

Joint Deployment and Distribution Coordination From the Fort to the Port

■ By Maj. Gen. Kurt J. Ryan

Pfc. Traven Friend, a tank mechanic with the 4th Squadron, 10th Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, conducts maintenance on an M88 recovery vehicle during seaport operations to offload the brigade's heavy equipment from a cargo vessel at the Port of Bremerhaven, Germany, on Jan. 6, 2017. (Photo by Capt. Scott Walters)



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The Army is rebuilding its deployment readiness and learning lessons from brigade-sized overseas deployments and rotational force deployments.

The demand for Army forces is increasing, and the Army needs to train on its mission-essential tasks (METs), including deployment and redeployment tasks. These tasks will play a critical role in rapidly presenting forces for worldwide deployment and employment by a combatant commander or joint force commander.

The Army had 55 opportunities to practice deployment or redeployment tasks in 2017. That operational tempo is significantly faster than it was in previous years, but the number will increase again in 2018 to 82 brigade deployment or redeployment opportunities. Our institution and the entire joint deployment and distribution enterprise (JDDE) must take advantage of these operations to train on atrophied deployment skills.

In our predominantly continental United States (CONUS)-based Army, deployment tasks start with the ability to project combat power from our forts to designated strategic seaports. This is the fort-to-port phase of power projection. The Army designates a number of key locations (forts and depots) that maintain adequate deployment infrastructure and connectivity with the national highway and rail networks. These locations serve as Army power projection platforms.

Additionally, during large-scale contingency operations, if a significant portion of the Army Reserve and Army National Guard has to mobilize, the Army expands mobilization force generation installations to accommodate post-mobilization readiness training. Then the Army leverages these facilities for fort-to-port deployment coordination.

Predeployment Preparation

As captured by multiple after action reviews, 2017 proved that our junior and senior leaders, both commissioned and noncommissioned, are aggressively training to rapidly alert, marshal, and prepare their unit equipment for global deployments.

An emphasis on deployment-related tasks drives unit training schedules to allocate time and resources to practice METs associated with the deployment process. Home-station readiness results are measurable and depend on the following certainties.

Leader presence matters. When commanders and senior enlisted leaders, from the division through platoon levels, are involved in pre-deployment and deployment operations, and when the deployment is planned, resourced, and rehearsed as a tactical operation in conjunction with the unit's METs, the unit's efficiency and effectiveness significantly improves.

Deployment must be practiced at a realistic pace. "Speed of war" outload, driven by division and brigade commanders, builds the right deployment culture at installations. Installations and deploying units should drive deployment readiness by practicing 24/7 deployment operations at the speed required by the combatant commander's operation plan.

Practicing deployments at a realistic speed is essential for helping the Army and its installations identify power projection platform deployment process gaps, including rail load, truck load, and air load limiting factors that may affect large-scale deployment support.

Data must be accurate. Deployment data accuracy, or the lack of it, drives the entire deployment continuum from fort to foxhole. Commanders who emphasize accurate and regularly updated organizational equipment lists and unit deployment lists significantly improve their success in planning and ordering strategic transportation (rail, truck, air, barge, and ship). The Transportation Coordinators' Automated Information for Movement System II remains the commander's system of record for ensuring deployment data accuracy.

Rail safety is important. Adequately trained unit rail loading teams and proper unit-stored block-

ing, bracing, packing, and tie-down equipment, identified prior to rail and line-haul operations, improve the speed and safety of equipment in transit.

Help is available. Requesting on-site assistance by JDDE enables early improves deployment synchronization and coordination with the designated strategic seaport. The Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command (SDDC) provides several special-mission teams for power projection platforms.

For example, deployment and distribution support teams are eight-man teams of transportation specialists that help division G-3s and brigades prepare for fort-to-port operations. Likewise, an SDDC rail operating crew, consisting of an engineer, conductor, and switchman, may be provided to assist logistics readiness centers with maintaining 24/7 rail operations.

Movement to the SPOE

A well-executed marshalling and out-load plan at the installation sets conditions for the success of follow-on operations at the designated seaport of embarkation (SPOE).

The Army maintains 20 strategic seaports in CONUS to facilitate power projection outside CONUS. If unit equipment is deploying by strategic sealift, equipment will flow to one of these ports. SDDC will direct units to send equipment to the appropriate SPOE, and the authorization to move equipment from fort to port will be captured in the port call message.

Units and installations must maintain discipline during onward movement to ensure equipment does not flow too early or too late to the designated SPOE; either scenario can disrupt unit cargo flow and ship stow timelines. Each SPOE can absorb a predetermined number of rail cars and line-haul trucks. They utilize unit cargo staging and ship berthing space as specified in port planning orders.

Commanders can “close” equipment at a designated seaport in several ways. If they are near the designated seaport, commanders can convoy road transportable equipment to the SPOE. Aviation units will self-deploy rotary-wing aircraft to the SPOE on the date designated in the port call message. More likely, commanders will leverage the commercial rail and trucking industry and order an adequate number of rail cars, trucks, and trailers through the supporting installation transportation office.

Lessons Learned

Army units are improving fort-to-port processes with every deployment opportunity. The most successful deployment operations of 2017 resulted in several observations.

First, units should ensure in-transit visibility from fort to port. They should use an on-site mission command element and share reporting information with the JDDE.

Division headquarters enable brigades to project rapidly from power projection platforms. A well-synchronized common operational picture of the deployment process, nested with the U.S. Transportation Command and shared routinely with SDDC battalions and brigades, can significantly improve the deployment process and allow problems to be effectively resolved across the JDDE.

An adequately manned unit port support activity (PSA), with a mission-command element provided by the division and brigade headquarters, greatly improves reporting accuracy during fort-to-port operations.

Second, units should anticipate and prepare to address all known equipment readiness faults. Broken equipment can adversely affect seaport download and ship upload operations. A robust unit maintenance and recovery element at the seaport should be part of the PSA. Maintainers should know the mainte-

nance readiness status of every piece of equipment departing the power projection platform, along with the required repair parts, to facilitate repair of that equipment before ship stow operations begin.

Third, units should maintain adequate fuel in each prime mover to facilitate operations at both the SPOE and seaport of debarkation. As a rule of thumb, all departing unit equipment should have three quarters of a tank of fuel and be marked accordingly. If the unit deploys with less fuel than that, the PSA must provide refueling capability at the SPOE to ensure there is adequate fuel for reception, staging, and onward movement in the gaining theater.

My next power projection article will focus on unit actions at the SPOE. It will address port support activity operations and how to best interface and coordinate with the U.S. Transportation Command, SDDC, and commercial port authorities to accomplish this common goal: the safe and effective outload of unit equipment configured to arrive at the geographic combatant command ready to fight.

By practicing our deployment tasks with regularity and realism at the speed of war, we will rebuild our deployment proficiency at echelon, enhance our credibility as a deterrent force, and, when called upon, project our military strength globally as the preeminent and decisive land combat force for our nation, the world’s lone military super power.

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