It's Time to Rebuild Our Culture of Deployment Readiness

■ By Brig. Gen. Jeffrey W. Drushal and Capt. Alex Brubaker

Soldiers from the 135th Expeditionary Sustainment Command prepare for a deployment by packing weapons and equipment on June 21, 2017, in Birmingham, Ala. (Photo by Cpl. Jaccob Hearn)

The Army was once adept at deployment, but it has lost that skill and must now rebuild a culture of deployment readiness.

Fight Tonight! First to Fight! Wheels up in 18 hours. These are recognizable slogans that emphasize a unit's readiness to go anywhere, anytime, and fast. But what is the Army's deployment readiness narrative?

The Army uses pre-positioned stocks to facilitate rapid employment force projection, but what are we doing to employ follow-on forces? What if our strategy of assurance and deterrence fails and we have an armed conflict with a nation state?

A recent effort to assemble an armored brigade combat team in Europe took 14 days. If war were declared tomorrow, how long would it take to move an Army corps into the Pacific or Eastern Europe? It is a tough question with variables outside the Army's control, but we can do better at training what is in our control. This article discusses how our expeditionary deployment skills have atrophied and some solutions to help get them back.

Atrophied Deployment Skills

Years of predictive deployments under the Army Force Generation model, combined with outsourcing our deployment process to strategic enablers, has eroded our expeditionary deployment skills.

When the Army deployed to Operations Desert Storm, Desert Shield, and the first rotations of Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, each unit was responsible for the readiness of its equipment, deploying it, and bringing it back.

As we looked for cheaper, faster ways to integrate into theater, we began using theater-provided equipment and leaving unit equipment in the left-behind equipment program. During major exercises in other countries, we used Army pre-positioned stocks. Those vital deployment skills have slowly transitioned out of the force.

Years of sustained conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan have caused the deployment narrative and culture to change. Instead of deployment being viewed as an operation for commanders, it became a task for logisticians. Years of strategic enablers, such as deployment support teams, left-behind equipment, and theater-provided equipment, have eroded units' deployment expertise and responsibility, and the onus is now on sustainers.

The reasons we shifted our focus made sense at the time, but over the course of 20 years, the overall impact has grown. Recently, the Army conducted inspections of the deployment readiness exercise program in order to assess current capabilities. The results showed suboptimal deployment training that focused on tasks like "alert" followed by scheduled training for the day.

Units rarely executed deployment readiness exercises in conjunction with installation transportation office (ITO) support. The few times that units did use that support are examples of the ITOs' inability to resource 24/7 operations without additional personnel.

The command deployment discipline program was found to be stovepiped in S-4/G-4 channels, limiting the commander's knowledge and involvement. On the whole, units have struggled to train the deployment process realistically.

The Army's potential missions, including direct action, deterrence, security force assistance, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, all have one common thread: the ability to rapidly alert, assemble, and deploy to any known point on the globe. The Army must be ready to deploy, fight, and win, anywhere in the world. The time to start rebuilding our culture of deployment readiness is now.

The Deployment Narrative

The Army has no overarching narrative when it comes to deployment. As the chief of staff of the Army continues to beat the drum for readiness, we must convey the importance of deployment readiness. To do so, we must leverage the

Soldiers from the 874th Forward Surgical Team from Fort Jackson, S.C., conduct a deployment readiness exercise on Sept. 8, 2017, to prepare for a potential short-notice deployment from home station to anywhere in the world they are called to provide medical support. (Photo by Maj. Simon Flake)

processes within the Army, the Joint Staff, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense to develop a narrative for Army forces that encompasses the current operational environment as well as operation plan requirements.

We need to influence the development and content of the 2018 National Military Strategy to ensure that it includes discussions of deployment readiness, the Army's strategic deployment capabilities, and the requirements that Army forces must meet. This will drive the prioritization of resources toward deployment capability.

Army Policy Adjustments

The Army should publish a policy revision requiring unit commanders to reconcile their unit equipment list with the unit property book every month. This will force the use of our systems of record, increase the accuracy of movement and dimensional data, and assist with the mobility community's quality assurance and quality control checks.

The Army should establish clear installation deployment standards across the globe so that the process is simple and known no matter where you go. Additionally, port

call messages should be published through Department of the Army G-3 operations channels to ensure unit compliance.

Commander's Actions

As leaders, we can only emphasize a finite number of priorities. It is time to start increasing our emphasis on deployment training. Command deployment discipline inspection results should be put into commanders' channels to give them accurate snapshots of their deployment readiness. Divisions could also add or modify their deployment

readiness slide in the logistics readiness review briefings and make it more comprehensive to provide a total picture of capabilities.

Units should consider adding unit movement briefings as part of company-level change of command outbriefings. Part of the briefing would detail the unit's last roll-out program that moved 100 percent of its modified table of organization and equipment items through the installation deployment process.

Collective Training

There is no standard baseline for the "deploy" mission-essential task. Look at three different companies within a brigade combat team on the Army Training Network and you will see three different collections of tasks. The armored company has eight collective tasks. The signal company has three collective tasks. The distribution company has 27 collective tasks.

The difference in the number of tasks being trained between a distribution company and a signal company in a brigade combat team is 24. We need to standardize the "deploy" task and subordinate collective tasks across the Army. The centers of excellence should establish a working group and determine what tasks all units should train. Deployment fundamentals should not be radically different among the various types of tactical units.

The Army must revamp its institutional approach to deployment training for combat training center rotations and warfighter exercises. We should evaluate units deploying to combat training centers from fort to port and from tactical assembly area to fort. Deployment and redeployment should be included in the after action review.

Build Individual Expertise

We must determine the best options for Soldiers to gain individual experience in an environment that is increasingly hampered by time limitations and resource constraints. These options should be conducive to a generation that uses the internet to get quick and easy answers.

The Deployment Process Modernization Office maintains a digital repository of deployment information called the "Deployer's Toolbox." It includes best practices, forms, regulations, and deployment smart books.

Army Deployment Rehearsal

For the United States to deter conventional attacks, its opponents must know that we can amass forces at their doorsteps. We must resource and execute the deployment of an Army division from the United States to one of our geographic combatant commands every two years based on an existing operation plan's time-phased force deployment data.

Only then can we validate the Army's force projection capabilities and speed of assembly. From these drills, we will gather vital data metrics and understand our limitations so that we can better prepare for conflict.

Rebuilding a culture of deployment readiness is a deliberate process that will take time, resources,

and energy. The effort belongs to every Soldier and Army civilian.

Most of our personnel who have experienced expeditionary deployment are senior officers and noncommissioned officers. Many of these people will leave the Army in the next five years, and we need to leverage their expertise before we have to relearn what we have lost.

Enacting new policies and commander's actions, training in new ways, and emphasizing deployment as an operation will help us get back to a culture of deployment excellence to ensure the Army is ready for the future fight.

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Soldiers from the Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division Artillery, board a C–17 Globemaster III at Moses Lake, Wash., on Oct. 18, 2017. Elements of the unit participated in a deployment readiness exercise in preparation to support 2nd Infantry Division operations in South Korea. (Photo by Pfc. Ethan Valetski)