



Wisconsin National Guard photos

A reaction force of Soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry secures the entry control point at a mock-up forward operating base at Camp Shelby, Mississippi. The Soldiers were conducting training in preparation for a deployment as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Reserve Component Mobilization: Lessons Learned at Mobilization Center Shelby

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The Wisconsin National Guard's 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry Regiment trained and validated at Mobilization Center Shelby (Camp Shelby, Mississippi) this past summer for deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, applying creativity and old-fashioned elbow grease in order to prepare itself in a very short time for war. Based on its mission as a convoy escort battalion, the unit executed a mobilization station plan approximately 60 days in duration. Lessons learned from this experience, perhaps not exactly duplicable to other active or Reserve units, may assist a battalion staff in planning their own mobilization.

There are five major lessons learned by 2-127th staff that may be beneficial to future mobilizing units. These are:

- (1) How to validate unit leadership,
- (2) How to shape mob center training based on mission-specific observations from the Pre-deployment Site Survey (PDSS),

- (3) How to accomplish the real world mobilization jobs of the S1 and S4 while at the same time allowing admin and logistics staff time to validate on their individual and collective tasks,

- (4) How to train an HHC, and

- (5) How best to replicate a theater-specific field environment at the mobilization center.

In my personal experience as a mobilization officer for several units ranging in size from an engineer detachment to an infantry brigade, the validation of unit leadership concurrent with the unit's line Soldiers has repeatedly been the source of much unit-level frustration. Early on during mobilizations for Operation Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, the National Guard Bureau (NGB) recognized leader validation as a problem. Leaders were fully engaged in classes and individual training, limiting their time available to manage, supervise, and lead. NGB's solution to this dilemma,

called "Phased Mobilization," activated unit leadership ahead of the unit's main body and sent them to the mobilization center a few weeks early to validate on individual tasks. However, due in part to a shortened time between receipt of mobilization orders and mob station report date, the 2-127th did not have an opportunity to pre-train and validate their leadership in this fashion. Therefore, at Camp Shelby unit leaders spent a large amount of time, especially during the initial individual training instruction, immersed in basic Soldier tasks. While I cannot speak to trends in other recent mobilizations, I urge future mobilizing units to push for the phased mobilization of their leadership and to wisely use that additional early activation time to validate key individuals.

A second lesson learned was the importance of conducting a PDSS early in the mob process to enable key leaders to better understand their mission and to validate mob station training requirements.

TRAINING NOTES

Key personnel from the 2-127th — the battalion commander, the command sergeant major, the S4, the S3, and the S2 — conducted this reconnaissance in theater during the unit's individual training window at Camp Shelby. PDSS is a must and usually creates no scheduling conflict with individual training if leaders have validated prior to mobilization. The PDSS allowed 2-127th's key leaders to link up with the 1st Battalion, 178th Field Artillery Battalion at CSC Navistar, Kuwait, and begin planning a relief in place/transfer of authority. While the five PDSS personnel learned a great many things that helped in preparing the 2-127th, perhaps nothing was as important to mobilization center activities as the clarification of the scope of the mission the unit would assume. Rather than a traditional infantry role, the 2-127th deployed on an MTOE (modified table of organization and equipment) based on Military Police manning and equipment with uparmored M1114 HMMWVs. The reason for this soon became apparent: 1-178th's assignment was to escort convoys, both military long-haul and civilian sustainment pushes, from the Kuwait-Iraq border throughout the entire Iraqi theater of operations. Close observation of 1-178th's mission during the PDSS allowed the battalion commander and S3 to request modifications to Camp Shelby's standard infantry battalion training package, focusing on mounted training, convoy escort missions, vehicle battle drills, and even in creating a mock-up of the MTS communication platform 1-178th's vehicles had been equipped to use. While the 2-127th received other important training at Camp Shelby such as urban operations and dismounted movement techniques to ensure they could receive a fragmentary order (FRAGO) to perform in a more traditional role, this modification to Camp Shelby's training program allowed Soldiers and leaders in the battalion to focus on and prepare for the specific duties of their forthcoming mission.

While a return to the intention of phased mobilization would help somewhat, the S1 and especially S4 leadership and staff face an especially difficult position while mobilizing. They not only must complete all the individual training for themselves and then perform during collective training in a field environment in support of tactical objectives, but they must also accomplish the massive day-to-day business of preparing the unit to deploy. For the S4, this includes:

- Hand-receipting, inventorying, and technically

inspecting (TIing) huge quantities of equipment laterally transferred from multiple states or fielded new through the Rapid Fielding Initiative (RFI) program,

- Decoding the Operational Deployment Document and forming recommendations to the commander on what equipment should be taken and what should be sent back to home state,

- Researching what equipment will be left behind in theater by the outgoing unit as SBE (stay behind equipment),

- Establishing procedures and timelines for packing and shipping,

- Ensuring the unit mess and life-support facilities are adequate during Camp Shelby events,

- Overseeing food service, water, and ammunition resupply to units and portions of units at disparate training sites, and

- Learning — as a light infantry unit — how to perform and report maintenance on vehicles and other new equipment.

For the S1 shop, tracking and supplying filler personnel presented the greatest and most time-consuming challenge. The unit attrited only about 6 percent, which was lower than average and due mainly to medical issues. Still, 6 percent of 620 Soldiers is 38 personnel, not to mention all the changes in unit organization and manning documentation often brought about by the departure of a Soldier. The S1 performed a number of other real-life duties to include management of Red Cross emergencies, tracking and completing a large number of change of rater OERs and NCOERs, and managing the Unit Status Report (USR). These tasks occupied the S4 and S1 personnel at all levels almost exclusively after completion of their initial



Soldiers from Company A of the Wisconsin National Guard's 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry prepare for convoy security training at Camp Shelby. The battalion's mission in Iraq will include convoy security.

block of individual training. The battalion commander largely exempted these personnel from collective training events, not an ideal solution but the best to ensure his staff could complete the primary near-term mission of managing and mobilizing the unit.

The simple recommendation that is logically simple but not so monetarily simple, is to mobilize a second set of S1 and S4 personnel, perhaps not even a full complement, but enough to perform in an OPCON capacity all the real-life business while the unit's true staff trains. This second set of administrators and logisticians would redeploy to home state at the completion of the unit's collective training. The monetary difficulty here is that mobilization orders only allow 100 percent of a unit's strength to mobilize. While Joint Forces Headquarters – Wisconsin (JFHQ-WI) provided teams of S1

and S4 personnel initially, these teams had two other battalions back in Wisconsin preparing to mobilize that were in need of experienced support. JFHQ-WI's support teams left Camp Shelby within the first few weeks of the unit's arrival and, while JFHQ-WI provided excellent support pushing material forward and assisting in rear operations in Wisconsin itself, the business of running the battalion's day-to-day operations in Mississippi was left to the battalion's primary staff.

Large slices of S1 and S4 personnel involved in real-life missions rather than in collective training created a challenging situation for the battalion's headquarters company. All companies were required by the mob center to have 85 percent of their personnel at each collective training event in order to validate. In addition to the various administrative and logistical tasks that needed to be accomplished, other staff and leadership were also needed to attend to specific missions that sometimes conflicted with scheduled training: the S2 attending specialized training off-site, the S5 escorting visiting dignitaries and news media, the S6 working to understand and provide training to the



Wisconsin National Guard Soldiers apprehend a suspected "insurgent" during training conducted at Camp Shelby.

battalion's line companies on newly fielded communications equipment, the XO and S3 shop planning the ARTEP (Army Training and Evaluation Program) and preparing operations orders for the unit's movement overseas. This left available for collective training on any given day from 50 to 80 percent of the HHC's total strength (73 personnel). While the HHC performed admirably, earning the praise of Camp Shelby's trainers, and while any basic Soldier skill training cannot be considered a bad thing, these personnel did not have the opportunity to practice their typical MOS skills until the final ARTEP: commo sergeants, tactical operations center (TOC) radio operators, intelligence analysts, maintenance crews. Rather than send these Soldiers through line-unit training in urban operations, individual movement techniques and convoy escort procedures, the HHC would have benefited from MOS-specific schooling, off-site or on-site, and a validation focused on the performance of HHC collective tasks: consolidated maintenance, military decision-making process (MDMP), S1 operations, etc. This specialized training and validation

would potentially require additional resources and forethought from the mob center as well as a detailed set of requirements presented initially by the HHC commander, S3 and battalion commander to influence the mob center's standard training model.

Lastly, training at the mobilization center should occur in and imitate as closely as possible the conditions in which a unit will operate once established at a forward operating base (FOB). Camp Shelby has done an admirable job setting up several FOBs, complete with guard towers, berms, and motor-pools. One limitation, however, was that the FOBs did not come equipped with telephone lines or internet connections, which made communication, staff operations, and reporting difficult. The mobilization

center should be funded to improve its FOB facilities in regard to data processing and communications. Close replication of today's modern battlefield environment is necessary to train TOC personnel and to allow unit administrative and logistics personnel to participate in collective validation while also continuing to manage deployment activities.

These lessons learned, while not all inclusive and perhaps not applicable to every unit's specific circumstances, should assist units in planning for their time at a mobilization center. The 2-127th Infantry's experience at Camp Shelby was rewarding and positive, and the battalion appreciated the taste of southern hospitality it received in Mississippi.

Captain Benjamin Buchholz currently serves as S5 and Route Security Element commander for the 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry Regiment, which is currently deployed to Iraq. Prior to his current assignment, he served as the Mobilization and Information Operations Officer for 32nd SIB and a Unit Assistor for 1-338th Training Support Battalion out of Fort McCoy, Wisconsin. CPT Buchholz received his commission into the Wisconsin National Guard through the University of Wisconsin - Madison ROTC program.
