

Rapidly Returning the Global Response Force

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The 407th Brigade Support Battalion competently redeployed the 2d Brigade, 82d Airborne Division, from Operation Unified Response in Haiti by planning, rehearsing, and communicating well with all of the units involved in the mission.

Developing redeployment competence is an interesting topic. Even though it is part of the mission-essential task list, it usually ranks very low on the priority list. Discussing redeployment operations in the midst of executing full-spectrum operations seems potentially counterproductive; it may distract a unit from completing a successful mission. Nonetheless, for logisticians, even if developing redeployment competence is not a priority, executing a redeployment competently is.

Redeployment Operations

Redeployment operations resemble reception, staging, onward movement, and integration; although both are combat operations, their logistics implications are highly significant. One could easily make the case that redeployment operations are a reverse supply chain of sorts.

Knowing that a lack of redeployment competence can potentially hinder the rapid rebuilding of combat power, it is worthwhile to share lessons learned concerning tactical redeployment, particularly under austere and immature conditions. Like deploying, redeploying under such conditions usually presents many challenges that tactical support units must solve.

Since the advent of modularity in 2006, the brigade support battalion (BSB) has possessed great capability to facilitate redeployment operations for the brigade combat team (BCT). This capability lengthens the BCT's operational agility, and units can stay in the fight longer.

This article outlines the experience of my battalion, the 407th BSB, as it contributed to the redeployment of the 2d BCT, 82d Airborne Division, from Operation Unified Response in Haiti in February and March 2010. This was a particularly significant redeployment operation since the 2d BCT would resume a global response force mission shortly after returning to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. During the redeployment, the 1st Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment (1-325 AIR), received a short notice

deployment order for a 4-month stop-gap mission in Afghanistan. This follow-on deployment highlighted the need to redeploy with precision.

Early Redeployments

The 407th BSB began redeployment planning in the first week of February, even without a redeployment date. We began redeploying the 1st Squadron, 73d Cavalry Regiment, in early March and finished redeploying the majority of the 2d BCT, including our battalion, on 26 March. Around 20 March, we learned that we would resume the global response force mission at Fort Bragg on 1 April.

By approaching the BCT's redeployment as a combat operation, we knew that mission command would be essential. We also inherently knew that although we could rent our own buses, host-nation flatbeds, and other means of transportation, we would have to interact closely with the Joint Staff, the U.S. Southern Command, and the U.S. Transportation Command. We would also require Joint Planning and Execution Systems visibility on inbound flights and ships.

Therefore, when conducting initial planning with the joint task force (JTF), we suggested the creation of a deployment-redeployment control center (DRCC). When the JTF and the 3d Expeditionary Sustainment Command (ESC) adopted this concept, we embedded in the DRCC our brigade mobility officer and one of our movement noncommissioned officers (NCOs) as a liaison team. During the first few battalion redeployments, we placed our battalion S-3 and two additional NCOs in the DRCC to maintain situational awareness 24 hours a day.

We found the key to redeployment success was to meet formally with the supported unit well before the potential chaos of redeployment. During this meeting, we would walk through a detailed, lockstep framework of our redeployment support from start to finish and scrutinize any

The deputy commanding general of Joint Task Force–Haiti stops to talk with several Soldiers from A Company, 407th Brigade Support Battalion, 82d Airborne Division, while they wait at an airfield to return to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. (Photo by Private Samantha D. Hall, 11th Public Affairs Detachment)



issues. We dubbed this framework the “r-minus” schedule.

Redeployment Tactical Operations Center

Borrowing a tried and true concept from redeploying the 82d Airborne Division from Iraq in April 2004, we built a redeployment tactical operations center (RTOC), which was a central operations center where redeployment operators throughout the BCT could share information, integrate resources, and synchronize redeployment. After defining RTOC information requirements, we manned the RTOC at night with a battle NCO and during the day with a lieutenant, an NCO, and an enlisted Soldier. A Transportation captain who was headed for Special Forces led the overall operation, constantly synchronizing daily operations between the DRCC and the RTOC.

We built the RTOC knowing our main body would need to redeploy our tactical gear at some point. We purposefully put the RTOC inside a general purpose medium tent that we could leave in Haiti. A hardworking crew of NCOs and Soldiers built tables, chairs, battleboards, and a floor from locally purchased plywood and 2x4s.

We did need to use some of our organizational equipment, such as our Command Post Node and accompanying “category 5” cable for digital communications, laptops we could carry, a 10,000-watt generator for power, a light set, and several printers. We left behind two high-mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles with trailers and one shipping container to use for redeploying this equipment by military aircraft.

By the same thought process, trying to increase our agility as much as possible, we packed our tactical voice communications equipment and received 26 land mobile radios. Although they were a nonsecure capability, these radios easily communicated with all of our nodes as well as the DRCC and the BCT tactical operations center, allowing us to track and report all aspects of the redeployment.

We also employed the “battlebox,” a shared email address assigned to our operations centers that battle captains and NCOs monitored 24 hours a day. The battlebox

ensured that a running log of emails was in one repository.

Conquer the Container

During our mission analysis and concept development, we derived three lines of operation: moving containers, moving vehicles to the seaport, and moving personnel directly to the airport. Initially, we assessed the container line of operation to be the most difficult, although we encountered the most challenges providing redeployment life support at the life support area (LSA).

To counter our anticipated difficulty with containers, we launched a “Conquer the Container” campaign. We sent a mobile training team (MTT) to each base camp to teach leaders a 1-night block of instruction on container friction points and problem areas. The MTT reviewed standards on shipping labels, radio frequency identification tags, and blocking and bracing for MILVANs [military-owned demountable containers]. The instruction also included hazardous material and ammunition packaging and handling training.

Ammunition Support

Ammunition was a concern because of our requirement to redeploy it to Fort Bragg. Because we required military aircraft for transportation and we were a low transportation priority, we were worried about ammunition on the ground causing delays in our redeployment. We sent our first air shipment of brigade ammunition back to Fort Bragg on 17 March. On a few occasions, the military aircraft assigned to our movement were reassigned to higher priority missions, but ammunition redeployment did not slow our return to Fort Bragg.

Unit ammunition turn-in went smoothly. After communicating standards as part of the Conquer the Container MTT, our ammunition team moved to operating bases early in the process to assist in packaging and account-

ability. A deployed quality assurance specialist (ammunition surveillance) team was a great help.

Surface Redeployment

While we were expecting rigid unit line number discipline when processing vehicles for surface movement, we were excited to learn that we could load ships without being confined by unit line number rules. What evolved was a type of surface channel that ran from Port au Prince, Haiti, to Jacksonville, Florida, then onward to Fort Bragg via line haul. We were not required to provide supercar-goes (manpower required to travel on the vessel and check tiedowns en route), probably because of the trip's short duration. The travel time was 14 days from port to fort, and movement out of the seaport marshalling yard was about 1 to 2 days based on the high priority granted by the DRCC.

For most vessels, we provided a 20-driver port support activity to drive all vehicles and equipment onto ships. We also maintained several nodes at the shipyard manned by mechanics from our B Company and headed by our shop officer. The nodes included a team to track equipment as it passed through the customs wash rack, a team to account for equipment as it left the final marshalling yard, and a team to account for equipment as it was loaded onto the ship. We first plugged into the rapid port-opening element from Jacksonville and also the 10th Transportation Battalion, which was running the port.

The Wash Rack

During initial planning, we thought we would be able to avoid washing vehicles for customs. Unfortunately, this did not turn out to be the case. Although we began with a planning estimate from the Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command of 10 vehicles per hour flowing through 3 points operated by contracted Haitians with 3.96-gallons-per-minute pressure washers, our first redeploying unit, the 1st Squadron, 73d Cavalry Regiment (the Gray Falcons), required almost 3.5 hours for a serial of 10 vehicles.

While the Gray Falcons had a small fleet (38 pieces of equipment), we knew this rate of throughput would not be able to support our larger battalions. The Red Falcons (the 1-325th AIR), the next battalion in the redeployment order of movement, possessed nearly three times as many vehicles and trailers. Therefore, we developed a mobile carwash, an asset that we could deploy to any forward operating base early in the predeployment process for precleaning.

To build this carwash capability, we first considered flying our sineators [chemical decontamination equipment] from Fort Bragg for the mission. Then A Company's "water dogs" built the carwash using a load handling system flatbed, two forward area water point supply system blivets, a 600-gallon plastic water tank, and two locally purchased 3.96-gallon-per-minute pressure washers. The

carwash team prewashed more than 205 vehicles across the BCT, reducing wash rack throughput time from 3.5 hours per serial to as low as 1 hour per serial.

Strategic Redeployment by Air

To redeploy by air, we were allotted a low transportation priority for passengers by the U.S. Transportation Command and a low priority for our military cargo, including ammunition, sensitive items containers, and the final Command Post Node and power generation equipment needed for maintaining communications.

Early in the redeployment process, we obtained a Strategic Mobility System account for the RTOC. Having this capability enabled the RTOC battle captain to track flights and maintain situational awareness. Our actual commercial flights arrived 1 or 2 days past the requested load date, and our flights for military cargo arrived an average of 3 days past the requested load date.

Customs

Redeploying from foreign soil inevitably requires a host of customs inspections. Returning from Haiti was certainly no different. During our mission analysis, we identified that customs inspections would ultimately determine our redeployment tempo. U.S. customs agents flew in and trained theater military police on customs standards, and we began inspections in three areas: containers, equipment, and personnel.

Container and equipment customs. We first had to determine suitable locations to pack containers. While most units deployed their organic containers (with the exception of the Gray Falcons, who did not have a chance to pack them), units still required 20-foot MILVANS to redeploy items that were palletized for deployment or were purchased in country. We conducted site surveys to determine which operating bases could support 20-foot flatbeds and rough-terrain cargo handlers.

Because of transportation constraints, the Gray Falcons loaded their containers at the airfield and the Black Falcons (the 2d Battalion, 319th Field Artillery Regiment) loaded their containers at their forward support company's operating base—a soccer and sports field. All other units packed their containers at their own operating bases.

In all cases, we transported Air Force 463L cargo pallets to the packing location several days ahead of time. Units used their wreckers to reposition the pallets next to their MILVANS and other containers to provide a tidy surface to clean items before packing them.

Equipment had to be clean, so units had to brush tents, ensure nets were free of dirt and seeds, and drain generators. We used contact trucks with airhoses to blow out dirt and seeds, brooms to sweep off tents, and cleaning wipes to clean tents and other equipment. Customs officials had to inspect the insides of containerized kitchens, wreckers, contact trucks, and maintenance shelters for contraband as well as cleanliness. Cleaning containers was relatively

easy—units simply had to sweep them out. Local nationals washed the outsides of the containers in the same way that vehicles were washed. The wash rack maintained a separate lane for containers.

To maintain accountability and facilitate and track the process, our maintenance company supervised the uploading of containers onto trucks from the 10th Transportation Battalion and escorted the containers to the seaport of embarkation. The only containers we did not seal were sensitive items the BCT needed to redeploy by air.

Four battalions (including our own) had three ISU 90 containers to redeploy by air. Our arrival/departure airfield control group facilitated moving these containers to the east end of the airfield 12 hours before departure for a final spray down by Air Force personnel and then an inspection by the Air Force and customs agents. Unit trail parties guarded these containers in the LSA prior to movement.

We found it best to label containers after they were washed since local nationals would sometimes mistakenly spray labels off. We also learned to keep all customs documents to avoid having to redo the inspection.

Personnel customs. We wanted to inspect Soldiers' individual baggage away from the passenger terminal to avoid creating a chokepoint at the airport of debarkation, which was built to process only 10 troops at a time. Working with the customs agents, we performed most baggage inspections at the unit's forward operating base less than 24 hours before their flight time.

Eventually, we started sending inspectors to a unit's LSA to perform customs inspections on top of Soldiers' cots. For our final flights, we facilitated these inspections in open tents that we erected approximately 50 meters from the air port of embarkation (APOE). Customs required about 2.5 hours to complete baggage inspections for 200 Soldiers.

Soldiers flying home had to stand on scales to record their weight and process their assault packs and carry-on bags through customs. Since most passenger flights were contracted commercial lift, many of the familiar commercial flight rules applied, such as no knives or liquids allowed. We had to deliver Soldiers to the APOE 5 hours prior to their departure time; the APOE required an average of 1.5 hours to process 200 Soldiers through customs and manifesting procedures.

The military police serving as customs agents were eager to help us follow correct procedures. So, for our third battalion redeployment rotation, we coordinated for courtesy customs training from them. They reviewed standards for containers, personnel, and equipment traveling by surface vessel. This training was extremely helpful and helped decrease our throughput time even further.

Life Support

Our original concept was to operate a "transient" LSA

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where we could billet unit troops before they redeployed by air. LSA Gold's close proximity to the 24th Air Expeditionary Group's terminal on the west end of the airfield parking ramp, colocated with the RTOC, was the logical location to house these transient troops. However, limited bed space and facilities held our transient capacity to 400 troops in addition to the camp's permanent party population of 400.

Based on this limited capacity, we initially offered transient billeting primarily to unit vehicle drivers; it did not make sense to return unit drivers to their operating bases after washing unit equipment. However, during our planning, we failed to fully identify the units' requirements to clear forward operating bases.

To clear its base, each unit had to disassemble, pack, and ship its general purpose medium tents and turn in its showers, excess water, rations, barrier materials, medical waste, and hazardous materials. In most cases, this close-out process took more than a day, and no unit wanted to wait until the last minute with customs and a flight ahead of them.

So, although we had underestimated the requirement, we still had to support it. We erected additional tents and brought more transients to the LSA than we had originally intended. Doing so required some adjustments since some transients stayed in the LSA for up to 4 days waiting for flights to be assigned and aircraft to arrive. To stretch the LSA's capacity, we established separate shower hours for permanent party and transients and transported hot meals across the camp to the transient location to avoid long feeding lines.

It took time for LSA Gold residents to adjust to these changes. Our first "adjusted" day looked the same as it did before—all personnel were in the shower and chow lines at the same time. We positioned NCOs at these service points to ensure that everyone honored the arrangement and could have the best service. Our camp groaned during its maximum capacity days when the total population neared 800 Soldiers, but the shower team miraculously kept the showers running and the cooks kept on cooking.

Learning and Improving

After the Red Falcons' redeployment, we executed an "in stride" after-action review with the 3d ESC. To increase mission command, we requested our own buses