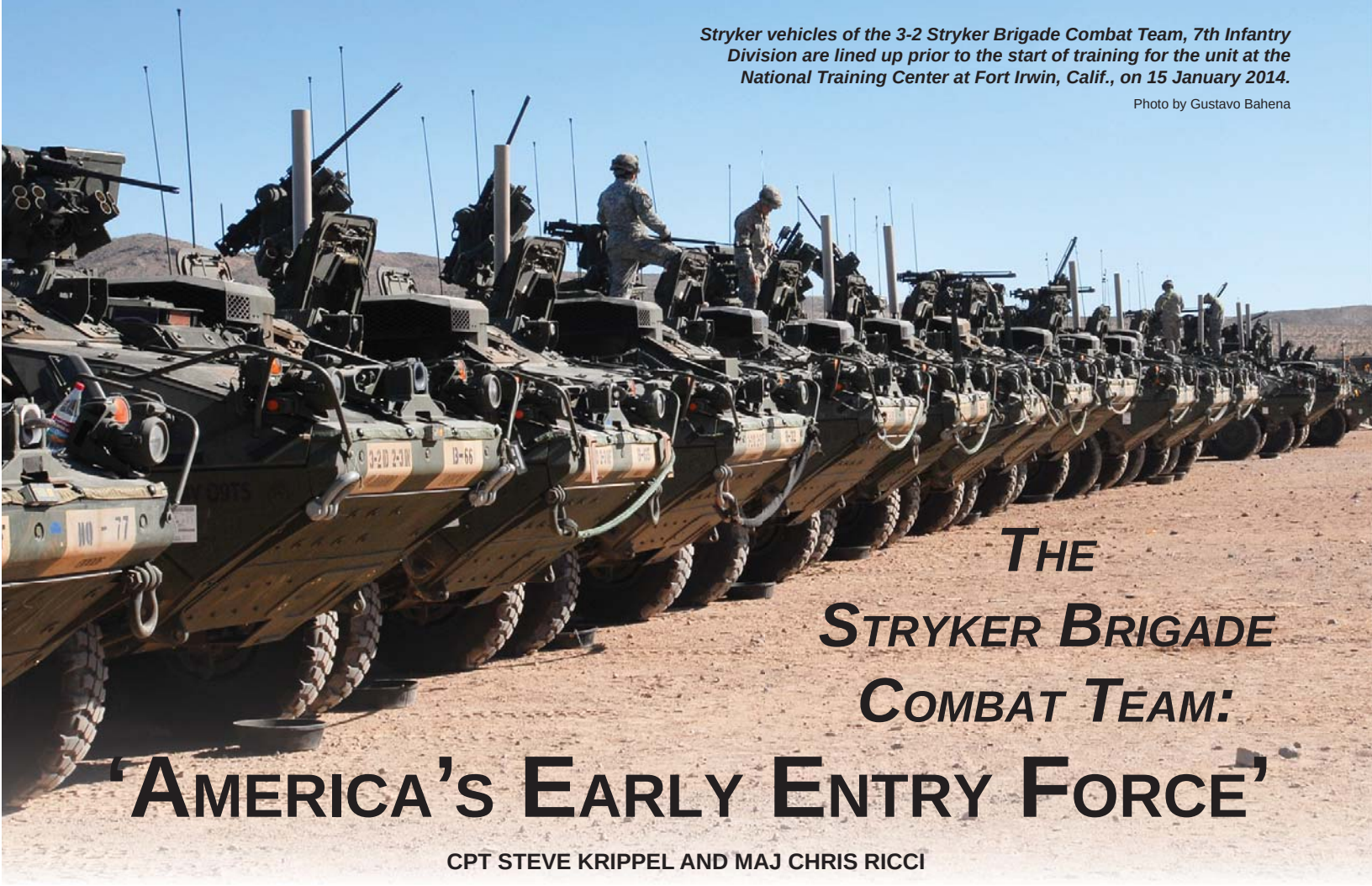

Stryker vehicles of the 3-2 Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 7th Infantry Division are lined up prior to the start of training for the unit at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif., on 15 January 2014.

Photo by Gustavo Bahena

The Stryker Brigade Combat Team: 'America's Early Entry Force'

CPT STEVE KRIPPEL AND MAJ CHRIS RICCI

At present, although the Army is capable of full spectrum dominance, its organization and force structure are not optimized for strategic responsiveness. Army light forces — the best in the world — can deploy quite rapidly, within a matter of days, but they lack the lethality, mobility, and staying power necessary to assure decision. On the other hand, Army mechanized forces possess unmatched lethality and staying power, but they require too much time to deploy, given current joint capabilities for strategic lift, affording the adversary ample opportunity to prepare for the arrival of U.S. forces... The Interim Brigade Combat Team (now Stryker Brigade Combat Team [SBCT]) has been designed as a full spectrum, early entry combat force. The brigade has utility, confirmed through extensive analysis, in all operational environments against all projected future threats, but is optimized primarily for employment in small scale contingencies.

— Executive Summary (EXSUM) Organizational and Operational Concepts (O&O), June 2000

Development of the SBCT

Why did the Army create the Stryker vehicle? Army planners recognized the need to bridge the gap between our light forcible entry forces and our heavy formations based on experiences deploying to Bosnia. Early entry operations were, and are, important to our ability to answer our nation's call. The Stryker brigade was designed to fulfill this requirement, but the Global War on Terrorism prevented early entry operations from being one of the key missions of the SBCT.[1] The Stryker, also designed for small scale contingencies, was quickly used in counterinsurgency (COIN) operations, and early entry operation skills atrophied as the SBCT focused on operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Most readers are aware of the constant trade off when developing armored vehicles; the balancing act of mobile protective firepower is — and always will be — a source of contention and debate. It is important to note that the Stryker family was designed to be C-130 transportable and capable of landing on an assault landing strip.[2] The Stryker was specifically designed with a myriad of add-on packages of armor to increase protection while maintaining C-130 assault strip capability.

The assault strip capability was placed on the Stryker since its inception for the purpose of being air movable anywhere in the world. A majority of landing strips in austere environments are only C-130 capable. The Stryker family of vehicles, with the exception of the double V-hull, remains C-130 transportable today. The capability of being transported by C-130 enables the Stryker brigade to conduct early entry operations in support of a host nation or as a

follow-on force to expand the lodgment of a forcible entry operation. Not only does the U.S. Air Force (USAF) have more C-130s than C-17s and C-5s, our allies around the globe also own significant numbers of C-130 aircraft. There are 70 countries with C-130s with a total of 2,400 C-130 aircraft across the globe. The C-130 has been in production for more than 50 years, and due to its unique capabilities will continue to be produced.[3] This greatly increases options for the joint task force commander to insert increased mobile protective firepower and doesn't limit the areas a battalion task force can be inserted. This also increases the amount of U.S. and allied aircraft available to move the task force due to the vast quantities of C-130s available compared to C-17 and C-5 platforms.

Transporting Strykers on C-130s is not without issues. There are significant challenges using the C-130 to transport the Stryker family of vehicles that can only be mitigated through increased training due to cargo capacity limits. The USAF certification memo even states that the Stryker exceeds accepted limits for routine loading on C-130 aircraft.[4] In addition to USAF testimony, multiple studies dispute the Stryker's ability to fulfill the C-130 requirement. Former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld publicly challenged the Stryker program specifically because he believed the Army failed to prove the Stryker was C-130 transportable. Rumsfeld thought the requirement was so important that if not achieved the entire program should be canceled.[5] This argument against the Stryker only strengthens the need to train on C-130s. Only with well-defined SOPs and experience will the Stryker community truly be able to deploy, fight, and win with the C-130 platform in austere environments across the globe.

As the fledgling SBCT came into development, early entry operations were tested. Over time the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan became the U.S. Army's primary focus and the SBCT community moved away from early entry operations. With the war in Iraq now over and Afghanistan winding down, the SBCT community is beginning to relook early entry operations. The following training events highlight initial testing of early entry operations as well as recent examples of early entry operations.

Millennium Challenge 2002

Stryker?… in August, we took risk [time] and sent a Stryker company — many of the youngsters here represent that battalion — sent a Stryker company directly from new equipment fielding at Fort Lewis, Washington, into the NTC (National Training Center) to demonstrate Stryker's C-130 transportability into Bicycle Lake during exercise Millennium Challenge — thanks to the Air Force. This was done safely, professionally. We all saw the greater protection, speed, deployability, and battlefield agility that Strykers will provide combatant commanders… Now look, there are some who are still skeptical about Stryker. And I appreciate the debate, but some of these skepticisms, at times, have gotten a bit bothersome, to the point of accusing the Army of deception about the Stryker's performance and transportability. This institution values duty, selfless service, and honor, and integrity. Its members have put their lives on the line and the lives of young men and women on the line for this nation. These accusations are baseless and thoughtless commentary. I appreciate the debate. Look at our numbers, challenge our metrics, question our analytics — they're all on review. But don't question our honor or our integrity. We must see the Stryker fielded to provide Soldiers the capabilities that they've needed for the last 12 years.

— GEN Eric K. Shinseki
State of the Army Address, AUSA Conference, 2002

Millennium Challenge 2002 (MC02) is surrounded in controversy, but that doesn't limit the value of lessons learned. A Company, 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment was a small part of the larger exercise, and the majority of the controversy surrounds the larger naval and air engagements.[6] The Strykers, albeit a short flight, did execute a C-130 insertion.

The MC02 inserted four Stryker Infantry Combat Vehicles (ICVs) from Fort Lewis into Bicycle Lake Airfield at Fort Irwin, Calif., on C-130s. Many valuable tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) were learned with regards to load plan, vehicle configuration, and planning timelines. For example, the Soldiers have to be capable of moving all the supplies because there will be limited to no material-handling equipment (MHE) on the airfield.[7] This is a significant bill to pay because five C-130s are capable of moving at least one airborne Infantry company, but the Stryker has the ability to project combat power off the airhead line (AHL).[8] It also gives the ground force commander (GFC) the ability to rapidly deploy a mobile dismounted Infantry assault force at the decisive point.

All variants of flat-bottom Strykers are C-130 transportable. This ability gives the GFC significant capabilities and options to tailor the force. If the GFC believes the initial task for Strykers should be a screen of the AHL, the commander could task organize to have Mobile Gun System (MGS) or Anti-tank Guided Missile (ATGM) Strykers be the first vehicles delivered on the ground. If the GFC assesses the forcible entry operation will take high casualties around the AHL, he could task organize for the Medical Evacuation Vehicle (MEV). The SBCT is the Army's only organic combined arms team at the company level. Dynamic task organization is readily available from the troop/company and battalion task force.

During MC02, A/5-20 IN was capable of off loading its vehicles in approximately three minutes and having them combat loaded in 15 minutes. The three-minute off-load time meant the risk to the aircraft was minimal, and 15 minutes ready to fight gave the GFC heavy machine guns and highly mobile Infantry squads in a short period of time. These times can be decreased if a Stryker company is deployed on C-17s. Deploying by C-17 has advantages with the acknowledgement that there are less C-17s in the USAF inventory and fewer runways capable of landing a C-17. Additionally, our allies have significantly more C-130s than C-17s due to the increased operating cost of the aircraft and its runway requirements. All of this must be kept in mind

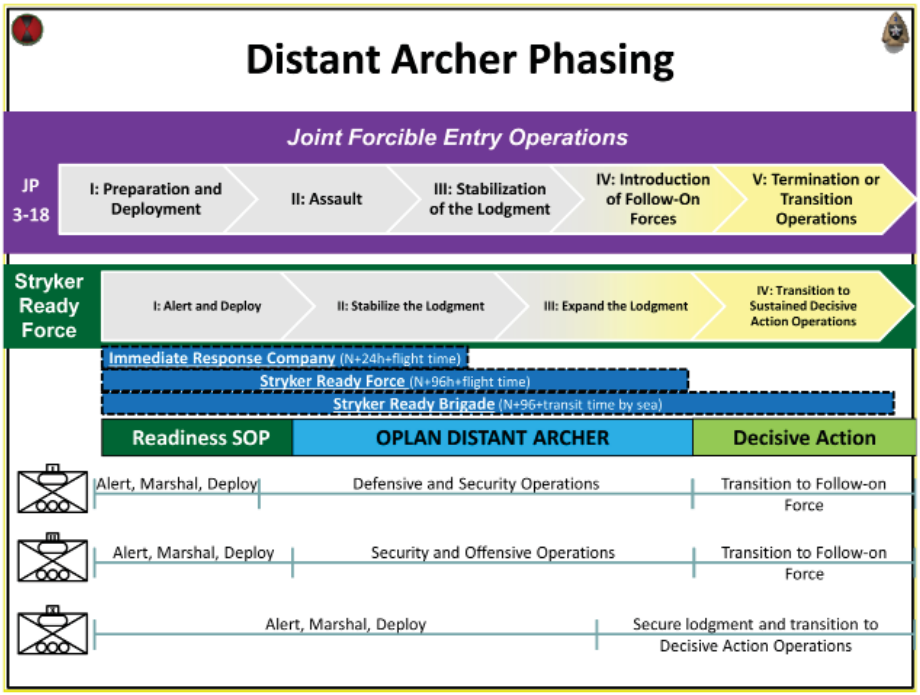

Figure 1 — OPLAN Distant Archer Operating Construct

as we continue to build and train a force conducting multi-national operations.

During MC02, the opposing force (OPFOR) destroyed the majority of A/5-20 IN. In late 2002, critics pointed to this as a failure of the Stryker, but recent decisive action rotations and multiple combat rotations have proven the Stryker as capable of taking the fight to the enemy. With more training on the C-130, the SBCT can prove the concept and increase our abilities as an early entry force.

7th Infantry Division Operations Plan (OPLAN) Distant Archer

Developing a culture of readiness and the capability to fight tonight are key to conducting early entry operations. The 7th ID was activated on 10 October 2012 to instill training and readiness standards for the combat brigades assigned to Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash. Upon activation, three SBCTs were stationed at JBLM, coining 7th ID as America's Stryker Division. Based on the unique capability of the SBCT to provide early entry forces to the fight, 7th ID created the training OPLAN Distant Archer to exercise the SBCTs' ability to "fight tonight" and to challenge leaders to anticipate the nature and tempo of the next fight in an expeditionary theater against a variety of hybrid threats.

OPLAN Distant Archer is an unclassified operational concept that prescribes the task organization, key tasks, and phasing for the rapid deployment of a Stryker brigade combat team and enablers. It establishes the enduring framework within 7th ID training cycles to focus leader and collective training to successfully alert, marshal, and deploy by strategic airlift and/or sealift in support of a deployed joint task force. OPLAN Distant Archer describes the initial organizational construct for arrival at an airport or seaport of debarkation following joint forcible entry scenarios and sets conditions for expansion of a lodgment to conduct of follow on unified land operations.

In addition to providing a training construct, 7th ID developed a readiness standard operating procedure (RSOP) that prescribes out-load support responsibilities across the installation in support of early entry force deployment.

Immediate Response Company (IRC)

Forces Command (FORSCOM) directed that the airborne Infantry brigade combat team (IBCT) global response force (GRF) have one Stryker company attached to it for moment's-notice missions across the world. This mission was originally assigned to the 2nd SBCT, 25th Infantry Division followed by 1st SBCT, 25th ID. Each of these units laid a foundation for the deployment N-hour sequence and mission readiness for the IRC. The 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment (1/25 SBCT) passed on lessons learned and TTPs to the 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment (3-2 SBCT) to support A Company, 1-23 IN's assumption of the IRC in support of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division GRF on 1 October 2013. 1-23 IN is currently in the process of passing on lessons learned to the next unit which assume the IRC GRF mission on 1 October 2014.

A/1-23 IN redeployed from Panjway, Afghanistan, in November 2012. By June 2013, the company was executing platoon live-fire exercises at Yakima Training Center (YTC) in preparation for the IRC mission. A/1-23 IN executed decisive action training at YTC while learning the mind set of early entry operations and no-notice deployments. YTC prepared A/1-23 IN for Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) rotation 13-09 in August 2013. Less than a year from redeployment, A/1-23 IN was fully integrated with 3/82 GRF and prepared for no-notice early entry operations, officially

Photo courtesy of author

A/1-23 IN Soldiers conduct shackle training on a C-17.

assuming the role on 1 October 2013.

A/1-23IN built on the foundation of 3-21 IN, but the IRC mission needs to continue to grow. SBCTs have to continue to train for early entry operations and the next step should be emergency deployment readiness exercises (EDREs) that include fly-away training scenarios. To truly be prepared for the IRC mission, SBCTs need to build a knowledge base, no less than a jumpmaster, on how to work around a variety of aircraft in support of rapid deployments.

Multi-Lateral Exercise

During a November 2013 multi-lateral exercise (MLAT), with the 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, A/1-23 IN expanded the lodgment by C-17 after 2/75 RGR seized the AHL. The Stryker platoon gave the GFC the ability to focus rotary wing assets against the deep fight and keep the Stryker Ready Force for the intermediate objectives around the AHL. This flexibility enabled the GFC to attack intermediate objectives while maintaining the speed to reinforce the AHL depending on the enemy's actions.

A/1-23 IN built up combat power during the day through an air bridge with C-17s. In total, A/1-23 IN had three MGS, one MEV, 12 ICVs, one Command Variant (CV), two Mortar Carrier Variants (MCV), and one Fire Support Vehicle (FSV) on the AHL. A/1-23 IN was capable of relieving two light Infantry companies in defense of the AHL and still had the ability to project combat power. We are not suggesting that one company of Strykers is comparable to two companies of light Infantry, but rather the Stryker's mobility, optics, and weapons systems enable them to defend a larger area. A/1-23 IN exercised C-17 capabilities on an austere airfield but needs to refine TTPs and continue to train in a joint environment.

NTC Rotation 14-03

During NTC rotation 14-03, 3-2 SBCT executed early entry operations. B Company, 1-23 IN executed a simulated air movement to Miami Aerial Port of Debarkation (APOD). There were significant training advantages and valuable lessons learned by executing a Distant Archer scenario at the NTC. In a perfect world, we would have executed with a real air movement, but the force should not discount the lessons that were learned or the training value of the simulated air movement.

During the NTC Distant Archer mission, Task Force Tomahawk infiltrated B/1-23 IN (with battalion mortars) and the battalion tactical command post (TAC) via air to Miami APOD. C Company, 1-23 IN; C Troop, 1st Squadron, 14th Cavalry Regiment; B Company, 1st Battalion, 37th Field Artillery Regiment; and D Company, 1st Battalion, 3rd Infantry Regiment (Old Guard) conducted ground movement from an initial staging base (ISB). B/1-23 IN secured the AHL, and Task Force Tomahawk executed a realistic mission command of two elements separated beyond FM communications range. Task Force Tomahawk trained link-up procedures, forward passage of lines, and battle handover by executing the Distant Archer scenario at NTC. The NTC Distant Archer mission was not perfect but should be improved during future SBCT rotations.

The Future of Early Entry

Early entry operations are — and will continue to be — just as relevant as they were in 2000. It can be argued that in this current state of perpetual conflict our Army needs to be globally focused and able to fight tonight across the full range of military operations. As the U.S. Army continues to mature its expeditionary mindset, the SBCT provides a rapidly deployable medium force to combatant commanders with the necessary command, control, communications, computers, intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR); weapons; optics; and most importantly, a mobile dismounted Infantry capability. Moment's notice readiness and the ability to fight tonight is a unit mindset that can be inculcated, at echelon, across our formations. Over the coming years, early entry operations need to be trained from the individual to collective level and certified at our combat training centers. The hallmark of great units is their ability to be better than anyone else at that "one thing." Our legacy armored cavalry regiments of the past had the guard mission, IBCT (airborne) units have the forcible entry mission, and the SBCT has the moment's notice early entry mission. Our Stryker brigades are designed to be expeditionary, and leaders must embrace and train this ability to fight tonight.

Notes

[1] Forcible entry operations seize and hold lodgments against armed opposition. Early entry operations immediately follow the forcible entry force and expand the lodgment to enable additional combat power to deploy into the area of operations. Joint Publication 3-18, *Joint Forcible Entry Operations*, 27 November 2012, I-1.

[2] The Interim Armored Vehicle [Stryker] must be transportable in a C-130 aircraft. The Interim Armored Vehicle must enter and exit the aircraft capable of immediate combat operations." SBCT Operational Requirements Document, 6 April 2000.

[3] Lockheed Martin C-130 fact sheet, www.lockheedmartin.com/us/products/c130.html (13 March 2014).

[4] Jon Lay, "Approval for Airlift of the Stryker Family of Interim Armored Vehicles," Department of the U.S. Air Force Memorandum from the Air Transportability Test Loading Agency, 6 March 2003.

[5] John Hendren, "Army Holds Its Ground in Battle with Rumsfeld," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 November 2002.

[6] Sean Naylor, "War Games Rigged?" *Army Times*, 16 August 2002.

[7] MHE is required for the MGS.

[8] Airhead line — "a line denoting the limits of the objective area for an airborne assault. The airhead line is bounded by assault objectives that are operationally located to ensure that enemy fires cannot be brought to bear on the main objective and for friendly forces to conduct defensive operations in depth." Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, 8 November 2010, 8.

CPT Steve Krippel is currently serving as the commander of C Company, 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment "Tomahawks," 3-2 Stryker Brigade Combat Team, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash.

MAJ Chris Ricci is currently serving as the executive officer for 1-23 IN, 3-2 SBCT, JBLM, Wash.