Long-Term Efforts Required for Strategic Mobility

LTC MATT KUHN

On 31 December 2019, in response to recent events in Iraq, the National Command Authority (NCA) directed the deployment of the Immediate Response Force (IRF) from the 82nd Airborne Division to the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) area of operations. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper described this deployment as a precautionary action taken in response to increased threat levels against U.S. personnel and facilities in Iraq. Within 17 hours, the remainder of the brigade combat team (BCT) and an element from the division headquarters were directed to CENTCOM as well. After only 19 hours following notification, the initial battalion had departed Pope Army Airfield in North Carolina, and within 10 days all elements had deployed to their final locations. Incredibly, within 12 hours of arriving in Kuwait, the division tactical command post (TAC) transitioned from initial operating capability (IOC) to full operating capability (FOC) and began its CENTCOM-directed mission.

Long-term readiness and planning efforts are required to demonstrate such proficiency in strategic mobility. As an Army, we must look at how we rapidly execute joint strategic mobility in order to provide command and control of maneuver elements on the modern battlefield. This operation starts long before the first call is received at a division operations center. In addition, adversarial contact can begin at any home duty station and continue all the way to a unit's initial assault objectives. Today's adversaries have the ability to conduct disruption and harassment operations from afar. U.S. Army divisions and corps must address the issues these enemy abilities cause in order to execute rapid deployments, just as their subordinate BCTs and battalions must do. Additionally, leadership, mission command, and command and control are vital to rapid execution of strategic mobility.

To highlight the ability of a division headquarters to deploy rapidly under less than ideal conditions, we examine how the 82nd Airborne Division executed this in early 2020. After the notification from the NCA, LTG Kurilla, the

Paratroopers assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, deploy from Pope Army Airfield, NC, on 1 January 2020. (Photo by CPT Robyn J. Haake)

XVIII Airborne Corps commander, gave verbal guidance, including task, purpose, and his intent, to MG James J. Mingus, the 82nd Airborne Division commander. This rapid execution of mission command, built on trust, enabled the division to begin planning and execution quickly. It should also be noted that during this alert, two of the six senior key leaders on the division staff were on leave and not recalled. This speaks volumes of the trust that the division commander had in his subordinates and their ability to execute the "next-man-up drill" to meet the commander's intent. The deployment was successful, but we should examine what long-term preparations enabled this success.

The 82nd Airborne Division is a unit that embraces the long-term pursuit of mastery. The lessons here which are applicable to the Army are the development and consistent refinement of standard operating procedures (SOPs) related to readiness and the deployment of forces. This starts long before the first warning order (WARNORD) arrives. It begins first with the Soldier Readiness Program (SRP). Leaders must ensure units and individuals are ready, including having the right equipment from the Rapid Fielding Initiative (RFI), being medically cleared, as well as administratively and legally prepared. Individual Soldiers must be inspected and validated by leaders; this process will exponentially speed up the time between the WARNORD and when the last Soldier boards transportation to a distant location. It also enables the units to begin the alert, marshal, and deploy sequence with many deployment tasks already complete. Units must have a plan to outload their elements and rigorously drill this on a routine basis. The ideal way to test this system is through the execution of emergency deployment readiness exercises (EDREs). EDREs offer a unit the ability to see themselves, identify friction points within the process, and more importantly, refine and update unit SOPs. Additionally, they offer a joint opportunity to integrate multiple services in the planning and execution of complex scenarios. Only by executing these can role and friction points emerge within internal elements, on-post agencies, and Family Readiness Groups (FRGs). Throughout these exercises, often supported by external units, a large organization will build relationships and trust within the team and gain repetitive experience in exercising complex command and control. Additionally, you can augment these EDREs with recall alerts to execute local operations and training. This is a low-cost solution that allows testing of internal communications procedures and the ability of personnel to rapidly assemble during non-duty hours.

An additional factor, often not realized until arrival in theater, is the criticality of Secret Internet Protocol Router (SIPR) access. While units often can create and maintain SIPR tactical accounts, once they have to communicate outside of their own tactical network and join the Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA) network, Soldiers must have a SIPR token and an active account. While challenging to maintain in a non-deployable environment, the approval time for SIPR accounts is not quick. One way to address this issue is for units to execute a monthly battle rhythm event over SIPR that requires data input from the battalion and through the division to ensure key leaders have the required access. Additionally, intelligence personnel at the division level must train to communicate directly with Combatant Command Joint Intelligence Operations Centers (JIOC) and know how to access National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA), National Ground Intelligence Center (NGIC), National Security Agency (NSA), and Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) products and key offices. In this case, prior relationships between the 82nd Airborne Division Analysis and Control Element (ACE) and the Central Command (CENTCOM) JIC ensured that the division G2 team could brief leaders down to the battalion level on the most current, relevant intelligence, both prior to deployment and enroute to Kuwait through Enroute Mission Command (EMC) platforms. Direct access to agencies across the intelligence community (IC) provided useful background information on the situation as well as critical indications and warnings.

Preparing equipment for deployment is also a critical factor. While some dedicated alert units maintain a small portion of their equipment inspected, segregated, and prepared to deploy on minimal notice, most units cannot train effectively over time without accessibility to their complement of assigned equipment. A division or corps headquarters will likely determine early in the planning process what command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4SIR) equipment is necessary for mission accomplishment. However, segregated consumable supplies, pre-packed and ready for movement, along with detailed checklists, will be essential to outload and ultimately achieve rapid IOC and FOC once in theater. The planning and finalizing of unit deployment lists (UDLs) and the inclusion of subject matter expertise from mobility logisticians (MOS 90A88) will also pay dividends.

82nd Airborne Division equipment is loaded onto a C-17 Globemaster aircraft at Pope Army Airfield, NC, on 1 January 2020. (Photo by CPT Robyn J. Haake)

During strategic mobility operations, a division or corps headquarters will likely be deploying subordinate units along with themselves. Command and control from the arrival/departure airfield control group; issue of class I, IV, V, VIII; airload planning; and the ability to execute contracting and purchasing once on ground are critical aspects that should not be overlooked. Additionally, the planning for liaison packages, including communication suites, both for partner forces and higher headquarters, will significantly help the unit integrate into combat operations more quickly once they reach their final destination. Individuals selected for these roles must know their duties and responsibilities and have the trust and empowerment of their senior leaders to the extent that the individuals can speak for the command and be a rapid conduit of decision points.

Another key element to strategic mobility is the relationships within the commander's mission command philosophy. These relationships extend beyond installation personnel critical to the outload process and the FRG. They include the U.S. Air Force for lift, weather teams, and the tactical air control party as well as various enabler units like the military police, explosive ordnance disposal, medical team augmentation, and logistical elements, to name just a few. Pre-established relationships, built on the repetition of training together, mutual trust, and clear communications, serve to flatten situational awareness and increase integration of these partners into a unit's planning and deployment SOPs. Inclusion in alert rosters and deliberate checklist steps within the alert-marshal-deploy operation can reduce the integration delay.

While assuming that limited access to military bases will delay an adversary from learning of our intentions, units must be prepared to be disrupted even before they depart their local base. Adversary use of intelligence-gathering, cyber attacks, small unmanned aircraft systems (sUAS) reconnaissance, and information warfare can disrupt outload procedures and must be accounted for. Physical force protection, operations security (OPSEC), and PACE (primary, alternate, contingency, emergency) plans start with units, but units should also include installation personnel and family members who must understand how to protect information during the process. The 82nd Airborne deliberately chose to deploy without personal cell phones to minimize the electronic signature of the unit and minimize the increased vulnerabilities, including adversarial targeting, that personal phones present. An additional disruption factor is that civilian agencies such as INTELSky track and publish the movement of all aircraft across the globe and must be mitigated in some cases; otherwise open-source media such as Twitter will broadcast troop and equipment movements.

Lastly, as an Army we must recognize that with the prevalence of social media, 24-hour news, and adversarial intelligence capabilities, achieving strategic or operational surprise will be difficult. As previously discussed, Soldier and family OPSEC are critical, but it is naïve to think that someone will not post to social media about something

unusual happening during a no-notice deployment. Whether it's a civilian during port operations, a Soldier bragging to friends, a worried spouse, or a retiree visiting the base, shielding a no-notice deployment is a monumental task in an open society. One way to lull our adversaries' senses is through consistent repetition of EDREs across the force. While costly, the constant execution of EDREs throughout the Army may dull news reporting and enemy interests while simultaneously allowing units to refine and increase their internal capabilities. Additionally, military deception (MILDEC) could be used. Imagine a light infantry element rapidly alerted, marshalled, and deployed from Fort Drum, NY, to Eglin Air Force Base, FL, under the auspices of an EDRE and deployed to an overseas theater from there. Other than fuel costs and a few hours diversion, a higher probability of strategic surprise may be achieved. On the opposite spectrum, there may be times where it is to the U.S.' advantage to conduct deliberate information operations about a strategic deployment. During the discussed 82nd Airborne deployment to the CENTCOM theater, there were deliberate decisions made to highlight the operation to influence enemy forces. Public affairs officers (PAOs) conducted round-the-clock information operations that were nested within the commander's intent.

Achieving strategic mobility proficiency is a long-term task that requires a number of factors, including individual and collective readiness, deliberate planning efforts, and rehearsals that refine SOPs. Additionally, leadership, mission command, and adversarial mitigation efforts are critical to success in defeating our adversaries, protecting the homeland, and supporting our allies.

At the time this article was written, **LTC Matt Kuhn** was serving as commander of C Squadron, Asymmetric Warfare Group, Fort Meade, MD. He currently serves as an Army Operations Center Team Chief with the Department of the Army G3/5/7. He has previously served in leadership and staff assignments with the 82nd Airborne Division, 75th Ranger Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division, Special Operations Command, U.S. Army Special Operations Command, and the Ranger Training Brigade. LTC Kuhn holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from Michigan State University and master's degree in administration from Central Michigan University.

U.S. Air Force personnel load 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division equipment on a C-17 Globemaster bound for the CENTCOM area of operations on 4 January 2020. (Photo by SPC Justin Stafford)