



Joint assessment team Soldiers assigned to the 597th Transportation Brigade and the 832nd Battalion, 689th Rapid Port Opening Element, get an arrival briefing at the Port of San Diego, Calif., on Aug. 19, 2017. (Photo by Airman 1st Class Haley Phillips)

SEDRE and SPOD Operations

A joint task force—port opening executed a sea emergency deployment readiness exercise and seaport of debarkation operations to prepare for humanitarian and expeditionary operations.

■ By Maj. Dustin A. Menhart and Capt. Robert A. Robinson

Simultaneously executing a sea emergency deployment readiness exercise (SEDRE) and seaport of debarkation (SPOD) operations is a challenging undertaking. To prepare for the challenge, the 597th Transportation Brigade, Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command, executed a SEDRE and SPOD operations at the Port of Port Arthur, Texas, in April 2016. The exercise was further complicated by a joint task force—port opening (JTF—PO) mission.

SEDRE and SPOD operations heavily rely on a realistic operational design, effective deployment of forces, and a methodical redeployment and retrograde process. The operational framework for the exercise was broken into four phases: planning and preparation, deployment of personnel and equipment, execution, and redeployment and retrograde.

Phase I: Planning

During the 597th Transportation Brigade's after action review of the

exercise, it identified four areas related to planning and preparation: operational design and approach, the predeployment site survey (PDSS), knowledge management, and the rehearsal of concept (ROC) drill.

Operational design and approach.

Initially, the 833rd Transportation Battalion commander identified the objectives and end state for the exercise. The commander's clear guidance and intent established a thorough understanding of the tools and methods that framed the path forward.

Each unit involved in the exercise had specific lines of effort and a desired outcome that captured the significance of the operational design and approach for this operation. The operational design and approach were shared with all partners and exercised throughout all phases of the operation, particularly during the ROC drill.

According to Joint Publication 5-0, Joint Planning, operational design is “the conception and construction of the framework that underpins a campaign or operation and its subsequent execution.” Operational design requires a unit commander to lead the development of the design, to encourage discourse and leverage dialogue in order to solve ill-defined problems, and to collaborate with higher headquarters to resolve differences of interpretation.

PDSS. The PDSS was particularly useful for synchronizing the logistics footprint and sustainment responsibilities at the Port of Port Arthur. The 101st Airborne Division, the 129th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, the 101st Airborne Division Sustainment Brigade, and the 833rd Transportation Battalion synchronized their concepts of operations and concepts of support to allow for situational understanding and awareness for each higher headquarters objective.

The PDSS provided integration and built partnerships within the separate command organizations. These partnership proved to be important during vessel discharge.

Knowledge management. The Department of Defense enterprise system of record, Intelink, was initially developed to be a knowledge management system for reporting procedures across the multiple levels of combatant commands. The 833rd Transportation Battalion has been using Intelink at the Joint Enabling Capabilities Command to train and provide its personnel with best practices for operations. The method and system allowed for timely reports that captured cargo documentation and

ensured end-to-end asset visibility.

Intelink enabled several tools for managing a joint operations center, such as battle drills, commander’s critical information requirements, and significant activities. All information and operational data was promptly accessed using Intelink, which enhanced operational effectiveness across the commands and the multiple joint organizations involved.

The ROC drill. Although a ROC drill is not an official doctrinal event, it is a best management practice within the Department of Defense. Prior to the operation, the 833rd Transportation Battalion coordinated with the 101st Airborne Division Sustainment Brigade and the 129th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion to validate the path to the ROC drill.

During the in-process review, a critical path was established for the concept of operation, concept of support, and outline for the ROC drill. A ROC drill briefing and script were generated to describe the four-phased operational approach that was parallel to the operational framework.

By producing the ROC drill briefing and script, the 833rd Transportation Battalion delineated the key tasks and objectives that each unit was required to perform. Through continual in-process reviews and communication, the 101st Airborne Division Sustainment Brigade, the 129th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, and the 833rd Transportation Battalion continued to refine the operation and receive valuable commander’s guidance. Thanks to collaboration and teamwork, the units recognized gaps before the execution phase.

Phase II: Deployment

Achieving the chief of staff of the Army’s top priority of readiness was one of the 833rd Transportation Battalion commander’s essential goals. The commander continuously evaluated the unit on readiness efforts during movement working groups

and ensured it applied the four deployment principles during outload.

The precision of the unit move relied on the unit movement officer and the oversight of the battalion’s mobility warrant officers. The synchronization of the equipment and personnel density list occurred during Phase I and continued to be assessed and monitored throughout Phase II for accountability and in-transit visibility (ITV).

The knowledge deployment principle allowed for timely decisions, guidance, and a shared understanding of all essential information regarding unit movements for cargo and personnel. Speed plays a role in force projection, and the efficiencies and processes that allow for speed proved to be instrumental to the organizational movement plan.

Having a tactical standard operating procedure (SOP) and a readiness SOP benefits an organization by providing a collective understanding. Before the SEDRE and SPOD operations began, the 833rd Transportation Battalion aggressively refined its tactical SOP that focused on the unit’s mobility. The work and detailed analysis paid dividends during the deployment and outload.

Phase III: Execution

If the planning and deployment phases are properly accomplished, the execution phase will be more synchronized. The success of the simultaneous SEDRE and SPOD operations was a direct reflection of the coordination and collaboration of partners exercising the mission.

The focal point of the operation was the *USNS Benavidez*, a roll-on/roll-off vehicle cargo ship. Expeditionary port unit personnel from the Military Sealift Command managed all port liaison functions for the vessel. Sailors from Naval Cargo Handling Battalion ONE provided the stevedore support for discharging the vessel.

The collaboration between the supported and supporting units began once the cargo and equipment start-

ed to come off the vessel. The 101st Airborne Division had a daily vessel offload plan meeting with all the JTF-PO units to ensure the priority of discharge was understood and maintained. The division also provided a port support activity to help the naval battalion discharge cargo from the vessel.

As the equipment came off the vessel, personnel from the 690th Rapid Port Opening Element (RPOE) documented the equipment to validate and monitor the simulated theater distribution plan. The cargo then was moved to the cargo transfer yard, where it was staged in chalk order based on the theater movement plan initiated by the 101st Airborne Division.

Once the cargo was released from the cargo transfer yard, a thorough exclusion of responsibility occurred and the units completed onward movement and integration into the theater of operations.

From the first piece of cargo discharged to the last piece of equipment transferred, the cargo management center, operated by the 690th RPOE and personnel from the 597th Transportation Brigade, provided the documentation and information technology for the seamless transition from intertheater distribution to intratheater movement. The center verified that all plans were well-synchronized and monitored throughout the mission.

Moreover, the JTF-PO SPOD mission command element, operated by the 833rd Transportation Battalion, ensured all port management activities were successfully integrated with port operations and the schemes of maneuver and support.

Phase IV: Redeployment

Redeployment and retrograde are a vital part of any operation, but they present difficulties. These difficulties are specific to each area of operations and present unique challenges that logisticians must overcome.

SPOD operations require adequate planning to facilitate an effective

and efficient redeployment process. SPOD operations within the JTF-PO environment are fast-paced, which further compound redeployment and retrograde operations. During the exercise, the JTF-PO had to focus on both the scenario and the real-world transfer of equipment and personnel back to Fort Eustis, Virginia.

Shipping equipment to Fort Eustis involved several obstacles. These obstacles included properly marking equipment with military shipping labels and radio-frequency identification tags, adequately documenting hazardous materials, and coordinating with commercial line-haul drivers.

The real-world movement of personnel was accomplished using flights booked through the Defense Travel System (DTS) and Group Passenger Travel. Both Army and Navy personnel were being transported, so Group Passenger Travel was easier because DTS commercial flights required the sharing of lines of accounting (LOAs).

Last-minute personnel changes during the redeployment caused last-minute sharing of LOAs. For future operations, all personnel will have shared LOAs on their DTS authorizations, even if LOAs are not ultimately used.

The redeployment and retrograde operations consisted of notionally returning a few pieces of equipment and signing over the rest of the equipment to the follow-on force. The RPOE rapidly set up ITV and coordinated the throughput of cargo. The JTF-PO was responsible for redeploying all equipment and provided a notional relief in place and transfer of authority, which transferred the remaining on-ground cargo to the 101st Airborne Division Sustainment Brigade.

The redeployment and retrograde operations suffered a few setbacks, but sharing LOAs among all participants, properly marking equipment to ensure accurate ITV, and ensuring proper hazardous materials

documentation will further improve SPOD operations.

The 597th Transportation Brigade used best practices learned from previous SEDRE and SPOD operations to streamline the planning process. Complex logistics operations involving several joint partners can cause problems such as duplicated efforts and missed deadlines.

Early planning resulted in a realistic operational design and approach and facilitated effective communication among all JTF-PO partners. Using the unit tactical SOP and readiness SOP benefited the entire JTF-PO, increasing efficiency and reducing reaction time.

Using knowledge management allowed personnel and the commander to assess the operation in near-real time. A realistic operational design, an effective deployment of forces, and a methodical redeployment and retrograde process were critical to the success of the exercise.

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