



A Soldier assigned to the 1st Squadron, 14th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, guides a Stryker vehicle during rail offload at Orchard Combat Training Center, Idaho, on Sept. 25, 2016. The 200 pieces of equipment that arrived on the train were used for Raptor Fury, a monthlong training exercise to validate the mission readiness of the 16th Combat Aviation Brigade. (Photo by Capt. Brian Harris)



Power Projection Readiness: A Historical Perspective

■ By Maj. Gen. Kurt J. Ryan

For close to a decade and a half, U.S. forces deployed on a rotational basis and were not required to exercise critical short-notice unit-level rapid deployment skills. As a result, the Army's ability to project units rapidly with their full complements of authorized equipment has atrophied.

The time and location of the nation's next major conflict is unknown, but we do know that we must be ready. To be ready, it is imperative that the total force build the collective skills of power projection and large-

scale deployment readiness so that, if called upon, we can provide a viable land force that is prepared to operate across the conflict continuum.

As a continental United States-based expeditionary Army, we must train deployment readiness relentlessly, and we must practice these skills at the "speed of war." The Army must leverage every training opportunity, such as deployments to and from combat training centers, rotations of forces in support of combatant commanders' theater security and cooperation plans, and emergency

deployment readiness exercises.

Bottom line: the Army must build its capabilities and instill a mindset to be ready to rapidly alert, marshal, deploy, and upon arrival at the theater, be ready to fight. Installations are the power projection platforms, and deployment readiness begins in the motor pools. Leaders must build unit capacity to marshal and upload equipment at home station, to move equipment by rail, line haul, or inland barge, or to convoy equipment to any of the nation's 23 strategic seaports.

Strategic enabling commands, in-

FEATURES

Power projection platforms are critical to an expeditionary Army's ability to deploy, fight and win.

cluding the Forces Command, the Army Materiel Command, and the U.S. Transportation Command, must practice fort-to-port and port-to-port tasks to rapidly load seagoing vessels to sail combat power to foreign ports of debarkation.

When units arrive, theater enablers, including the Army service component commands, theater sustainment commands, and assistance from allied support agreements, will facilitate deploying units' reception, staging, onward movement, and integration tasks, which are key to building and providing ready-to-fight forces to the joint force commander.

Historical vignettes from the Army's own power projection experiences over the past 50 years show many applicable examples of how the Army can effectively campaign as long as it can deploy rapidly.

The Vietnam War

The United States managed the considerable feat of transporting 200,000 troops to South Vietnam in the early months of 1965 following the presidential order to deploy a large-scale combat force to Southeast Asia. However, the moves of the first two divisions—the 1st Cavalry Division and the 1st Infantry Division—were neither synchronized nor efficient.

The Army had last deployed a large-scale joint force for the Korean War in the early 1950s; it was out of practice. The initial force move to South Vietnam required 17 special trains, 126 aircraft, 27 cargo vessels, 933 buses, 12 troop ships, and five aircraft carriers to move the two divisions. After this initial, albeit inefficient, success, the nation made changes to significantly improve its power projection readiness.

The Army faced long delays in off-loading ships in South Vietnam, and the delays were made worse by single ships making multiple port calls. The Army adjusted its deployment processes by sending fully loaded ships of combat configured loads to

a single port whenever possible.

While only 7 percent of ships en route to South Vietnam were destined for a single port in October 1965, by April 1966 that number had improved to 95 percent. This vastly increased the nation's capability to efficiently project military forces and to amass combat effects upon arrival.

The Army was relearning quickly and began institutionalizing deployment processes by investing in training and focusing on critical deployment and redeployment mission-essential tasks. These tasks are now resident in nearly every unit's mission-essential task list.

Desert Shield and Desert Storm

In March 1988, Brig. Gen. John R. Piatak, the U.S. Transportation Command's first director of plans, presciently stated, "In the future, we will have to pay closer attention to our deployment readiness and to industry's ability to handle transportation surges."

Just 29 months later, Iraq invaded Kuwait, and the president called for the massive deployment of U.S. forces to the Middle East to commence Operation Desert Shield. Deployment lessons learned from combat training center rotations throughout the 1980s helped to shape the Army's response to the massive force deployment requirements of the operation, which included more than 500,000 service members at its height.

In August 1990, commercial ports at Jacksonville, Florida; Savannah, Georgia; and Charleston, South Carolina, were selected as the best ports from which to deploy the large volume of equipment needed for the first three Army divisions to defend Saudi Arabia. These divisions were the 101st Airborne Division, the 24th Infantry Division, and the 82nd Airborne Division. Soldiers and equipment simultaneously deployed by strategic air from designated airfields close to each division's home station.

The divisions and brigades had rehearsed their deployment tasks prior to their deployment notifications. Senior mission commanders had refined readiness standard operating procedures, practiced installation deployment assistance teams, and conducted emergency deployment readiness exercises. These exercises were often held in conjunction with a movement to a combat training center.

Units had been evaluated on deployment mission-essential tasks, and the port authorities were familiar with the units' special outload needs. Deploying units had formed and exercised necessary port support activities, routinely conducted reconnaissance of their designated ports, and occasionally performed tabletop exercises or tactical exercises without troops to the port.

The port at Jacksonville enjoyed the requisite size to handle the special requirements of the 101st Airborne Division's unique cargo, which included more than 300 helicopters. Savannah's close proximity to the 24th Infantry Division at Fort Stewart and Fort Benning, Georgia, provided an adequate rail network connecting bases to the port and promised faster loading and departures. Deployments were executed at the speed of war.

Enduring and Iraqi Freedom

Following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Operation Enduring Freedom demonstrated the importance of being ready. Deployments began within days after the terrorist attacks. President George W. Bush initially announced the operation as a bombing campaign and deployed special operations forces to support the Afghan Northern Alliance in its successful drive to topple the Taliban government.

Operation Iraqi Freedom began with large-scale deployments to Kuwait in 2002 in preparation for operations against Saddam Hussein's Iraqi army in March 2003. The U.S. Army benefited from months of



Beginning his unit's move to Poland for Operation Atlantic Resolve, an M1A2 Abrams crewman from the 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, secures a tank after it is loaded onto a rail car at Fort Carson, Colorado, on Nov. 15, 2016. (Photo by Ange Desinor)

prior planning, several warfighting exercises, and deployment rehearsals that enabled commanders and staffs to learn from prior deployments.

The U.S. Central Command's continual rotation of brigade teams to Kuwait throughout the 1990s had helped to keep the Army ready for large-scale deployments. Using brigade combat teams provided a foundation of familiarity and deployment readiness for future operations in the Middle East.

The Army's Future

While history provides us with experience and a frame of reference, the benefits end there if we do not build upon the lessons learned. Readiness can only be attained through focused effort, continued action, and a relentless desire to master deployment tasks.

The Army may enjoy only a narrow window of opportunity to prepare for the nation's next conflict. The period we are in now will be described as the current generation's interwar years. We do not know when or where the next fight will take place, but as history shows, it

will most certainly come, and we must be ready.

Repetition is key, and Army leaders should leverage every unit movement as a deployment training opportunity. In 2017, the Army will deploy or redeploy numerous brigade combat teams. Each movement should be viewed as an opportunity to build deployment readiness in the Army's warfighting formations.

By repetitively practicing and mastering the skills associated with deployment and global power projection, the Army will ensure it is ready to deploy, fight, and win when it is called.

Maj. Gen. Kurt J. Ryan is the commanding general of the Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois. An Ordnance Corps officer, he holds a bachelor's degree from York College of Pennsylvania, a master's degree in logistics management from the Florida Institute of Technology, and a master's degree in strategic studies from the Army War College.