



*The 954th Quartermaster Company materiel redistribution team sorts through hundreds of containers filled with years' worth of supplies that had been passed from unit to unit. (Photo by Chief Warrant Officer 2 Dannie Garnett)*



# CMRE

# Responsible Retrograde in Afghanistan

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The 17th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion (CSSB) from Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, deployed to Afghanistan in 2014 to serve as the U.S. Central Command Materiel Recovery Element (CMRE). Since it was accustomed to providing sustainment support to two brigade combat teams, the battalion found the CMRE mission to be unlike its usual sustainment tasks.

## CMRE Mission

The CMRE supported regional command and brigade combat team efforts to bring property to record, inventory and account for containers, process materiel for

retrograde, and close down forward operating bases or transfer them to the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. This was conducted by using foreign excess personal property or foreign excess real property process packets, conducting site demilitarization, or returning the land to its original condition.

The CMRE facilitated base closures and transfers and recovery, redistribution, retrograde, and disposal (R3D) by providing retrograde support to maneuver units that were conducting counterinsurgency operations. These actions helped the maneuver units to prepare the Combined Joint Operations Area-Afghanistan (CJOA-A) to

meet post-2014 strategic operational objectives and transition forces to Operation Resolute Support.

The key CMRE tasks were as follows:

- Align capacity with requirements to maximize assets in order to increase R3D.
- Define future requirements and build capacity at retrograde sort yards to maximize R3D.
- Educate the CJOA–A forces on CMRE capabilities, resources, and expertise in order to expedite R3D.
- Establish systems and processes that focus energy, effort, and attention on support, maintenance, accountability, resources, and training.
- Standardize systems and procedures so routine actions are executed to standard, allowing the team to focus forward in order to anticipate problems, analyze data, and provide creative solutions.
- Develop and maintain relationships that facilitate teamwork and share information, resources, and expertise.

The CMRE mission can be summed up in two words: responsible retrograde. After 13 years of continuous military operations with unit after unit conducting reliefs-in-place and falling in on supplies left by previous units, a huge amount of excess materiel had accumulated.

Leaders must be good stewards of government property through accountability. Logisticians should consider property accountability and ask themselves these questions: How do I responsibly clean up my unit's area of operations, who can show me what is salvageable, and where can I turn this stuff in? The CMRE provides these answers and capabilities.

The multifunctional CMRE mission required strict mission command of nine different retrograde capabilities, or enablers:

- Materiel redistribution teams (MRTs).

- Forward retrograde elements (FREs).
- Retrograde sort yards (RSYs).
- Medical retrograde sort teams (MED RSTs).
- Base closure assistance teams.
- Mobile container assessment teams.
- Ammunition abatement teams.
- Customs inspection teams.
- Operation Ammunition Clean Sweep (OACS) teams.

Most of the CMRE enablers were manned by both military and contractor personnel. When combined, they resulted in a very large battalion footprint and a robust capability to assist bases with future closures, transfers, and materiel reductions.

### MRTs

MRTs were the “tip of the spear” for responsible retrograde. These small teams, made up of both military personnel and contractors, were sent to outlying bases to assist units by identifying, sorting, and shipping excess materiel of all classes of supply back to the major RSY control hubs.

The MRTs would sort through materiel on site and identify, segregate, and prepare excess, non-mission-essential items for shipment. MRTs required minimal support from the units they supported, and they could usually complete the mission in less than a week at a site.

During the last five months of the CMRE mission, the MRTs completed more than 103 missions and processed more than 2,000 20-foot equivalent units (TEUs) of excess materiel. Materiel that was returned to the Army supply system was valued at over \$57 million.

The MRT was extremely successful because it used an aggressive marketing campaign to inform units of what assistance was available to them. Weekly MRT fliers were sent out across the Kandahar and Bagram email distribution lists. Fliers were also posted at bus stops and dining facilities, and the MRT was even advertised at the weekly senior enlisted advisors working group. This resulted

in a 300-percent mission increase and instant recognition across CJOA–A by word of mouth.

### FREs

FREs were strategically established throughout the CJOA–A in order to maximize the R3D of materiel at large or central bases designated by each FRE site. FREs differed from MRTs in several ways but had a very similar mission or end state. FREs had double to triple the personnel conducting R3D and had materials-handling equipment to assist with the materiel being received, sorted, and shipped back to an RSY for final disposition.

MRTs would sometimes push materiel to the FREs for another layer of screening to ensure that no materiel was transported unnecessarily by convoy to the RSYs. The purpose of the FREs was to provide materiel interdiction and determine if materiel was not serviceable and needed to be disposed of, demilitarized, or packaged and shipped to the RSY.

On average, 80 to 85 percent of materiel received a disposition for disposal or demilitarization, keeping more than 1,900 Soldiers off the road and saving over \$42.5 million in transportation costs since the materiel was not sent to the RSYs by convoys.

### RSYs

The heavy lifters and most visible of CMRE operations were the RSYs. These yards not only managed all the materiel sent from the MRTs and FREs but also from the units assigned to the base. The three RSYs were established at the largest CJOA–A bases. Their capabilities were significantly more robust than MRTs or FREs.

R3D operations were conducted 24-hours a day by both military personnel and contractors. Each yard had a large amount of materials-handling equipment and transportation assets to move materiel and containers as they arrived or moved to one of the supporting agencies for final disposal. Providing a key

capability unique to the RSYs, logistics information systems allowed materiel to receive a final disposition and be returned to the Army supply system.

With base closures requiring descopeing and materiel reduction, the RSYs established the capability to drain and purge thousands of heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning units along with commercial and military

generators identified for disposal.

The true success story for RSYs is the amount of money saved by returning classes of supplies to the Army supply system. From December 2011 to November 2014 when the CMRE mission ended, supplies valued at more than \$1.2 billion were returned directly to the Army supply system, and more than \$6.9 billion worth of supplies and equipment was

reissued and used by units operating in Afghanistan.

### MED RSTs

An area that needed attention during the CMRE mission concerned expendable and non-expendable class VIII (medical materiel). With role 2 and role 3 medical facilities spread throughout Afghanistan, recovering excess class VIII was critical not only

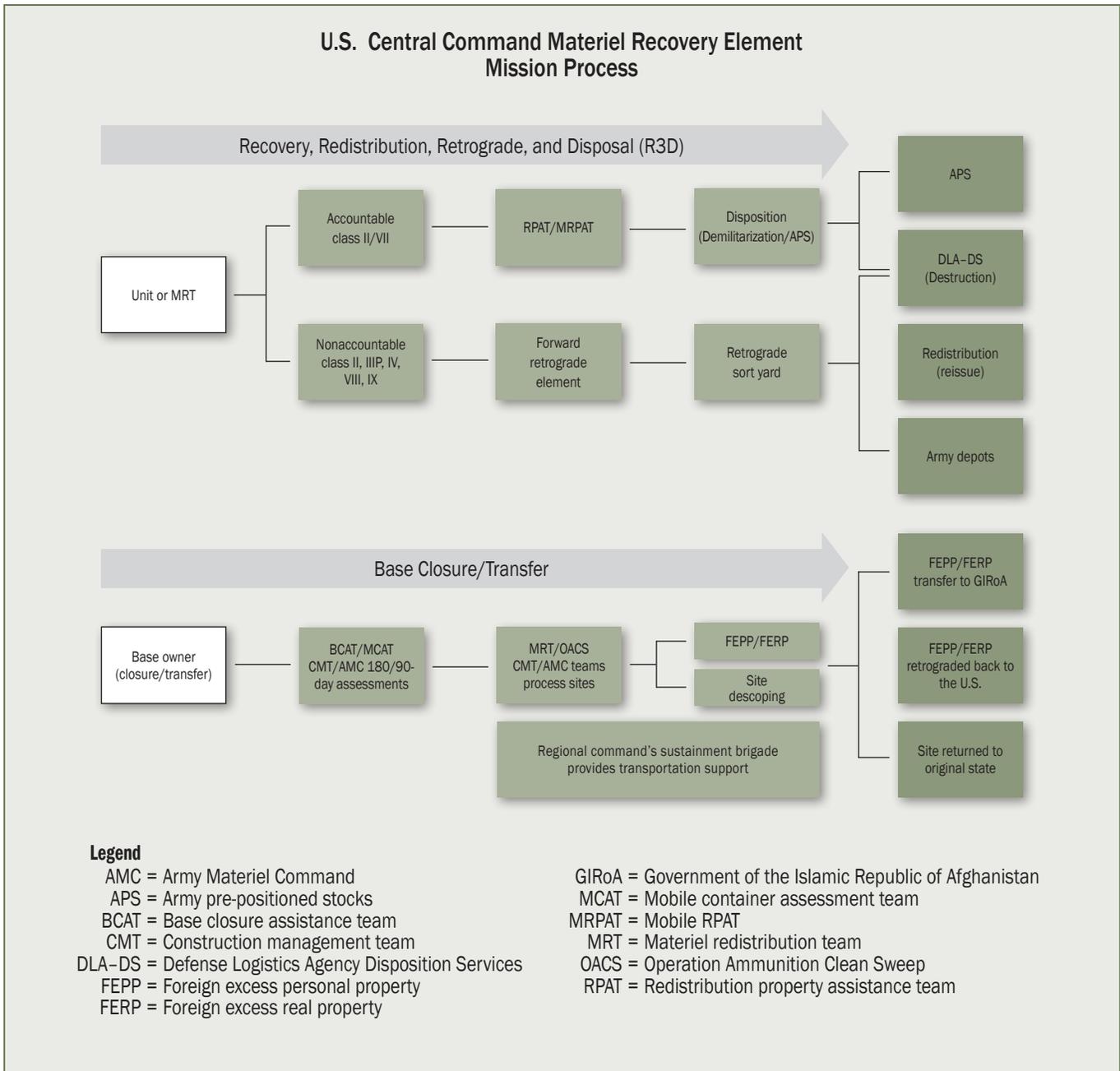


Figure 1. The U.S. Central Command Materiel Recovery Element mission process is used to determine the disposition of materiel and real property in Afghanistan.



*Command Sgt. Maj. Jacqueline Williams, 17th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, walks Shindand Air Base's forward retrograde element yard where multiple classes of supply have been turned in from units for sorting and retrograde. (Photo by 1st Lt. Katherine Curra-Spurger)*

to U.S. forces but also to coalition partners.

By establishing MED RSTs at the RSY, the CSSB was able to sort serviceable class VIII and reissue it to units still in the fight. In five months, the MED RST redistributed over \$3.7 million worth of class VIII to U.S. units throughout the CJOA-A. It also worked with the U.S. State Department to legally gift the Afghan National Army with class VIII materiel that had been identified for disposal.

MED RSTs were sent to role 3 medical facilities to assist with retrograding class VIII equipment and supplies to the RSYs. They acted in an MRT capacity when conducting off-site missions. MED RSTs saved money and increased Soldier sur-

vivability by providing the supplies needed for initial first aid by a combat lifesaver.

### **Base Closure and Container Assessment**

Base closure assistance teams and mobile container assessment teams, consisting of both military personnel and contractors, were critical to establishing a plan for bases to meet their closure or transfer dates. Their missions were to inventory personal property and structures with the base owners and assist with submitting documents to U.S. Forces-Afghanistan. This was the initial requirement for establishing a backward planning timeline on how each base would meet its closure and transfer date.

All CMRE assets were identified

during the initial assessment, and the sustainment brigade's support operations (SPO) team and the construction management team coordinated to execute a detailed support plan for descoping operations and materiel retrograde.

### **Ammunition Abatement**

The 17th CSSB was tasked to provide more than 100 personnel to support the 401st Army Field Support Brigade's redistribution property assistance teams (RPATs). The RPATs were responsible for a variety of missions in support of theater-provided equipment property being turned in and eventually retrograded to depots throughout the world for reset.

The 17th CSSB Soldiers support-

ing the RPATs conducted three main functions on a daily basis. First, the ammunition abatement teams focused on removing all ammunition from equipment being turned in to the RPATs. Equipment went through five inspection phases, with different Soldiers conducting each phase with the purpose of finding live or expended ammunition.

Equipment had to be thoroughly inspected and validated at each phase in order to prepare each piece of equipment to leave the country or for demilitarization. The demilitarization part was especially critical because of the possibility of live ammunition being hidden in a seam and igniting while the piece of equipment was cut with plasma cutters. More than 2,000 pieces of rolling stock were inspected with zero mission failures.

### Customs Inspections

The second RPAT function involved providing customs inspections for retrograding excess materiel and rolling and nonrolling stock out of country. The customs teams were stationed throughout the CJOA-A at RPAT sites. This was also true for the ammunition abatement teams that worked hand in hand with customs. Both teams assisted each other with ammunition sterilization and ensured each piece of equipment went through a thorough washing process before the actual customs inspections took place.

Third, RPAT customs teams assisted the RSYs with materiel being shipped via 463L pallets or 20-foot containers. This was another critical function the CMRE played while conducting responsible retrograde and meeting the U.S. Department of Agriculture and customs and border protection requirements.

### OACS

In October 2013, OACS teams were established with both military and Department of the Army civilian ammunition specialists to assist bases and units with their class V (ammunition).

Their task was to inventory each unit's on-hand ammunition, identify excess based on their unit basic load, identify code H (unserviceable) items for demilitarization, and leave the unit basic load required to maintain operations.

All excess and code H class V was packaged for shipment by the OACS team and shipped to one of two ammunition supply points for final demilitarization and disposition.

During 12 months of operation and 70 OACS missions, the CMRE demilitarized more than 2,900 tons of ammunition valued at \$54.6 million. Bringing this capability directly to each unit's location allowed units to focus more on their missions and not be concerned about how they were going to simultaneously conduct tactical and sustainment operations while reducing the excess footprint to meet base closure dates.

### Mission Command

Providing mission command for eight units and three contractor agencies that were conducting nine separate operations at dispersed locations across the CJOA-A took predeployment planning and coordination in order to fully understand the dynamics of the CMRE mission. Most of the battalion staff functioned normally; however, the SPO shop had to reorganize in order to provide specific oversight of RSYs, FREs, MRTs, base closure and assistance teams, mobile container assistance teams, MED RSTs, OACS, customs, and ammunition abatement teams.

The SPO was divided into three main sections. Before deploying, each section's officer-in-charge and noncommissioned officer-in-charge tackled current CMRE procedures and standards in order to grasp this unique logistics operation and understand the systems established for planning and tracking daily production. This prepared the battalion and the SPO for assuming the mission prior to deploying.

A must for the CMRE mission was the close relationship between the SPO and the battalion S-3. Daily operations and constant CMRE enabler support movements around the CJOA-A required a balance between the S-3 and SPO sections.

The S-3 had to incorporate each team's unique role into a comprehensive retrograde component and track each team's progress throughout the CJOA-A. The SPO was primarily responsible for all mission coordination, daily reporting by each team and site, intratheater equipment and personnel movements, and advertising of the CMRE capabilities through aggressive marketing campaigns.

The 17th CSSB closed out this historic chapter of military operations in Afghanistan. Many lessons have been learned since the CMRE began. Billions of dollars' worth of equipment was recovered and returned to the Army supply system.

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