

SWIFT RESPONSE 15:

EXERCISE VALIDATES JMRC AS CRITICAL PART IN FUTURE OF AIRBORNE READINESS

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In the summer of 2015, the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) in Hohenfels, Germany, embraced a new and complex challenge with Exercise Swift Response 15 (SR15). SR15 was a combined airborne joint forcible entry exercise designed to integrate multiple allied nations' high-readiness forces to operate as a cohesive team and demonstrate NATO's capacity to rapidly deploy and maintain a strong and secure Europe. The exercise included the largest airborne operation executed on European soil since the end of the Cold War. The success of this operation has set conditions for the combined task force's continued interoperability and readiness to fight as a coalition for all the participants. The exercise presented many challenges, but after working through some friction, the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division headquarters and its subordinate multinational battalions accomplished the mission and met all training objectives. Perhaps the most interesting outcome of this exercise was the realization that JMRC should be the new certification ground for the Army's component of the Global Response Force (GRF). The following are some of the key lessons learned regarding JMRC's role in training future GRF units and some proposals to maximize the use of JMRC to provide the Army more capable readiness forces for geographic combatant commanders.

JMRC is the perfect venue to validate the readiness for the GRF because it forces the unit to alert, marshal, and deploy to Europe. The typical mission rehearsal exercise (MRE) for a unit assuming the GRF is a deployment to the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Polk, La., or the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, Ca. JRTC and NTC offer fantastic training venues to teach the basics of parachute assault and airfield seizure with a capable and determined opposing force (OPFOR). However, due to their proximity to home station, units deploying to JRTC or NTC do not experience the same challenges they face when deploying outside the continental United States for real-world missions. The rotational training unit's (RTU) ability to preposition personnel and equipment at JRTC and NTC during past validation exercises deprives the unit of the training value of conducting a true outload sequence. A GRF MRE at JMRC can truly test the readiness of the unit prior to assuming the GRF mission.

Executing the MRE at JMRC forces the unit to:



Paratroopers from Italy, Spain, and the U.S. jump from aircraft to seize an airfield on Smardan Training Area, Romania. (Photo by LTC Rod Cunningham)

- * Move all necessary classes of supply and equipment into a foreign country; and
- * Validate unit movement personnel and overall readiness of the GRF.

It also forces the GRF to build a multinational coalition at the intermediate staging base which is a realistic and tough friction point for any unit. JMRC offers the unique challenge of partnering with a myriad of multinational units from across Europe and rapidly building an effective NATO coalition prior to executing combat operations. Most military and civilian leaders acknowledge that America will never again fight alone. The Army's GRF component must have the ability to rapidly build a NATO task force that can work together coherently, effectively, and efficiently to be truly global. JMRC forces all rotational units to develop the three dimensions of interoperability: the technical (hardware, radios, ABCS systems), procedural (U.S. doctrine, NATO standardization agreement [STANAGs], joint NATO doctrine), and human (language, culture). If the GRF units are ever truly going to be a rapid response force capable of global employment for any combatant command, they must develop organizational experience with these challenges.

JMRC has the capacity to provide challenging and unfamiliar terrain, a near-peer threat, and enough space to conduct a joint forcible entry (JFE) exercise and build the follow-on forces in order to deploy the entire Army component of the GRF. SR15 validated that the short take-off and landing (STOL) strip is capable of supporting enough air lands to bring in the majority of the bravo echelon (non-airdrop-capable elements of the GRF). But to do this even more effectively, JMRC needs to develop the ability to allow the JFE exercise to occur on the air-land capable airstrip to allow for a more realistic JFE. The next step should be building a larger airfield with a C-17-capable field landing strip in order for the GRF to use all Air Force and Marine aircraft (C-130, C-17, and KC-130) to land the bravo echelon. Additionally, JMRC could improve the ability to certify the GRF by building an airborne objective which has all the simulated airfield architecture to more closely replicate most major airports. If JMRC had an airfield with a simulated control tower, hangers, buildings, a fire station, and an occupied military compound, it would be a more realistic airborne objective. Having a strongly defended airfield, more observer-coach-trainers (OCTs) with JFE experience and expertise, and an OPFOR with experience defending against parachute assaults would increase JMRC's ability to validate the GRF.

The Army needs to do a better job validating the GRF during future MREs. As an Army, we currently allow too many prepositioned loads, notional air-land operations, notional heavy drops, and various other ways to circumvent friction when we introduce combat power during airborne operations. Allowing these types of unrealistic methods for introducing combat power does not allow the unit to experience all the challenges they could face when conducting airborne operations as the GRF. If we are to be ready for a world-wide deployment anywhere in the world in 18-96 hours, we must ask ourselves to do more with our airborne units. When conducting airborne operations, we typically grant these types of concessions when resources outside of the Army's control do not match what is required to deliver all of a unit's equipment and enablers to the drop zone. Most leaders fully understand that this is required during training exercises to ensure that all warfighting functions are able to meet their training objectives during airborne operations. However, once it is time to validate our Army's readiness forces, we must resist the urge to solve our problems this way. If we do not restrict combat power to only that which we deliver via parachute assault or what we bring in on air-land operations, we will never be able to execute these missions when the call comes. We must force our airborne units and enablers to plan and execute operations by utilizing existing airborne standard operating procedures (SOPs) such as the use of door bundles with "A echelon;" the use of Joint Precision Aerial Delivery Systems (JPADS); the use of the Container Delivery System (CDS); the use secondary loads on air-land vehicles; and the proper planning and synchronization of a priority vehicle list (PVL) during JFE exercises in the future as the only methods to bring combat power into the lodgment. This will force our airborne forces to understand the capabilities of all their combat power and make tough choices during the validation exercise when resources fall short.

JMRC should become the exchange point to cross-level experience for our airborne forces. Currently, the 173rd Airborne Brigade conducts multiple multinational exercises across Europe almost every month. These exercises are critical to build relationships and interoperability with our European allies, but they do little to build the capability that we expect our airborne forces to have in order to conduct JFE operations. Proficiency jumps do not equal "trained" on the airborne mission essential task list (METL). Executing these complex NATO operations with a combined multinational task force is challenging enough for units that have completed an intensive training cycle



A Soldier from the 2nd Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, packs up a parachute after an airborne operation as part of Swift Response 15 in Germany on 26 August 2015. (Photo by SGT Ian Schell)

through battalion-level training. These exercises are exponentially more difficult for units that have not completed any type of training cycle and had the chance to train leaders and validate unit SOPs. If they have not had the opportunity to validate their organizational understanding and execution of U.S. doctrine, there is no way units will be able to place the requisite emphasis on learning and understanding things like NATO doctrine; STANAGs; culture, combat power, and equipment of multinational partners; and national caveats for different nations.

“Interoperating at the tactical level is not easy. Even seemingly simple tasks bring a myriad of challenges in blending our operations, our technology, and our cognitive approach to operations. At the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany, we work to close these gaps every day.”

— MG Christopher G. Cavoli,

Former commander of the 7th Army Training Command, quoted from Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) Handbook 16-18, *Multinational Interoperability Reference Guide*

Most units in the Army have experienced some level of interoperability in various partnered exercises or operations, but only JMRC due to its location can stress interoperability with a 50 percent or more multinational combined task force. More Army units would benefit from experiencing these challenges on a more regular basis.

SR15 has served to highlight numerous challenges, areas of improvement, and potential ways to increase readiness across the airborne force for the future. One way to improve airborne readiness across all of the airborne forces in the Army would be to adopt a similar rotational concept like that currently being conducted in Korea. The XVIII Airborne Corps and 82nd Airborne Division headquarters could take ownership of certifying all airborne forces in the Army. This would allow the 173rd in Italy to return to the United States on a rotational basis, enabling more time for training on basic core competencies and airborne METL tasks. Once a unit completes the GRF training glide path and validates at JMRC, they become U.S. Army Europe’s (USAEUR’s) airborne force. This will allow our European allies to conduct the same security operations across Europe with a trained and validated airborne force. Increasing the training level of our airborne force in Europe will not only increase readiness across USAEUR, but it will allow that unit to place the requisite emphasis on interoperability with our European allies. There are currently three airborne Infantry brigade combat teams (IBCT[A]s) at Fort Bragg, N.C., that balance the airborne GRF requirement in nine-month cycles. Allowing the 173rd to become the 4th IBCT(A) in that cycle would allow the unit to build jumpmaster and airborne proficiency while at Fort Bragg and conduct an intensive training cycle not hindered by the restrictions they currently face in Italy. They would also build organizational experience and knowledge with JFE exercises. As part of the validation, the other Stryker and mechanized elements of the

Army component of the GRF could simultaneously deploy to Europe. This would allow the airborne force to seize an airfield, open a lodgment, and conduct passage of lines with the mechanized force to defeat a robust mechanized element in the Hohenfels training area all while balancing the interoperability challenges that only JMRC can provide. This would stress the required relationship building and interoperability required between our airborne, Stryker, and mechanized components of the GRF and our European allies. Once the GRF validation is complete at JMRC, these forces could remain in Europe for at least one year to conduct security operations in Europe with our allied partners and would assume the footprint in Vicenza and Grafenwoehr. The validated GRF element positioned in Europe would need similar outload capabilities currently only available to the stateside GRF. The Army should look at the feasibility of providing the following: a strategic deployment facility (green ramp equivalent); some type of heavy drop rig site; a location similar to the division ready cage; and a marshalling area like the pole barns at Fort Bragg to conduct the initial issue of ammunition and rigging. If the Army could build the requisite infrastructure in Europe, then the forward-deployed GRF element would have the same ability to alert, marshal, and deploy as the GRF unit at Fort Bragg. Additionally, having some type of mobile command HQs certified to move forward and act as the higher headquarters for the GRF element forward would allow USAEUR to employ the GRF in Europe without losing capability in its headquarters.

As the Army analyzes future conflict scenarios and the readiness of airborne forces, it must consider the potential strategic impact of a more capable and ready force could provide in Europe. The ability to have a GRF element capable of conducting joint forcible entry already in Europe will have a powerful impact on the national security of the United States and our NATO allies. The Army must place the required emphasis on truly conducting forced entry on a defended air field. Readiness and rapid deployment of forces capable of achieving decisive victory for our combatant commanders will continue to be an integral part of our national security. The Army must invest in training, preparing, equipping, and certifying forces that can respond quickly to any situation anywhere in the world and achieve decisive victory in unified land operations.



A German soldier stands guard during a simulated noncombatant evacuation operation on the Hohenfels Training Area during Swift Response 15 on 30 August 2015. SR15 was the U.S. Army's largest combined airborne training event in Europe since the end of the Cold War. (Photo by SFC Caleb Barrieau)

The Army will continue to fight in coalitions in the future, just as we have in recent years. If the Army Operating Concept considers multinational interoperability one of the critical warfighting challenges we will face in the future, we must seize the opportunity to adequately prepare our units to face this challenge and if necessary respond in combat.

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