Rebuilding a Culture of Deployment Readiness

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"Fight tonight," "First to fight," "Wheels up in 18 hours" — these are recognizable slogans that emphasize readiness to go anywhere, anytime, fast. But what is the Army's deployment readiness narrative?

The Army utilizes pre-positioned stocks for a rapid employment force projection capability, but what are we doing to affect follow-on forces? What if our strategy of assurance and deterrence fails and we have armed conflict with a nation state?

A recent effort to assemble an armored brigade combat team in Europe took 14 days.[1] If war was declared tomorrow, how long would it take to move an Army corps into the Pacific or Eastern Europe? It's a tough question with variables outside the Army's control, but we can do better at training what is in our control.

This article will discuss how our expeditionary deployment skills have atrophied and some solutions to help get them back.

Atrophied Deployment Skills

Years of predictive deployments within the Army Force Generation model combined with outsourcing our deployment process to strategic enablers have eroded our expeditionary deployment skills.

Soldiers from the 2nd Infantry Division board a C-17 Globemaster at Moses Lake, WA, on 18 October 2017 as part of a deployment readiness exercise. (Photo by PFC Ethan Valetski)

When the Army deployed to operations like Desert Storm, Desert Shield, and the first rotations to Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, each unit was responsible for the readiness of its equipment, deploying it, and bringing it back.

As we looked for cheaper, faster ways to integrate into theater, we began using theater-provided equipment and leaving unit equipment in the left-behind equipment program. During major exercises in other countries, we used Army pre-positioned stocks. Those vital deployment skills have slowly transitioned out of the force.

Years of sustained conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan have caused the narrative and culture to change. Instead of deployment being viewed as an operation for commanders, it became a task for logisticians. Years of strategic enablers like deployment support teams, left-behind equipment, and theater-provided equipment have eroded units' deployment expertise and responsibility, and the onus is now on sustainers.

The reasons we shifted our focus made sense at the time, but over the course of 20 years, the overall impact grew. Recently, the Army conducted inspections of the deployment readiness exercise (DRE) program in order to assess current capabilities. The results showed sub-optimized deployment training, focusing on tasks like "Alert," followed by scheduled training for the day. Units rarely executed DREs in conjunction with installation transportation office (ITO) support. The few that did highlighted the ITO's inability to resource 24/7 operations without additional personnel. The command deployment discipline program (CDDP) was found to be stove-piped in S4/G4 channels, limiting commander knowledge and involvement. On the whole, units struggled to execute realistic training of the deployment process.

Six Solutions to Emphasize Deployment Readiness

The spectrum of potential missions — including direct action, deterrence, security force assistance, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief — all have one common thread: the ability to rapidly alert, assemble, and deploy to any known point on the globe. The Army must be ready to deploy, fight, and win anywhere in the world. The time to start rebuilding our culture of deployment readiness is now.

Deployment Narrative

The Army has no wide-spread narrative when it comes to deployment. As the Chief of Staff of the Army continues to beat the drum for readiness, we must convey the importance of deployment readiness. To do so, we must leverage the processes within the Army, the joint staff, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense to develop a narrative for Army forces that encompasses the current operational environment as well as operation plan requirements.

We need to influence the development and content of the 2018+ National Military Strategies to ensure that it includes discussion of deployment readiness, the Army's strategic deployment capabilities, and the requirements that Army forces must meet. This will drive the prioritization of resources toward deployment capability.

Army Policy Adjustments

The Army should publish a policy revision requiring unit commanders to reconcile their unit equipment list with the unit property book every month. This will force the use of our systems of record and increase the accuracy of movement and dimensional data, and it will also assist with the mobility community's quality assurance and quality control checks.

The Army should establish clear installation deployment standards across the globe so that the process is simple and known no matter where you go. Additionally, port call messages should be published through DA G-3 operations channels to ensure unit compliance.

Commander's Actions

As leaders, we can only emphasize a finite amount of priorities. It is time to start increasing our emphasis on deployment training. Command deployment discipline inspection results should be put into commanders' channels to give them accurate snapshots of their deployment readiness. Divisions could also add or modify their deployment readiness slide in the logistics readiness review briefings and make it more comprehensive to provide a total picture of capabilities.

Units should consider adding unit movement briefings as part of company-level change of command out-briefings. Part of the briefing would detail the unit's last roll-out program that moved 100 percent of its modified table of organization and equipment items through the installation deployment process.

An 82nd Airborne Division paratrooper rigs a vehicle during a deployment readiness exercise at Fort Bragg, NC, on 25 July 2017. (Photo by PVT Audrianna Arellano)

Collective Training

There is no standardized baseline for the "deploy" mission essential task (MET). Look at three different companies within a brigade combat team (BCT) on the Army Training Network (ATN) and you'll see three different collection of tasks. The armored company has eight collective tasks. The signal company has three collective tasks. The distribution company has 27 collective tasks.

The difference in the number of tasks being trained between a distribution company and a signal company in an BCT is 24. We need to standardize the "deploy" MET and subordinate collective tasks across the Army. The centers of excellence need to establish a working group and determine what tasks all units should train. Deployment fundamentals should not be radically different among the various types of tactical units.

The Army must revamp its institutional approach to deployment training for CTC rotations and warfighter exercises. We should evaluate units deploying to CTCs from fort to port and from tactical assembly area to fort. Deployment and redeployment should be included in the after action review.

Build Individual Expertise

We must determine the best options for Soldiers to gain individual experience in an environment that is increasingly hampered by time limitations and resource constraints. These options should be conducive to a generation that uses the internet to get quick and easy answers.

The Deployment Process Modernization Office maintains a repository of deployment information, including best practices, forms, regulations, and deployment smart books on its "Deployer's Toolbox" website.[2]

Army Deployment Rehearsal

For the United States to deter conventional attacks, its opponents must know that it can mass forces on their doorsteps. We must resource and execute the deployment of an Army division from the United States to one of our geographic combatant commands every two years based off an existing operation plan's time-phased force deployment data. Only then can we validate the Army's force projection capabilities and speed of assembly. From

these drills, we will gather vital data metrics and understand our limitations to better enhance our preparedness for conflict.

Conclusion

Rebuilding a culture of deployment readiness is a deliberate process that will take time, resources, and energy. The effort belongs to every Soldier and Civilian.

Most of our personnel who experienced expeditionary deployment are senior officers and NCOs. Many of these Soldiers will leave the Army in the next five years, and we need to leverage their expertise before we have to relearn what we have lost. Enacting new policies and commander's actions, training in new ways, and emphasizing deployment as an operation will help us get back to a culture of deployment excellence to ensure the Army is ready for the future fight.

Notes

[1] Sydney J. Freedberg Jr., "Army Soldiers Slash Time To Move From Port To Front: Deterring Russia," *Breaking Defense*, 17 March 2017. Accessed 3 October 2017 from https://breakingdefense.com/2017/03/army-soldiers-slash-time-to-move-from-port-to-front-deterring-russia/.

[2] Link to the toolbox can be found on the Transportation Corps' website at http://www.transchool.lee.army.mil.

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