



Replacement troops board a train 28 April 1919 en route to the embarkation port in Fort Meade, Maryland, in preparation for sea movement to Europe to join the post-World War I Army occupation. (Photo by Sgt. Steiniger, S.C., courtesy of the National Archives)

The Individual Replacement Process Will It Work?

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The U.S. Army requires a proven solution for providing individual replacements to support large-scale combat operations (LSCO). When

it transitioned to a modular force structure, the Army eliminated the replacement battalions and companies previously responsible for executing the replacement

management process. The last replacement company inactivated in 2007. The Army still fields human resources companies, but these are not designed to execute the personnel replacement process. In place of the old replacement pipeline, the Army now relies on the theater distribution network to deliver personnel when and where they are needed.¹

But will that approach work in a major conflict? The Army practices replacement operations during Warfighter exercises with corps and division staffs. Managed by the Mission Command Training Program (MCTP), these nine-day exercises focus on mission command, staff processes, procedures, and relationships. The exercises are guided by training objectives established by the training audience's senior mission commander.²

Unfortunately, resource constraints limit the scope of these exercises; most Warfighters focus on division-level operations, a few exercises focus on corps operations, and none focus on the theater. Those same constraints limit realism, particularly within the sustainment warfighting function, where digital conflicts avoid real-world problems such as inprocessing delays, traffic congestion, and the normal friction associated with reception, staging, onward movement, and integration. In addition, technological limitations preclude the use of mission command systems such as the Deployed Theater Accountability System, further distorting the process.³

Despite these limitations, the MCTP program does its best to replicate the replacement process. Units routinely struggle with incorporating human resources (HR) planners within operational planning teams and critical battle rhythm events. In addition, staff officers struggle to identify specific roles and responsibilities of key players such as the corps G-1 and the HR planners within the expeditionary sustainment command. Finally, the critical process of casualty estimates rarely gets enough attention. Units frequently neglect to update these estimates based on battlefield developments, impeding effective replacement operations. According to Lt. Col. Amy Hood, senior HR observer controller at MCTP, success or failure usually depends on the integration of HR planners within the support operations office and the G-1.⁴

The speed and lethality of LSCO will likely test that integration, producing thousands of casualties and a

corresponding need for thousands of replacements. Those replacements will either deploy in organized units or as individuals. Individual replacements, or nonunit-related personnel (NRP), may include both military and Army civilian personnel. Wounded personnel returned to duty will fill some of this demand, but most NRP are likely to deploy from the continental United States (CONUS).⁵

During early stages of a LSCO, the Army plans to draw most individual replacements from the active component. Assuming a LSCO leads to full mobilization, the Army will likely turn to the Ready Reserve, which includes Individual Ready Reserve, Standby Reserve, and Retired Reserve soldiers. While most American males register for selective service within thirty days of turning eighteen, any decision to reinstate the draft would require congressional legislation.⁶

Planning for NRP Replacement Operations

While the Department of the Army recruits, trains, and deploys individual replacements from CONUS, the theater Army assumes responsibility for delivering them to the right location once they arrive in theater. That delivery process, which involves moving personnel replacements through the theater distribution network, demands centralized planning and decentralized execution.⁷

The theater Army commander's principal staff officer for human resources support, the G-1, supports this planning effort by monitoring personnel strength, projecting future requirements, and prioritizing replacements. The G-1 human resources operations center

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(HROC) will coordinate with the theater sustainment command (TSC) and its assigned theater personnel operations center (TPOC) to integrate personnel movements within the theater concept of support. The TSC will synchronize NRP replacement operations as part of its larger operational responsibilities for theater distribution and sustainment.⁸

At the TSC, the distribution management center (DMC) within the support operations office analyzes requirements and capabilities to develop a feasible concept of support for every contingency. Most of this sustainment planning addresses the distribution network's ability to forecast and deliver commodities—such as fuel, ammunition, and repair parts—in support of the concept of operations. Personnel replacements, however, will travel through the same network as hellfire missiles and spare tires.⁹

Unlike commodities, those replacements need considerable support in transit. Lt. Gen. Christopher Mohan, who commanded the 21st Theater Sustainment Command in Europe between 2019 and 2021, highlights this point: “We thought of it [personnel replacement operations] in terms of synchronization with other commodities.”¹⁰

The critical element for NRP operations within the DMC is the theater personnel operations center, which plans, integrates, and sustains theater-wide HR

the theater Army G-1 HROC, manages myriad HR responsibilities, and anticipates NRP requirements to ensure synchronization with other sustainment priorities within the concept of support.¹¹

The TPOC plays an indispensable role in the planning phase of NRP replacement operations. Effective integration of NRP issues within the larger concept of sustainment requires TPOC planners to synchronize their efforts with other elements within the DMC. Because of the unique requirements involved in moving personnel, the TPOC should work closely with the theater movement control element to coordinate appropriate modes of transport for NRP.¹²

Other NRP replacement considerations include the following:

- Command and control
- Personnel accountability
- Emergency personnel services
- Billeting
- Transporting
- Equipping
- Medical support
- Food service
- Force protection

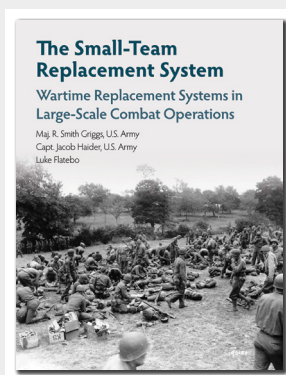
Many of these issues impact the entire distribution network. The DMC staff, including the TPOC, should complete a troop-to-task analysis of these activities, an-

anticipating requirements and allocating sufficient resources to address each function.¹³

The size and scope of LSCO magnify the complexity of this planning. Replacements may arrive at several different aerial ports of debarkation (APOD) and move several hundred kilometers along multiple routes to reach their gaining units. In addition, these move-

ments may include several modes of transportation and will likely involve multiple stops at intermediate staging bases, convoy support centers, and other nodes within the distribution network.¹⁴

The authors of “The Small-Team Replacement System: Wartime Replacement Systems in Large-Scale Combat Operations” posit that building and maintaining combat power in the face of high-intensity combat casualty rates requires an effective personnel replacement system. They propose a small-team replacement system to meet the challenges of large-scale combat operations. To view this article from the January-February 2020 edition of *Military Review*, visit <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/JA-20/Haider-Replacements-3.pdf>.



support, including early entry reception operations and coordinating personnel replacement priorities. The TPOC is replacing the Human Resource Sustainment Center organization. The TPOC coordinates with

The Theater Distribution Network

In the designated theater of operations, that network begins at the APOD, normally within the joint security area, where NRP arrive from a replacement center in CONUS. At the APOD, a movement control team from the TSC will track their movement within the transportation coordinators' automated information for movement system, meet the aircraft, and escort replacements to the theater gateway, where a theater gateway personnel accountability team will record their arrival within theater, utilizing the tactical personnel system.¹⁵

The theater gateway may locate within the APOD or at a nearby installation. In Kuwait, for example, U.S. Army Central Command operates a theater gateway at Camp Arifjan, a few miles south of its APOD in Kuwait City. The theater gateway provides limited personnel services for arriving replacements, such as replacement identification cards, and necessary life support such as lodging, food service, and medical support.¹⁶

From the theater gateway, the flow of replacements depends on available transportation. Movement control teams on-site will coordinate their departure based on priority of movement and availability of transportation. Where possible, replacements will likely move by ground transport, such as commercial buses, but onward movement may require either air or sea transport.

Movement to the forward area may take several days and require multiple stops. Alternatively, replacements may travel to a regeneration site where they are assigned and trained on a weapons system such as a tank or howitzer to provide the gaining command with a fully trained crew.¹⁷

As part of its mission to set the theater, the DMC must coordinate force protection, life support, and limited personnel services at each location. Because many of these resources will depend on commercial support, the DMC should review the size and scope of existing contracts and develop requirements packages where



Staff Sgt. Tommie McKissack (left), Warrant Officer Joshua Thibodeaux, and Staff Sgt. Solomon Griffin Jr. finalize Tactical Personnel System files and upload data into the Deployed Theater Accountability System 5–6 May 2022 in Bardofuss, Norway. Their mission ensured the accountability of all personnel of the 4th Brigade, 25th Infantry Division. (Photo by Capt. Thomas Malerk, U.S. Army)

necessary. In addition, the TSC will need to establish a method of command and control to ensure good order and discipline during these movements. Finally, the planning process must account for the strong likelihood that personnel movements will compete with other movement requirements for transportation assets and time and space on available road networks.¹⁸

What Can Go Wrong?

Competition for transportation assets makes this process especially difficult. Personnel replacements are important, but mechanized forces absolutely cannot fight without fuel and ammunition. As a result, these two commodities attract the most attention from sustainment planners and coincidentally, consume the lion's share of cargo space on available transportation assets. In a well-trained, fully manned DMC, TPOC

planners will attend the right meetings, participate on the right operational planning teams, and integrate the theater Army commander's replacement priorities within the TSC's initial distribution plan and at subsequent movement coordination boards.¹⁹

Arguably, the first weak link in this chain is the distribution planning process, during which the planners match requirements against capabilities in accordance with the commander's priorities. Personnel shortages, task overload, and lack of time for collective train-

distribution network. With its reliance on air and seaports, highways, bridges, rail lines, pipelines, bases, and digital communications, the distribution network is inherently vulnerable to myriad enemy capabilities, from special operations to cyberattacks to weapons of mass destruction.²²

Recommendations

Given the inevitable need for replacements in the next conflict, what can the Army do now besides

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ing and rehearsals threaten the effectiveness of every staff. These roadblocks pose a unique challenge to the planning process for replacement operations due to the anticipated scope of requirements and the unique considerations for moving personnel forward into a combat zone. Cross talk and collaboration between the Army G-1, HROC, TSC support operations, and the TPOC chief will ensure that replacements get the necessary attention during distribution operations.²⁰

The second weak link is the availability of replacements from CONUS. The Department of the Army will resource initial requirements from the active force, with volunteers, excess personnel, and low-density military occupational specialties (MOS) in nondeploying units topping the list. In a LSCO, however, the Army is likely to deploy the majority of its active-duty forces within the first few weeks, limiting the pool of available replacements within the Active Component. Reserve Component forces will deploy next, but their mobilization requires legislative and presidential authority, which may be too slow. Any delays within the political process will negatively impact combat power in theater.²¹

The enemy always gets a vote, and therein lies the third weak link. Once replacements arrive, they must survive their movement through a fragile theater

hope for the best? The following ideas will improve our ability to integrate this capability within theater distribution networks.

First, sustainment leaders should demand a casualty estimate (by MOS and rank) for every operation plan. People are our most important resource, but without an estimate of projected losses, planners cannot accurately predict distribution requirements.

Second, the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command should teach the NRP replacement process within the Army's theater sustainment planners' course, support operations course, mobilization planners' course, and other professional military education courses.

Third, the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command should add rigor to NRP replacement operations during division and corps Warfighter exercises. These exercises often include a full complement of sustainment units and corresponding observer-trainers. Training objectives, however, tend to focus on how well the distribution network delivers commodities such as fuel and ammunition, overshadowing the complexities involved in moving actual soldiers through the same pipeline.²³ Adding NRP challenges to the mix would underline the sustainment commander's responsibility to integrate replacement operations

within the distribution plan. At the same time, commanders must resist the urge to avoid replacement operations by hitting reset during these exercises.

Lastly, senior mission commanders should stress NRP replacement operations during theater and mobilization exercises. Current exercises re-create portions of the NRP process, but this replication usually happens on a small scale, wishing away the tyranny of time and distance that makes theater distribution so difficult. Better yet, given the critical importance of sustainment within LSCO, the Army's senior leaders

should consider investing in a corps Warfighter to stress test the entire theater distribution process.

Conclusion

We will need replacements in the next war. If that war involves LSCO, we will need replacements at a scale not encountered in the past seventy-five years. The new process looks good on paper, but a test drive is in order. We need to teach our leaders, train our soldiers, and exercise this capability now while we have the time to adjust. ■

Notes

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2. "Mission Command Training Program (MCTP)," U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, accessed 14 March 2022, <https://usacac.army.mil/organizations/cact/mctp>; Amy Hood (lieutenant colonel, senior human resources observer, coach/trainer, Operations Group Alpha, Mission Command Training Program), in discussion with the author, 23 February 2022.
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8. FM 4-0, *Sustainment Operations*, para. 2-102.
9. Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 4-0.1, *Army Theater Distribution* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, October 2014), para. 2-42–2-44; FM 1-0, *Human Resources*, para. 1-26.
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12. FM 1-0, *Human Resources*, para. 1-26; ATP 4-0.1, *Army Theater Distribution*, para. 2-50–2-54. For additional information on movement planning, see ATP 4-16, *Movement Control* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 15 April 2013).
13. FM 1-0, *Human Resources*, para. 3-87.
14. FM 4-0, *Sustainment Operations*, para. 5-119–5-123; see also ATP 4-0.1, *Army Theater Distribution*, chap. 4.
15. FM 4-0, *Sustainment Operations*, para. 4-57–4-63, para. 4-72, chap. 5.
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20. Lane, discussion.
21. Sheridan, discussion.
22. FM 4-0, *Sustainment Operations*, para. 5-13–5-18.
23. Hood, discussion, 23 February 2022.