

# Mobility Challenges in the European Theater

A reduced movement control force structure, commercial carrier dependence, bureaucracy, and a lack of movement control experience contribute to the difficulty of planning and executing U.S. military movements throughout the European theater.

■ By Lt. Col. Chris Johnson

Since the end of World War II, the Army has occupied and forward-stationed combat formations of various sizes and compositions throughout Europe, primarily to be a credible deterrent force to the Soviet threat. Europe transitioned from a continent at war to a continent undergoing reconstruction and rehabilitation, and the U.S. military's freedom of movement slowly began to erode as European nations gradually exerted sovereignty over their transportation networks.

For many years, appropriate tactical and operational movement control agencies provided operational commanders with the ability to plan, organize, and execute the division and corps formations necessary to achieve strategic effects in the defense of European and NATO allies. The transportation architecture in Europe functioned sufficiently for decades into the late 1990s.

Recently, budgetary pressures, coupled with changing views on the role the U.S. military should play in Europe, necessitated the drawdown of forces and the dismantling of the Army's transportation network throughout the region. Decades' worth of experience and expertise concerning military mobility evaporated seemingly overnight. This left the Army in Europe with a patchwork of legacy systems, units, and business practices that are increasingly strained because of the stra-

tegic emphasis placed on Europe in recent years.

## Moving in Europe Today

As both the U.S. European Command and U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR) continue to mature and deter aggressive influences throughout Europe, units at the operational and tactical levels face complexities involved in planning, programming, managing, and executing military movements over an area roughly the size of the U.S. Eastern Seaboard.

Large-scale movements across national boundaries were nearly nonexistent until rotations into the Balkans began in April 1992. These rotations supported peacekeeping missions and were NATO's and USAREUR's first operational deployments.

Two decades later, with the Russian army's increasing aggression toward its former satellite countries, both the United States and NATO must plan and resource for potential kinetic engagement with this revanchist power.

In recent years, the rotational armored brigade combat team (ABCT) concept has served as part of the U.S. military's response to energized Russian army activities. This operationalized concept now deploys continental United States (CONUS)-based ABCTs to Eastern Europe for nine-month periods to provide active deterrence and execute complex training exercises with NATO allies.

Atlantic Resolve serves to strengthen partner-nation relationships and capabilities while increasing a forward military presence to counter Russian activities within the region. The 330th Transportation Battalion (Movement Control) provided the initial movement control for U.S. forces there.

Upon returning from its nine-month rotation in Poland, the 330th Transportation Battalion recently identified significant operational planning gaps. The following factors contribute to the difficulty of planning and executing military movements throughout the European theater:

- A reduced movement control force structure.
- Commercial carrier dependence.
- Sovereign bureaucracy.
- A lack of movement control experience.

Each of these factors individually represent complicated problems; when combined, they form nearly insurmountable obstacles to the most basic of military movements, especially for battalion-sized elements. The establishment of a formal movement control infrastructure and transportation architecture would enable freedom of movement through mission command.

## Reduced Force Structure

Throughout the 1980s and '90s,

the European theater operated under a steady-state formula of maintaining the status quo at all costs to deter potential aggression from the Eastern Bloc.

During this period, the Army's contribution to this deterrence came in the form of one Army service component command (USAREUR), one field Army headquarters (Seventh Army), two active duty corps headquarters (V Corps and VII Corps), and four active duty divisions (the 1st Armored Division, the 1st Infantry Division, the 3rd Infantry Division, and the 8th Infantry Division). All of these units, totaling approximately 230,000 Soldiers, were permanently in Germany.

Any movement control necessary for the significant formation in Germany was handled by

three movement control battalions (MCB), a theater Army movement control agency (TAMCA), and associated transportation units scattered throughout the continent.

Successive drawdown initiatives over the past 15 years have resulted in combat formations withdrawing from the European theater and moving back to CONUS. These moves were intended to transform the force from a forward-deployed Army to a CONUS-based Army with regional power projection capability.

The lack of large-scale maneuver units operating within Europe made resourcing a transportation infrastructure seem unnecessary to Army planners during the yearly Total Army Analysis sessions. Over time, the two MCBs, the TAMCA,

and the supporting transportation units deactivated or were restationed to other places within the Army, effectively disassembling the Army's transportation network in Europe.

A single MCB with a handful of movement control teams remained to manage an entire continent's worth of movement coordination. An inadequate, underdeveloped transportation network, paired with the drain of experience and expertise, presents challenges in supporting the rotational ABCT deterrence model.

### Commercial Carrier Dependence

The withdrawal of key Army transportation enablers, such as rail cars and heavy equipment transporter systems, have resulted in a



*Pfc. Brandon DeFlippo, an M-1 Abrams tank system maintainer with the 5th Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, watches a recovery vehicle being lifted off of a train in Adazi, Latvia, on Dec. 7, 2017, as part of a readiness exercise in support of Atlantic Resolve. (Photo by Spc. Hubert D. Delany III)*

dependence on commercial conveyance to transport combat platforms. The use of commercial carriers has always been an essential enabler in moving military forces from forts to ports. The Army uses commercial

sponsive enough for CONUS-based units to rely on for the rapid and uninterrupted movement of unit equipment.

Within the whole of the European theater, just one rail consortium is the

mander's intent.

The overall lack of competition has cultivated a monopoly on rail capability within the theater. This has forced military units to alter plans and deliveries based on com-

**“For the apostles of mobility, movement and its control are perhaps the most important capability and techniques of land warfare.”**

**—Robert E. Sumpkim**

ships, railroads, and trucks to fill both contingency and routine transportation requirements. These commercial enablers often provide their services with little to no advance notice.

But this is now the norm versus the exception, which significantly increases risk should contingency operations ensue. The commercial movement enterprise in Europe is neither reflexive nor re-

single point of entry for all rail movements. With most of the enduring European sea ports of embarkation and debarkation located in the western part of the continent (Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands), this single rail company is allowed to drive the throughput process by both directly and indirectly establishing priorities that are not always congruent with the maneuver com-

mercial movement availability rather than operational requirements. The lack of rail options is not only an inconvenience during peacetime activities but also dangerous should crisis or contingency occur.

**Sovereign Bureaucracy**

Another significant challenge that impedes mobility in Europe is bureaucratic inefficiencies. Military



*Soldiers with the 5th Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, load heavy equipment onto a train near Swietoszow, Poland, on Dec. 2, 2017, as part of an emergency deployment readiness exercise in support of Atlantic Resolve. (Photo by Spc. Hubert D. Delany III)*

movements in Europe are not exempt from the bureaucratic morass of formal legal movement approvals before each convoy. Laws and regulations pertaining to every aspect of normal daily business govern each of the 29 signatories to the NATO alliance. These include varying regulations from different departments of transportation.

As do the individual states within the United States, European countries each have their own laws regulating movement, mobility, and restrictions limiting the types, timing, density, frequency, and routes of military convoys. The lack of standardization in movement regulations and timeline variations for submitted requests across Europe lead to overly complicated military movements that are frustrating under even the most routine conditions.

In times of crisis or escalating tensions, overly cumbersome movement systems and a lack of standardization could prevent essential equipment and supplies from arriving at the point of need on time.

### **A Lack of Experience**

Once U.S. forces concluded the initial ground invasion and established a long-term presence in Iraq and Afghanistan, units no longer deployed with equipment on a large scale from their CONUS duty stations. Rather, units deployed with only their assigned personnel and small shipments of their most basic equipment. These shipments arrived on chartered or military strategic aircraft.

An overreliance on theater-provided equipment became the norm and cultivated an entire generation of commissioned and non-commissioned officers who lack a fundamental understanding of deploying into and operating within a nation where U.S. access is not guaranteed. These leaders also often do not have enough off-post convoy experience prior to deploying to Europe.

The U.S. military presence in Germany and Eastern Europe will continue to endure as a counterbalance to the antagonism of the Russian government within the region. Leaders must seriously consider altering business practices and training models that encourage behaviors that run counter to how movement control should take place both routinely and in times of crisis.

The 330th Transportation Battalion identified four potential solutions that would substantially optimize future operations.

First, through the Total Army Analysis process, the Department of the Army should permanently station a second MCB within Eastern Europe, preferably in a location that is centrally located and where the host nation is comfortable with its presence.

Second, the Army should establish an organization that executes the former TAMCA roles and responsibilities across the theater. This organization would operate as a separate center with a colonel-level directorate similar to the theater sustainment command's human resources service center.

Third, movement control teams should be permanently stationed throughout Eastern Europe. This will allow for growth and help movement control Soldiers gain regional expertise.

Finally, the Army should reduce its reliance on single-source commercial partnerships to execute military moves throughout Europe. It should explore and expand its direct coordination with individual host-nation companies.

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