

Reception and Integration of an ABCT Through Theater Intermediate Staging Bases

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The 44th Expeditionary Signal Battalion provided command post node capabilities at Drawsko Pomorskie Training Area, Poland, on Jan. 18, 2017. These capabilities allowed the incoming armored brigade combat team personnel to communicate immediately upon arrival. (Photo by 1st Lt. Kiefer Ragay)



The 16th Special Troops Battalion used seven intermediate staging bases to receive armored brigade combat team units and speedily prepare them for Atlantic Resolve.

As a part of the U.S. strategy to bolster forces and deter a Russian threat, the 3rd Armored Brigade Combat team, 4th Infantry Division (ID), (3-4 ABCT) from Fort Carson, Colorado, deployed its forces to the Atlantic Resolve joint operations area in January 2017. This deployment entailed moving the ABCT's 3,500 personnel and 2,600 pieces of equipment, including 261 combat platforms, to seven locations across Poland. Once all equipment and personnel were accounted for and prepared for combat operations, the 3-4 ABCT initiated a second onward movement into Eastern Europe to establish a presence in Estonia and Romania.

The reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (RSOI) process took 14 days from the time the first of three ships arrived at the port of Bremerhaven, Germany, to the time the ABCT was combat ready.

Conceptually, the force flow of personnel and equipment was simple: use air, sea, and rail assets to reach seven forward locations. In actuality, much more occurred behind the scenes to make RSOI possible. This was one of the largest logistics deployment efforts since Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom.

Mission Command

The 3-4 ABCT could not deploy its forces to Europe alone. The 21st Theater Sustainment Command (TSC) facilitated the strategic logistics coordination for the RSOI.

The 21st TSC tasked the 16th Sustainment Brigade with mission command of all logistics integration requirements in the Atlantic Resolve area of operations (AO). The 16th Sustainment Brigade supported the 598th Transportation Brigade, Military Surface Deployment Distribution Command (SDDC), for reception and staging and the 4th ID Sustainment Brigade for onward movement.

The overall mission command structure for RSOI focused on relationships between supporting and supported units. This structure greatly influenced

the TSC's ability to support the complex 3-4 ABCT RSOI mission, which consisted of facilitating theater opening, distribution, and sustainment.

The 16th Sustainment Brigade developed a concept of sustainment to enable the 3-4 ABCT to project forces, enhance speed of assembly, and build combat power. This concept of sustainment consisted of developing a transportation and distribution plan, establishing life support, and developing intermediate staging bases (ISBs) for integrating incoming personnel and equipment.

During the execution phase, the 16th Special Troops Battalion (STB) took mission command of all ISBs and ensured the concept of sustainment was fully executed as designed. This streamlined the RSOI process, making the deployment of a fully enabled, combat-ready ABCT possible in 14 days.

Projecting the Force

Movement is chronologically the first, yet possibly the most complicated, aspect of developing a concept of sustainment. For RSOI, 3-4 ABCT used air, sea, rail, and road assets to transport Soldiers and equipment.

These assets entered into the U.S. Army Europe AO through theater gateways or ports of debarkation (PODs) to move to their final destinations. POD coordination was not easy because U.S. forces could not receive dedicated support at PODs because of competition with commercial vendors. The 598th Transportation Brigade was the main effort during this critical phase. The 16th Sustainment Brigade assigned its movement control teams (MCTs) to the 4th ID Sustainment Brigade, which was in charge of port support activity operations at port and rail locations.

The 16th STB assisted with the transportation of 3-4 ABCT personnel and equipment by creating a common operational picture that enabled freedom of maneuver.

To successfully project 3-4



A contract worker drives a forklift to deliver water to Soldiers at Zagan, Poland, on Jan. 18, 2017. (Photo by 1st Lt. Gregory Hacker)

ABCT into the AO, the 16th Sustainment Brigade coordinated the use of sea PODs, rail PODs, aerial PODs, and road networks. This coordination depended on leveraging strategic-level assets, commercial contracts, and host-nation support while using MCTs and personnel accountability teams (PATs) to monitor progress and ensure streamlined execution.

Enhancing Speed of Assembly

The 16th STB coordinated movements through the 39th Transportation Battalion and monitored the MCTs during mission execution. For equipment tracking, the 16th Sustainment Brigade assigned MCTs to tactical nodes across the AO in concert with the PAT teams. These teams increased speed of assembly and the brigade's ability to meet combat-ready standards by providing closure reports for equipment arriving by commercial truck, rail, and air.

The MCTs used several methods to accomplish this reporting. The pri-

mary method was to manually track equipment by bumper number and transportation control number when it arrived in Poland. The MCTs also used technology to monitor the arrival of convoys and trains.

The teams applied radio-frequency identification (RFID) tags to the equipment at home station and monitored it using U.S. Army Europe's network of RFID interrogators. The teams also used commercially procured mobile trackers to augment the RFID interrogators. Using these assets, MCTs provided real-time updates of current locations and projected arrival times that allowed leaders to make necessary preparations.

The 16th STB also provided the 4th ID Sustainment Brigade with PATs to monitor and report the reception of Soldiers and equipment using automated Army systems such as the Tactical Personnel System (TPS) and the Deployed Theater Accountability System (DTAS).

Integrating with the 21st TSC's human resources sustainment center

for PAT reporting was vital for capturing personnel visibility. Using TPS and DTAS, the STB and higher echelons gained real-time updates and accurate information that increased leaders' visibility and enhanced freedom of maneuver.

The 569th Human Resources Company launched theater gateway PATs to Polish civilian airports (employed as aerial PODs) to receive 3-4 ABCT personnel. The theater gateway PATs used the Joint Operation Planning and Execution System to track incoming flights and TPS and DTAS to account for personnel arriving in theater. This validated unit accountability, streamlined the personnel flow, and drastically increased the 3-4 ABCT's speed of assembly.

Managing the arrival and discharge of equipment provided accurate reporting of equipment and personnel movement to the 4th ID mission command element (MCE) for force tracking. Knowing the status and location of their personnel and equip-



Vehicles from 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, leave the American roll-on roll-off carrier Resolve at Bremerhaven, Germany, on Jan. 6, 2017. The unit's vehicles and equipment were shipped to intermediate staging bases in Poland before deploying across Europe for use in training with partner nations. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Jacob A. McDonald)

ment during the deployment and onward movement improved training timelines, range operations, and the speed at which deploying forces became combat-ready units.

Sustaining the Force

Sustaining the deploying unit as it progresses through the theater RSOI process maximizes speed of assembly and allows it to focus on building combat power. When the 3-4 ABCT arrived in Poland, the 16th STB, in conjunction with the 4th ID MCE, ensured that sustainment and life support for an entire ABCT was ready upon arrival.

By leveraging organic assets, host-nation support, and contracted solutions, the 16th STB maintained oversight and ensured the sustainment of the 3-4 ABCT. The STB equipped each ISB with a command team responsible for es-

tablishing the life support requirements needed to seamlessly receive all 3-4 ABCT personnel into theater. Since operations were enduring and forward in Poland, most requirements included host-nation or contracted support.

The ISB commanders (company commanders from the 16th Sustainment Brigade) worked directly with the host nation to facilitate support through existing acquisition and cross-servicing agreements captured in a statement of requirements.

The STB and MCE resourced most contracted requirements through the Logistics Civil Augmentation Program (LOGCAP). In all, the 16th Sustainment Brigade and the 3-4 ABCT established and executed a total of 14 statements of requirements, nine LOGCAP contracts, more than 800 one-time

movement contracts, and 10 commercial contracts.

The 16th STB S-4 section directly managed ISB life support requirements and facilitated communication between various channels including the 4th ID MCE, LOGCAP, the host nation, the 16th Sustainment Brigade, the Installation Management Command-Europe, and the Army and Air Force Exchange Service (the Exchange) to ensure they fully supported the ISBs.

The S-4 developed a “quality of life” tracker that captured all life support requirements to include billeting, dining facilities, gyms, mail rooms, American Forces Network access, Wi-Fi, and Exchange support. Every night the 16th STB hosted a battalion update brief where key players discussed the requirements and issues related to life support and then determined solu-

tions. Because of the complexity of requirements and the number of organizations providing resources, this forum was crucial to ensuring real-time updates, shared understanding, and necessary resources.

Building Combat Power

The 16th STB stood up, resourced, and managed seven ISBs across western Poland to serve as strategic platforms that enabled the 3-4 ABCT to reach full combat strength and achieve their 14-day speed of assembly goal. These ISBs were part of the theater RSOI process and therefore “theater infrastructure” where deploying units linked up and integrated Soldiers, equipment, and mission command systems before moving to a tactical assembly area.

The STB tasked company command teams to guide integration. Each command team was accompanied by 10 to 18 Soldiers and non-commissioned officers. This number varied depending on the size of the ISB and the support required.

Having command teams who were already familiar with the European theater in charge of each site was essential to providing critical guidance that drastically increased the readiness of each unit entering the ISB.

Placing command teams at the ISBs also provided critical support and assistance for the inbound commanders. Instead of focusing on life support and reception tasks, inbound commanders were able to concentrate on reaching full combat power and preparing their units for onward movement.

The STB assigned each ISB a contracting officer representative to coordinate and oversee contracted and host-nation support. The contracting officer representatives worked with subcontractors, a LOGCAP-provided administrative contracting officer, and host-nation representatives to meet contracted requirements and to make adjustments when operational needs changed.

The ISBs included several addi-

tional key sustainment functions to achieve a combat-ready posture. The 44th Expeditionary Signal Battalion provided essential communication support and assets that enabled 3-4 ABCT leaders and staff to “plug and play” immediately upon arrival. These assets were operationally controlled by ISB commanders.

Additionally, the 421st Multifunctional Medical Battalion granted ISB command teams operational control of Role I medical personnel and equipment. A noncommissioned officer was embedded with each ISB to manage and coordinate all class I (subsistence) requirements and to monitor food service operations.

Supplies. Likely, the most underappreciated, yet extremely vital portion of the ISB mission was coordinating and managing all classes of supply. Food, water, fuel, blocking and bracing materials, storage, ammunition, materials handling equipment (MHE), and transportation assets were on hand and ready for 3-4 ABCT units as they arrived. Significant planning was required to ensure these assets arrived at all seven ISBs when staff was available to receive them.

Inbound personnel. The PATs provided the ISB command team with the number of incoming personnel and their estimated arrival times to ensure the ISB was ready to receive each group.

It was imperative that the STB staff and planners coordinated with the 3-4 ABCT in the months before the mission in order to identify exactly how many Soldiers would be located at each ISB and when their flights would arrive.

When the 3-4 ABCT Soldiers arrived, many of the Polish barracks at the various ISBs were undergoing renovations. Command teams had to accommodate for the limited billeting space to meet the demand of incoming troops.

Incoming equipment. The ISB commanders managed the influx of equipment from air, rail, and line-haul assets through close co-

ordination with the MCT and the inland cargo transfer company for its MHE. The ISBs closely tracked all equipment to ensure that the necessary MHE and support personnel were immediately available to download and stage inbound equipment.

The 16th STB demonstrated the importance of sustainment operations in enabling a combat force to deploy its forces at an unprecedented speed. While the rapid deployment of the 3-4 ABCT is impressive, the behind the scenes meticulous planning and robust logistics support is perhaps a more impressive takeaway. This event demonstrated that sustainment is the gateway to mission, operational, and ultimately strategic success.

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