely applied correctly. The MK planning effort at USAREUR ensured those who would be managing execution were involved in planning from the start.

The deliberate transition briefing included all planners from across the staff. Additionally, the subordinate organizations directly involved in execution were either present or received the briefing via Defense Connect Online.

During the weeks after the transition and before IOC, the USAREUR G–3/3 office provided the command with continuous situation updates. Further, it participated in coordination meetings with the 21st TSC and facilitated support for the TSC-led rehearsal of concept drill conducted before IOC.

Sgt. James Curtis, a computer information technology specialist with the 21st Theater Sustainment Command's Sustainment Task Force 16, troubleshoots a satellite transmission terminal, Jan. 27, 2014, at MK Air Base. (Photo by Sgt. Maj. Michael Pintagro)

Lessons Learned

After nearly 90 days of planning and coordination before the publication of the USAREUR operation order, the OPT identified several lessons learned that can be applied to future ISB or passenger transit center planning:

- ☐ The planning effort should identify the mission command construct as early as possible.
- ☐ The entire OPT should have an understanding of the GFM process and the implications of time in that process in terms of resourcing to meet a requirement.
- ☐ Equipping efforts must be worked early during planning to link movement of existing materiel with its destination and to establish contracts for equipment not in the inventory.
- ☐ Antiterrorism, force protection, and emergency management assessments must be coordinated and completed quickly in order to rapidly implement infrastructure improvements and commit resources to mitigate force protection shortfalls.
- ☐ The OPT must continuously ask, "Who else needs to know?"

The OPT is a powerful planning mechanism, but if the right players are not at the table with the right questions being asked and answered, it will prove ineffective. Communication between combatant commands and component commands via Defense Connect Online and video teleconferences is critical to enabling shared understanding and a unified vision.

The operational planning effort to establish the passenger transit center began in August 2013 with Feb. 1, 2014, established as the IOC date. Over that six-month period, planners from tactical through strategic levels coordinated and synchronized the continuously emerging requirements.

By February 2014, the passenger transit center opened with all facilities functioning, the staff trained and assembled, and a mission command element established. Within weeks, it quickly became the principal transit node for the theater because of the drawdown and eventual closure of the transit center in Manas, Kyrgyzstan.

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