Readiness: It's About Time!

By Colonel Carl A. Strock

In the short span of three months in late 1994, Army engineers from Fort Stewart and Fort Benning, Georgia, deployed on four no-notice, power-projection operations.

- In August, B Company, 92d Engineer Battalion (Combat Heavy), deployed to Surinam to construct a compound for Haitian refugees. Soldiers busily engaged in a local construction project on Friday found themselves in Surinam on Monday.
- September brought the late-breaking decision to include a mechanized company team as part of the invasion force going into Haiti. Within hours a reinforced platoon from A Company, 3d Engineer Battalion, loaded equipment on trains for movement to the Port of Wilmington. They subsequently deployed to join their equipment for what was planned to be an ongoing combat operation.
- When the phone rang in October, soldiers from the 11th and 92d Engineer Battalions were in the air, bound for Kuwait, in a matter of hours. Their mission was to draw and fight pre-positioned equipment to deter invasion of that desert kingdom.
- A few weeks later, the 317th Engineer Battalion deployed to Saudi Arabia to meet the inbound equipment on the Army's pre-positioned shipping.

A review of troop lists for other recent operational deployments reveals that Fort Stewart and Fort Benning are not unique. Why do engineer soldiers frequently find themselves far from home and in harm's way in spite of the promised peace with the end of the Cold War? More pointedly, what do these deployments imply for you, the Army engineer?

The answer to the first question is complex. East-West tension once kept military adventurism to a minimum with international actors tightly controlled by or indebted to one of the superpowers in the existing bipolar world. Use of force was often avoided out of fear that a conventional conflict would escalate to a nuclear exchange. During the Cold War, readiness imperatives weighed heavily on strategic forces with the required response time measured in minutes through the use of ICBMs, nuclear submarines, and strategic bombers. Conventional forces, bolstered by a large forward presence, had days or weeks to prepare and deploy under the nuclear umbrella.

Today, in a multipolar world with more to gain and less to lose, regional actors often see force as an effective way to accomplish their objectives. Strategic forces have limited utility in today's policy of crisis response and power projection. Conventional, tactical forces now bear the requirement for rapid response—measured in hours instead of weeks or days—when U.S. national interests are threatened. An understanding of the role reversal between strategic and tactical forces leads to the second question, "How does this change affect you, the Army engineer?"

Simply stated, there is an increased probability that you will be called upon and that you will have little time to prepare. Whether you are a private or a colonel, active or reserve, light or heavy, carpenter or combat engineer, forward deployed or CONUS based, you must live the following five imperatives. They focus on war because that is the most challenging environment you will face. Your "war" may be a disaster-relief, humanitarian, or peacekeeping operation, but if prepared for combat, you will also be prepared for operations other than war.

Expect War. The drums of war are beating. Listen to them. Anticipate when and where the call will come. Develop and maintain a sense of urgency in your soldiers—that they will deploy some time during their tour of duty. The only unknowns are when, where, and by what means. Adopt the "wheels-up-in-18-hours" philosophy of our traditional contingency forces. With this sense of urgency, the next imperative easily follows.

Think War. The transition from garrison to combat will be rapid and dramatic. View your world from a foxhole perspective—that is, you must weigh every policy and procedure against its utility and practicality on the battlefield. Implied

(Continued on page 28)

cranes) and 72 trailers to 53 prime movers, 28 trailers, and 60 work modules/flatracks.

The Army is not on the cutting edge of this technology, nor is it the leading user. Municipalities were the first to recognize PLS-type applications in road and utility work, disaster response, and refuse collection. They have increasingly turned to these applications in the last few years because of budgetary constraints. Industry has responded by expanding the functions and capabilities of the modules available. The research and development have been completed; the Army now must define its requirements. The potential use of PLS technology on tracked vehicles and numerous light and medium trucks must also be investigated. Swedish industries already manufacture small vehicles with PLS, and English, German and French industries are investigating PLS dumping techniques. Four or five American firms offer modules for many engineer applications, such as dumping, rock crushing, lubricating, and lifting.

Much work remains to be done. More detailed analyses are required to determine the appropriate set of work modules, the mix in any given unit, the quantity and sizes of PLS-equipped chassis, the quantity of trailers, and the impact on unit maintenance and deployability. The Engineer School's Directorate of Combat Developments, in concert with the Program Manager for PLS, is initiating a study to answer these questions. Thorough unit mission analysis and the application of this technology will allow engineer units to be more effective, more flexible, and more prepared to support the Army in the next century.

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(Personal Viewpoint, continued)

in this imperative is the need to study doctrine and anticipate how it may change to accommodate the constantly changing face of warfare. The soldiers of the 92d Engineer Battalion were not intimidated by the prospect of deploying to the austere environment of Surinam because they had performed their peacetime and wartime missions using the same tasks, conditions, and standards.

Train for War. You will go into battle as you are—not as you would like to be. Make the training management principles expressed in FM 25-100 and FM 25-101 a reality. Use the available time efficiently. Base training plans on a solid assessment of mission-essential tasks and how well you can perform them. Continued force reductions make this task especially challenging because few units retain the luxury of a single regional focus. The engineer soldiers who deployed to the Persian Gulf were confident that they would succeed—even with the unknowns of pre-positioned equipment—because they were trained and ready for all contingencies.

Maintain for War. A well-trained, highly motivated engineer force is only as effective as its equipment allows it to be. View maintenance time not as a distractor but as an opportunity to build and sustain combat power. Without complete and operational machines, weapons, and tools, you cannot make a meaningful contribution on the battlefield. Assume that there will be no time to correct faults or make up shortages before your equipment is moved to the port or departure airfield. Ensure that the maintenance support organization is responsive, deployable, and easily tailored to meet the needs of your task organization.

These four imperatives are held together by the glue of engineer leadership.

Prepare Junior Leaders for War. Engineer leaders in squads and platoons execute drills and run work sites—the building blocks of successful engineer operations. Versatile, competent, innovative, and confident junior leaders are more important now than ever. The increased tempo of deployments and the relatively small scale of operations require junior leaders who can make important decisions without the benefit of senior guidance and in the absence of well-developed orders. Many recent crisis-response operations required platoon- and company-sized engineer forces to execute hastily developed plans. For example, the young second lieutenant who led his platoon into Haiti was the theater's expert on mechanized engineer tactics and equipment.

While many themes run through these imperatives, the common element is time. Readiness is about time. It is only a matter of time before you are called. When that call comes, there will be little time to prepare. As you climb into bed tonight, ask yourself whether you, your soldiers, and your equipment would be ready if the phone should ring at 0300. Then think about what you will do tomorrow to improve unit readiness. Only then should you allow yourself to drift off to sleep. Isn't it about time that you made a personal commitment to the readiness imperatives?

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