

53rd Transportation Battalion Provides 57th Presidential Inaugural Parade Support

Months of planning and preparation go into producing the presidential inaugural parade.

■ By Lt. Col. Stephen W. Ledbetter, Maj. Clarisse T. Scott, and Richard E. Killblane

One may not think of a parade as a military operation, but when it came to the presidential inaugural parade on Jan. 21, 2013, the nation trusted no organization other than the armed forces to coordinate and supervise it. Joint Force Headquarters National Capital Region, under the command of Maj.

Gen. Michael S. Linnington with Air Force Brig. Gen. James P. Scanlan as his deputy, formed the joint task force (JTF) headquarters for the operation. The JTF, which was composed of representatives from all branches of the armed forces, began planning more than six months before the event.

For all past inaugural parades, the movement control function was performed by a joint ad hoc organization made up of individual augmentees known as the Armed Forces Inaugural Committee (AFIC). For the 2013 presidential inaugural parade, however, the JTF decided to use unit capabilities for this mission.



Soldiers in their blue Army service uniforms form the Army segment of the 2013 presidential inaugural parade cordon. Each branch of the service formed one leg of the parade cordon.

The 53rd Transportation Battalion from Fort Eustis, Va., was selected to provide all movement control for the parade. This was the first unit with a pre-existing chain of command to execute this mission and receive the label of Joint Team Parade. Joint Team Parade ultimately consisted of 247 Soldiers and Marines.

Movement Control Mission

The 53rd Transportation Battalion provided command and control for two movement control teams (MCTs) and a general purpose company. One of the two MCTs was the 271st MCT, which is organic to the 53rd Transportation Battalion. The second MCT was an ad hoc team comprising members of the 330th Transportation Battalion from Fort Bragg, N.C. The 1st Battalion, 319th Field Artillery Regiment (1–319th FAR), 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, from Fort Bragg served as the general support company.

This operation had all the components of a movement control mission but with greater visibility. Every detail of parade support had to be synchronized with multiple law enforcement agencies, the Secret Service, the National Park Service, the Presidential Inauguration Committee (PIC), and various District of Columbia logistics support entities. This allowed for a very small margin of error.

It was still, in concept, a point-to-point operation, and the movement controllers in the tactical operations center had to synchronize the movements of more than 9,000 parade participants and multiple floats and animals from four different locations around the city to meet their parade start times at the National Mall.

PIC Oversight

Essentially this was a strategic-level operation answering directly to the civilian leaders. The PIC, made up of campaign staffers, was in charge of the parade but relied heavily on military expertise to put



Cadets from the United States Military Academy march in the 2013 presidential inaugural parade while Georgia police officers provide part of the security detail.

it together. This is partly because the PIC was not established until about the third week of November, after the presidential election was held. The PIC did not have enough time to plan and synchronize a parade of this magnitude within a 60-day time frame.

The PIC's primary role was to select organizations that would represent each state in the parade and approve the military plan. The National Capital Region J-3 (operations) plans section served as the lead planner for this event, led by Mike Wagner.

Planning Team Organization

The planning began in August 2012 when the 53rd Transportation Battalion sent seven Soldiers on temporary duty to the National Capital Region to work and integrate at Fort McNair with the JTF headquarters staff for the planning process. The battalion S-3 served as the officer-in-charge of parade planning at Fort McNair; the operations noncommissioned officer-in-charge was a Marine master sergeant.

Joint Team Parade was divided into six elements:

- Band control, led by two noncommissioned officers (NCOs) from the U.S. Army Band.
- Staging area, run by an officer and NCO from the 271st MCT.
- Assembly area, run by an officer and NCO from the 53rd Transportation Battalion.
- Float assembly, run by a military intelligence officer from Fort Belvoir, Va., with personnel from the 330th Movement Control Battalion.
- Horse control, run by an officer and NCO of the Old Guard Caisson Platoon.
- Route control, run by an officer and NCO from the 53rd Transportation Battalion.
- Dispersal area, run by an officer and NCO from the 53rd Transportation Battalion.

Assembly and Staging Areas

Although the JTF had already selected the Mall for the assembly area, over the next month the planners read through the boxes of loose-leaf binders that served as continuity books from the previous parades to determine what was needed at each

site. During this phase, Joint Team Parade noted the challenges faced by the horse control team in the last inauguration. That was one area that the JTF had not worked on before it arrived.

The horse control team began working diligently to find a location that would prevent horse trailers from being moved twice once they arrived in the city. The JTF inaugural planning staff and the Washington, D.C., government developed several courses of action. Eventually, the horse control team had L'Enfant Plaza approved as the horse assembly and dispersal area. This plan kept horse trailers in place and eliminated the need to have police escorts between locations; this had been one of the biggest complaints from horse handlers at the previous inauguration.

The horse staging and float assembly areas also were changed. The last inauguration had the horse and float assembly in one area near the Switzer building. The notes from the last inauguration stated the area was very congested. The new plan developed by Joint Team Parade eliminated this problem. The new plan separated the float assembly area and the horse

staging area. They were both located on C Street but on opposite ends. This plan took into consideration the safety of the horses and of the parade participants who rode on the floats.

Staging and Security Screening

The big difference between this operation and movement control in Iraq or Afghanistan was security. The Secret Service supervised the screening of participants and X-rayed the floats. Since the inauguration would take place on Jan. 21, the planning had to account for cold early morning weather. The assembly area on the National Mall consisted of a large fest tent with a capacity to provide more than 6,000 people with heat, water, and food since participants would begin their screening early and the parade would not begin until afternoon.

The marching participants would stage in the Pentagon parking lot on Monday morning. Security screening was conducted by a military police officer, the battalion S-3 circulation control officer, and Soldiers of the 271st MCT who would control the movement of all marchers during this process.

The participants were divided into five march divisions, each of which would be led by a branch of the armed forces and its band, and lined up in the services order of existence: Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, and a composite of Coast Guard and Merchant Marines. Each division required approximately 55 coach buses to transport parade participants to the assembly area on the National Mall.

To ensure timely movement of parade participants, each division was staffed with a division control team of about 15 personnel to escort them through the parade route. The division control teams mainly comprised Soldiers from the 1-319th FAR and remained with the each state's marchers from the beginning of the day (starting at the Pentagon) to the end of the parade (at the dispersal area). Wearing dress blues and a maroon beret, a division control team member walked alongside each group.

The horse riders remained at the Prince George's Equestrian Center until they were escorted to L'Enfant Plaza. All horses and riders were screened and assembled at L'Enfant Plaza adjacent the National Mall.

The merge point adjacent to the assembly area on the National Mall was where all the marchers, floats with riders, and horse units would fall into their assigned places in parade order before moving to the ready zone to await entering the parade route.

Command Facilities

The JTF provided 12 command and control trailers to Joint Team Parade to establish and provide mission command at the seven nodes in and around the National Capital Region where parade marshaling, staging, and execution activities would take place. The 53rd Transportation Battalion set up its battalion tactical operations center in a command trailer near the start point of the parade at the corner of 4th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue.

The JTF established its joint operations center at Fort McNair, and the 53rd Transportation Battalion



The 53rd Transportation Battalion conducts a rehearsal of concept drill at Fort McNair, Washington, D.C., as part of the 2013 inaugural parade planning process.



A paratrooper from the 1st Battalion, 319th Field Artillery Regiment, remains with the parade marchers from their arrival at the assembly area until the end of the 2013 presidential inaugural parade.

placed a liaison officer in the joint operations center. The 53rd Transportation Battalion's commander considered the National Mall the center of gravity for the operation, so he stayed there with the battle captain and operations officer to oversee all aspects of the parade. The most important tasks were to ensure the parade started on time once the president and vice president were seated in the presidential reviewing stand and ensure that there were no large gaps between groups.

Each of the four route-control check points along the 1.7-mile parade route on Pennsylvania Avenue was manned by an NCO and an enlisted Soldier, who managed the flow of traffic and police stragglers from

command trailers. The operation would be executed off of an execution checklist instead of automated computer programs.

At the end of the parade route, the 53rd Transportation Battalion ran the dispersal area where the divisions would board their buses to return home. It was critically important not to allow anyone to linger and cause congestion at the dispersal area. The 53rd Transportation Battalion, with personnel from the 1-319th FAR would expedite getting the marchers to their buses.

Joint Team Parade

By mid-September, Joint Team Parade planners had gone through all the binders and footlockers from the

2005 and 2009 inaugurations. They found that several documents and permit packages had to be prepared for land use in and around metro D.C. before the PIC came on board.

The staging area team conducted several meetings with the Pentagon facilities manager to ensure all resources required for operations at the Pentagon were requested. It took approximately three months to gather all the details for this document; the permit packet from the previous inauguration helped.

Joint Team Parade became the conduit of information from the Pentagon to the JTF staff. The Pentagon permit not only covered the requirements for parade participants but also covered the resources needed

by the U.S. Secret Service and White House social aides. Since the PIC was the lead entity in the entire process, it submitted all parade request permits to the city.

In October, the 53rd Transportation Battalion and other JTF staff sections formed planning working groups to begin synchronizing the moving parts of the parade. These working groups included the J-4 contracting and transportation sections, the provost marshal and police department, capital medical personnel, the public affairs officer, and the Joint Team Parade street cordon. Others joined as their plans developed and they saw a need to coordinate with Joint Team Parade.

Once the JTF had the parade planned out, they developed a consequence management plan that would go into action in the event of a ter-

rorist attack. The 53rd Transportation Battalion would be responsible for accountability of all military personnel in such a contingency.

Rehearsal of Concept Drills

On Nov. 16, 2012, the Joint Task Force held its first rehearsal of concept drill and map exercise at Fort McNair to rehearse and synchronize all aspects of the inauguration. It was during this and subsequent drills and map exercises that movement times or “triggers” were refined and identified to be either time or event driven. Clear lines of reporting were also established during these sessions in order to ensure that a common operational picture was maintained by all parties during the execution of the inaugural parade events that would last from 2 a.m. until 8 p.m. on Inauguration Day.

Full Dress Rehearsal

The JTF held the Department of Defense full dress rehearsal on Sunday, Jan. 13, 2013, to identify any potential problems or friction points and get an estimate of how long it would take to execute key events on Inauguration Day. The biggest lesson learned by Joint Team Parade was at the parade staging area at the Pentagon.

The full dress rehearsal illuminated the requirement for the staging team to adjust its arrival and operational times for Inaugural Day and revealed that the original staging and parking plan needed adjusting to prevent congestion. The necessary adjustments were made to the staging area plan, and the operations on Inauguration Day went off without a hitch.

The D.C. Metropolitan Police blocked off Pennsylvania Avenue for the morning so the military, police,



Soldiers of the Caisson Platoon of the Old Guard ride their horses in the 2013 presidential inaugural parade.

and even media could rehearse the synchronization of their participation. The military cordon lined the street with Soldiers, Marines, Sailors, Airmen, and Coast Guardsmen to find their proper alignment and intervals and to rehearse saluting the president's limousine as it passed. These service members lined the entire length of Pennsylvania Avenue from the start of the parade to the finish.

This rehearsal involved a large number of military participants; however, civilian parade participants were unable to participate. Division control teams and other JTF staff members walked as fillers while carrying signs identifying which state and group they represented.

A few glitches occurred, but the plan was sound, and the JTF used the after-action review to work out areas that needed refinement. Because of the confusion and congestion at the initial staging area, Soldiers needed to be there as early as midnight the morning of the parade and the entry control personnel who directed the arrivals needed to have handheld radios.

During the rehearsal, more people arrived at the battalion tactical operations center than expected, so a larger command trailer was needed. The same was true with the route control trailer. With one week left to refine the operation, the 53rd Transportation Battalion conducted mini-rehearsals at the staging area and conducted a communications rehearsal with the route control teams. So by the day of the parade, everyone felt comfortable.

Inauguration Day

On Inauguration Day, even with all the rehearsal and preparation, a few glitches beyond Joint Team Parade's control still tested how sound the plan really was. This began with the public swearing-in ceremony lasting longer than normal, which delayed the start of the parade. The late start created a backlog in the tent at the assembly area on the National Mall.

The backlog required the battle captain and staging personnel to think quickly on their feet. They delayed Divisions 4 and 5 at the Pentagon. Once the presidential escort exited the Capitol building, they released Divisions 4 and 5 from the Pentagon and Division 1 formed up for movement onto the parade route. This verified how well the route control team had trained.

Joint Team Parade developed phase lines not just to track the movement of the participants along the parade route but also to track the movement of the president so that the battle captain would know when to give the signal to start the parade.

The Joint Team Parade was directed to begin the parade almost immediately after the President passed the start point, at 4th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue. However, Division 1 started marching so soon after the President passed that it nearly caught up with his motorcade, which would not have allowed the president and first lady enough time to reach the reviewing stand to observe the parade.

To remedy this situation, the battle captain had to call ahead to one of the check points along the route to halt the parade, which was a monumental task since all of Division 1 had entered the parade route. The halt created a huge gap. Joint Team Parade then put Division 2 on the parade route to close the gap and reduce further delays along the parade route when the parade resumed. The parade was halted for 15 or more minutes.

Because of the skill with which the movement controllers of the 53rd Transportation Battalion and Joint Team Parade performed, the JTF wants to use the 53rd Transportation Battalion or a like unit for all future inaugural parades.

The Army Transportation Corps has long ties with the Office of the President of the United States. The Transportation Corps has provided the White House sedan since President William Howard Taft in

1909; the Corps was responsible for presidential helicopter flights from the late 1950s until 1976. Now, the Transportation Corps will provide movement control for future presidential inaugural parades.

This operation provided an excellent movement control training opportunity for the 53rd Transportation Battalion as it prepared for its upcoming deployment. The presidential inauguration parade operation has all the components of a normal movement control operation but with much greater visibility and smaller room for error. This was an excellent training experience for movement controllers.

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