1st Lt. Chris Lind with the 197th Field Artillery Brigade (rear detachment) and 1st Sgt. Paul Emond, senior enlisted advisor with the 744th Forward Support Company, 3rd Battalion, 197th Field Artillery Regiment, work together 13 December 2022 to load donated bikes into a light medium tactical vehicle for Operation Santa Claus in Concord, New Hampshire. The annual holiday gift drive, hosted by the State Employees' Association, provides the opportunity to give to disadvantaged children in the Granite State. The program sponsored more than 3,200 children in 2022. (Photo by Sgt. Bei Simmons, 114th Public Affairs Detachment)

Rear Detachment Operations through a Project Management Framework

Maj. Aaron F. Anderson, U.S. Army

Although they do not attract the same attention as their deployed counterparts, rear detachment (or rear-d) operations are critical to units during and after deployments. Currently, there is limited doctrine dedicated to the topic, leaving each rear element to re-create similar systems and processes. This includes the March 2023 release of Army Techniques Publication 3-35, *Army Deployment and Redeployment*, where the term "rear detachment" is mentioned once in the appendix for unit movement officer duties.[1] Much like the missions units deploy to support, the size and scope of rear detachments vary widely. Sometimes units deploy all available forces and leave a skeleton force, as could be expected during large-scale combat operations. However, there are other times, like during security force advise-and-assist team missions in Afghanistan over the past twenty years, where large percentages of units remained at home. What is constant is the requirement for a rear-d, and therefore, so is the need to understand how to approach this critical enabling mission effectively.

One industry that can provide a framework for rear-d operations is project management. The sixth edition of the Project Management Institute's *Project Management Book of Knowledge* defines a project as "a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result."[2] Rear-d operations meet all these criteria. They are temporary and usually have a defined start and end date. Planners and leaders can approach the operations using the initiating, planning, executing, monitoring/controlling, and closing processes.[3] It also produces a unique service and result. Rear operations are unique as the command operates with a percentage of the overall force. The results produced are different than those of a typical training cycle. Regardless of the rear size, those running in charge are as busy as those deployed, wear many hats, and accomplish tasks usually given to larger formations. Further, the command accomplishes this while leading populations of soldiers that did not deploy for many reasons. While challenging, rear-d operations allow leaders at all echelons to step into challenging roles of higher responsibility to learn and grow. As a brigade executive officer and operations officer during my unit's recent rotation to U.S. Central Command, the feeling was that my team and I were learning lessons most likely solved by rear-ds many times over. This article aims to shed light on these lessons to help others in the future.

Initiating

Initiating length depends on whether the deployment is an ordered or short-notice mission and may last several hours to several weeks. It is usually the quickest of the five processes identified above, with the most critical outputs being the minimal information requirements from Warning Order #1: who (naming of rear-d leadership), type of operation (what), and a planning timeline (when).[4] This process is initially challenging as it competes with deployment planning. As the unit gets wrapped into the newly assigned mission, the tendency is to accept risk planning for the rear-d. Naming the rear-d command allows the rear-d team to form a subordinate command and begin concurrent planning to feed the overall deployment military decision-making process. Naming a subordinate command team one echelon down as the rear-d command is a good practice if afforded the opportunity. Another option is to activate a deputy commanding officer if available. Setting a timeline for activating the rear-d drives a transition schedule and establishes clear command and control within the formation to free the forward team from garrison responsibilities.

Planning

People. Choosing the rear-d team is a negotiation during the military decision-making process to ensure that the requirements of both the forward and rear missions meet the commander's intent. Two important but not

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Rear detachment commander 1st Lt. Jacob Bales, 552nd Military Police (MP) Company, 728th MP Battalion, 8th MP Brigade, 8th Theater Sustainment Command, answers questions from a group of Advancement via Individual Determination students 18 February 2018 at Leilehua High School, Wahiawa, Hawaii, while the students write personal notes to place inside the care packages they planned to send to the soldiers of 552nd MP Company who were deployed in Guam. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Taresha Hill, U.S. Army)

exclusive considerations are whether the rear-d has the correct leader-to-led ratio and whether the unit has allocated the proper subject-matter experts and quantity of personnel to accomplish the commander's priorities. Failure to address either of the questions during the planning process may cause the commander to have to divert unplanned attention from the deployed mission back to the rear.

Ensuring a correct number of leaders in the rear serves several vital purposes. The most obvious is to lead and manage the portion of the unit's population that is nondeployable for reasons including legal issues, high-risk behavior, medical issues, and personnel departures due to changes of station or the end of Army service. These soldiers comprise the rear NCOs, officers, and judge advocate staff attempting to maintain pace with the number of packets, investigations, and boards. For example, five field grade officers each carried at least two open investigations and were primary members of separation boards during our recent deployment. Having

the rear-d complete personnel and property actions is a common and appropriate objective, but one must account for the time these actions take away from other tasks. The same holds for property book actions. Splitting property books means identifying another set of responsible leaders. While some units may bring their entire equipment table, plenty remains in the rear to account for and maintain. A unit that assigns property books to inexperienced or incapable soldiers does a disservice to the soldier at the risk of substantial liability and a disservice to the unit post-deployment when the commander resumes control of all items. Finally, commanders must consider that certain signature authorities are restricted by rank, even with the assumption of command orders. Are the right leaders back to sign actions, and who has the authority if not? Awards provide an example: only an O-5 (lieutenant colonel) can sign Army Achievement Medals and only an O-6 (colonel) can sign Army Commendation Medals.[5] Taking leaders away from the forward population comes with risk to the forward

Table. Example Tasking Matrix Showing Tasks by Lines of Effort during Each of the Three Planning Horizons

	Deployment	Rear-D Exclusive	Redeployment
LOE 1: Command Discipline Programs (CDPs)	• Lateral Transfers	• Excess Divestiture • Lateral Transfers • Organizational Inspection Program	• Lateral Transfers • Equipment Reset
LOE 2: Forward Support	• Casing Ceremony • Railhead • Port Detail • Soldier Readiness Program (SRP) • Flightline Support	• Late Deployers	• Flightline Support • Welcome Home Ceremony • Reverse Soldier Readiness Program (rSRP) • Uncasing Ceremony
LOE 3: Unit Training	• Predeployment Training	• Individual Ranges • Team Live-Fire Exercises	• Army Regulation 350-1 Training
LOE 4: Taskings	• Training Exercise Support • Garrison Support • Reoccurring Division Tasks	• Brigade-Level Field Training Exercise Support • Community Relations Events • Garrison Support • Gate Guard • Reoccurring Division Tasks	• Combat Training Center Support • Reoccurring Division Tasks • Garrison Support

(Table by author)

mission, but the commander must weigh that risk to the rear mission and the long-term post-deployment health of the unit.

Ensuring proper size and composition is the second half of naming a properly manned rear-d team. Continuity is an essential aspect of any team. Leaving staff or unit leaders that are going to depart the unit mid-deployment is accepting risk. Our team learned this over nine months by employing five S-4s (logistics officers) at the brigade level, which led to continual challenges in tracking and executing routine tasks. Second, while it is easy to consider each staff section by its primary functions, it is equally easy to forget about additional duties such as unit safety, environmental control, sexual harassment and assault, equal opportunity, and barracks management. It takes leaders identified by their primary duty position and adds more to their plate. Finally, get creative. Some staff sections only have one or two people, so the rear-d may inevitably lose that capability completely. Specific functions can become additional duties to maintain as a portion of a staff's function. One example is naming unit public affairs representatives to assist the public affairs officer and continue to tell the rear-d story.

If there is a large amount of equipment but a lack of maintainers, units can look to contracted solutions to help sustainment functions keep pace. The Unit Maintained Equipment Program uses contractors to help units keep pace with services and fully mission-capable vehicles while providing valuable experience to nondeploying soldiers to learn their craft better, and contracted family readiness support assistants can help manage communications and support functions for families.[6] These contracted efforts require time to implement, so leaders must program in these requirements early.

Operations. The rear-d commander must sit with the unit commander to define realistic and defined goals early in the planning. Once defined, it benefits the

rear-d to establish expectations with the home station's higher headquarters. If the deployment is an ordered deployment and time allows, briefing these expectations at a quarterly training brief allows approval of the rear-d priorities with the higher headquarters commander in a public setting. It establishes the glide path for the rear-d and sets expectations for how many taskings the rear-d can absorb. Setting priorities and expectations is also critical to enabling mission command. The tyranny

commander and division headquarters. Therefore, our rear headquarters turned the brigade commander's priorities into four lines of effort that were tasked to a subordinate battalion or brigade staff section to lead to maximize resources. The table (on page 139) shows the planning time horizons and lines of effort (LOE), which are discussed in the next section, used during our deployment. Many of the items addressed in the matrix are typical across other rear formations.

> "The tyranny of distance and time finds a way to make it impossible for the forward commander to fully understand what is happening in the rear, no matter how advanced video teleconferences or computer technology becomes."

of distance and time finds a way to make it impossible for the forward commander to fully understand what is happening in the rear, no matter how advanced video teleconferences or computer technology becomes. Without refined guidance from the forward or rear-d commander, a simple mission statement or set of lines of effort can be enough for rear leaders to act on.

Finally, setting expectations and priorities allows the rear-d to task organize by effort. The reduced size of the rear-d formation and its leaders stresses what a rear-d can accomplish while maintaining a traditional line and wire diagram task organization. Our recent deployment took approximately 65 percent of the formation forward, but the ratio was not distributed equally amongst ranks or formations. Six of the seven battalion headquarters and the brigade headquarters and staff went forward. It left one battalion headquarters with a reduced brigade staff to manage approximately two thousand soldiers at the home station. Distributed operations forward meant each battalion was fortunate if they could split their majors and leave one back. I served as the sole field grade officer as the brigade executive officer and operations officer for most of the deployment. At the same time, the lone battalion commander and command sergeant major ran both the brigade rear-d and their battalion. We did not have the same capacity as prior to the deployment to run the tasks given to us by our brigade

Executing

As discussed in the initiating process, execution can begin at a specified time, such as a color casing ceremony, or it may begin less officially as the deployment draws near when the preparation required of the forward team makes running garrison operations unsustainable. Most likely, though, rear-d operations begin in earnest with the deployment of the forward team; for as long as commanders are still on the ground, there is still the tendency to command their entire formation. The following subsections of this process are organized by the LOEs identified in the table. These LOEs adjust and adapt depending on the scope and size of the rear-d. However, to cover a wide swath of rear-d operations, they provide a variety of mission sets while also allowing for further discussion on select examples.

LOE 1: Command discipline programs. LOE 1 efforts are areas where units can make forward progress and put the unit on a firmer foundation upon redeployment. This effort includes but is not limited to programs related to supply, maintenance (Command Maintenance Discipline Program, or CMDP), and deployment. It also includes additional related items, such as the reduction of excess equipment, lateral transfers, and the organizational inspection program. LOE 1 is an area where the rear-d can leverage subject-matter experts within subordinate formations to lead a more significant effort. CMDP efforts can leverage the rear elements of a forward support company or brigade support battalion. At the same time,
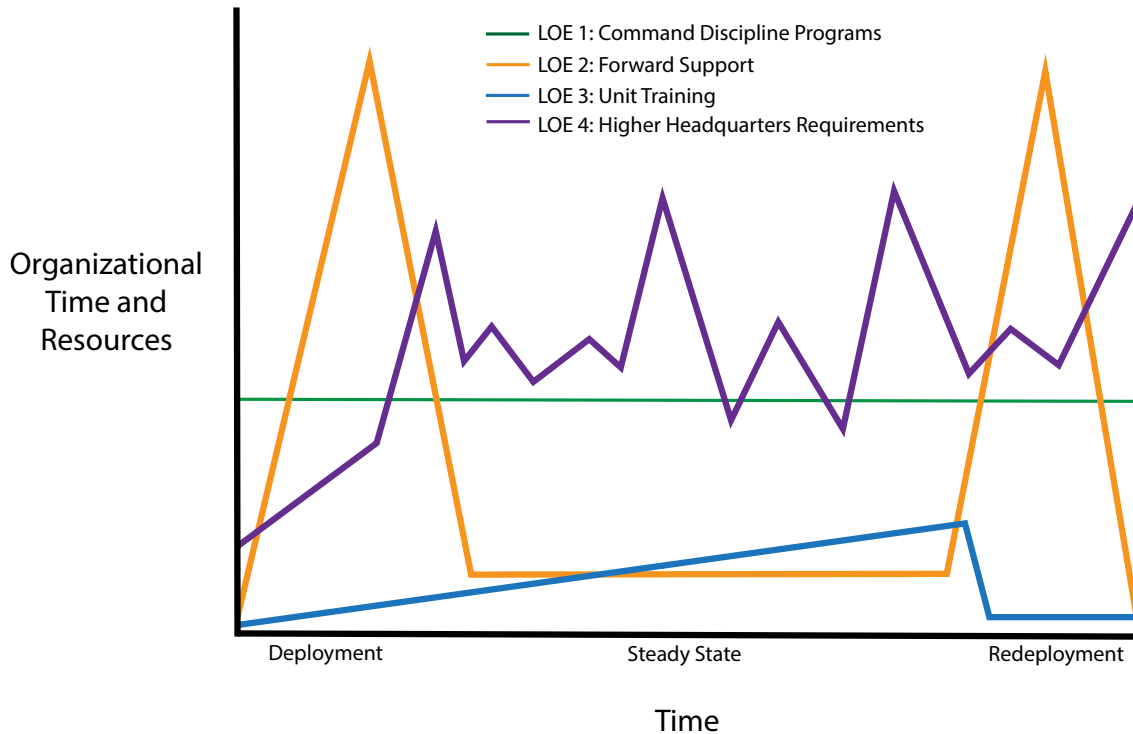
(Figure by author)

Figure. Rear-Detachment Lifecycle to LOE Considerations

lateral transfers and reduction of equipment can allow an S-4, property book officer, or even a company executive officer to take the lead. The greatest challenge in executing these programs is the knowledge gap created by having new and junior leaders take over as property book holders. The benefit of this LOE is the ability to use the entire rear-d population. Physical profiles preventing the wear of gear or departing soldiers with numerous appointments can still contribute to this LOE daily. This effort is ongoing throughout the deployment but will most likely see the most significant gains in the middle of the deployment when not supporting deployment or redeployment efforts.

LOE 2: Support to the forward element. At the beginning of the rear-d lifecycle, the team is busy putting the unit through the Soldier Readiness Program (SRP), running the unit during pre-deployment leave, and eventually enabling the departure of personnel and equipment (see figure). It is a complete team effort by the rear-d staff and subordinate units. It can last from several days to several months, depending on the size of the unit and deployment notification timeline. Once the forward team has departed, the effort wanes and shifts to preparing late deployers and accepting individuals that return early from the theater. It

is a much smaller operation that an S-4 shop can most likely manage, as it primarily consists of arranging transportation. The S-1 (personnel officer) and medical officer in charge also manage a smaller, continuous SRP. Eventually, like deployment operations, the redeployment becomes a total team effort. In this case, initial welcoming home tasks, reverse SRP, associated redeployment training, acceptance of initial equipment, and an uncasing ceremony supersede other LOEs. Like deployment, the redeployment phase can take several weeks to months of planning and execution.

LOE 3: Unit training. Training may range from maintaining proficiency in basic soldier skills to beginning another progression of team or squad proficiency. Either way, training serves three critical functions. First, it keeps soldiers professionally engaged and reduces off-duty incidents. Second, individual and small-unit training builds a strong foundation for the forward team to fall back on. Soldiers that arrive late to the unit and miss the deployment are the soldiers that have the most longevity in the formation. The unit relies on these soldiers during the next training cycle as many of the deployed population depart. Third, a portion of junior leaders left on rear-d, many who wanted to deploy but did not get the chance, need repetitions in

the eight-step training model to plan, resource, and execute training. The unit cannot afford to lose the development of junior NCOs and officers in the chaos of competing requirements and taskings at home.

LOE 4: Support to higher headquarters requirements. LOE 4 is the most public display of maintaining the unit's reputation and can be a significant source of friction. The unit is no longer in the training phase and has deployed forward to accomplish its assigned mission. Those remaining at home station are no longer conducting large-scale collective training, and higher headquarters and garrison likely expect them to support taskings. However, the formation is small, and the unit commander has provided their own priorities while away. Ultimately, these two competing requirements compete, and leaders need to balance the requirements. As a data point, our deployment taskings amounted to approximately 1,811 individual soldiers contributing 223,000 man-hours over nine months.

Considerations. There are several additional characteristics of the rear-d worth discussing as they are common across time and units. The first is that the rear-d is underresourced. How much depends on the unit and forward mission, but we found that on any given day, our rear-d had roughly one thousand people available for tasks. This amounted to approximately 50 percent of the overall rear-d and just 22 percent of a light infantry brigade combat team's overall strength. Additionally, the analysis does not account for the aforementioned loss of leaders to investigations, separation boards, and property actions. Finally, the reality is that the tasks received from a higher headquarters typically require the same quality people (NCOs, no profile, not flagged for adverse action, longevity in the unit) that are the rear-d's most precious resource.

Several techniques can assist in creating a shared understanding amongst all organizations. As discussed earlier, the first is briefing the rear composition and LOEs during the unit quarterly training brief leading up to the deployment. The second is maintaining a troop-to-task list, especially for key populations. Analysis of previous taskings can identify those ranks and military occupation specialties most likely to get pulled, and maintaining these shorter troops to tasks can pay significant dividends. We found medical personnel, E-7s (sergeants first class), and food service soldiers were in high demand. Finally, it is vital to work with the higher headquarters to understand their intent. Higher often assigns taskings for a specific rank or job title, but the rear-d can meet the intent task in alternate ways. While conducting support for another unit's training exercise, does the mission require thirty soldiers, or is the intent to create the effects of a platoon? One or two squads with additional crew-served weapons or vehicles may meet all the training objectives and offer the same training value.

Finally, many deployments last six months or longer, enough time for conditions at the home station to change. As leaders rotate, new personalities change the atmospherics, battle rhythm, and expectations. Additionally, some forward leaders have been in the formation for some time and believe they understand how to conduct operations in the rear. They may express frustration when things are not going according to their home station paradigm. While the rear-d must keep the forward element aware of these changes, it is also impossible to fully understand or appreciate the home station without being physically present. The bottom line is that it is hard to fully comprehend its complexity unless you have served on the rear-d. It is also impossible for the rear-d to understand the deployed environment without being there. No explanation, least of all this article, can fix that.

Monitoring and Controlling

Today's technology allows communication between forward and rears in ways unimaginable to previous generations. Phone, email, and video teleconferences over unclassified (Non-Secure Internet Protocol Router, or NIPR) and classified (Secure Internet Protocol Router, or SIPR) networks facilitate the flow of information at all hours of the day. There must be a balance that weighs the commander having knowledge of operations at home against making them the rear-d commander. One method for achieving this is establishing and adhering to a battle rhythm. Mission and commander personalities determine the correct frequency and communication medium, but forward and rear leaders can consider the following techniques and lessons learned. First, just because the forward operates more on SIPR than NIPR does mean that the rear has the same capability. There are situations when the medium needs to be SIPR, but if the brief entails rear data and/or was a NIPR product before deployment, chances are it is still NIPR. Making briefings difficult or impossible to access frustrates commanders when subordinates cannot answer questions.

Second, leaders must be mindful of the time difference between the rear and forward. For the rear-d, this may mean regularly scheduled meetings occur during

A member of the rear detachment of 3rd Battalion, 2nd Air Defense Artillery Regiment, 31st Air Defense Artillery Brigade, ties down a vehicle during strategic air load operations 11 May 2020 in Lawton, Oklahoma. (Photo by Sgt. Amanda Hunt, U.S. Army)

traditional physical training hours or outside the normal duty day. The rear must also be aware that prime times for meetings and engagements at home station are most likely off hours for the forward. We found two or three scheduled video teleconference engagements a week were sufficient to ensure shared understanding. One typically was for leader-to-leader synchronization, while the other was a forward-to-rear unit battle rhythm event, such as a wellness meeting, command and staff, or leader professional development engagement. As expected, off-cycle events to address timely information also occur, so limiting scheduled engagements to two to three per week allows for these extra engagements without overburdening either side. Remember, while the goal is to keep the command informed, it is also important to relieve the commander from having to control operations at both locations.

Closing

Closing activities begin with the planning and execution of redeployment operations. These are like deployment operations but in reverse order. The first activity will most likely be the reception and welcoming home of personnel. Communication with the forward team, higher headquarters, garrison support agencies, and family readiness groups is critical to making this first impression successful. Following the initial welcome home, the next redeployment task rear-d may get tagged with is to plan and execute the reverse SRP process. If possible, regenerate a scaled-down version of the SRP plan used for deployment and include the appropriate garrison agencies into the plan early and often. Finally, the rear-d may be responsible for initial property returning, especially if the property comes back direct from the deployed location by military aircraft. If the equipment comes back on a slower contracted ship, there is a good chance the unit may not receive it until after redeployment leave. Like the deployment phase, the redeployment phase may end with a defined event or may naturally transition back to the complete formation. If the former, it may look like an uncasing the colors ceremony, another task for the rear to plan and execute.

Regardless of the scope or scale of the operation, the rear-d needs to remain flexible and humble throughout the process. We experienced shifting redeployment flights, frustrated redeploying soldiers, and an eager forward

team ready to come back and immediately take control following the deployment. The first item, shifting flights, is beyond the control of a rear-d and creates stress for the deployed soldiers, their families waiting for them, and the rear-d support soldiers who sit around waiting for planes or buses to support. All one can do in this situation is communicate to all parties and remain humble as frustrated soldiers eventually make it home. In most cases, soldiers immediately forget their frustrations as soon as they reunite with their families. The second item is usually another frustration appearing in the heat of the moment. Soldiers are aware that redeployment tasks are the only tasks preventing them from going home, reuniting with their loved ones, or taking leave. Any time not actively engaged begins to create discontent and the belief that the system is inefficient or broken. The final item is the desire of the forward team to come back and immediately put their processes and thoughts into action. Again, remain humble and offer your best advice. Much like the rear-d had to figure out the relationships and systems at the home station, the forward team also navigates these waters—the only responsibility of the rear-d is to make the transition smoother and offer advice. Bring the forward counterparts to all the battle rhythm meetings, explain each report or slide, and provide context where necessary, but do not get frustrated when things change.

When closing out rear-d operations, it is easy to become overwhelmed with redeployment and lose track of good people and their accomplishments as they transition into new roles. Many subordinates will pleasantly surprise leaders with their time, effort, and accomplishments. Some of these people, like the deployers, depart the formation shortly after the deployment for other positions. Others remain in their current positions and revert to the chain of command they experienced before deployment. Either

way, they were a part of the rear team during the deployment and deserve proper recognition. Write proper evaluations or letters of continuity, and even though there is no end-of-tour award for rear-d, it doesn't mean leaders cannot recognize individual achievements. Identify excellence by writing impact awards, publicly acknowledge soldiers, and point out the "all-stars" in the formation. Finally, ensure the rear-d personnel get a chance to take leave. Supporting the deployed team can mean putting personal plans on hold for the greater good. It is a disservice to the larger organization if rear-d talent burns out before they can begin the next training cycle. They are the foundation for the next mission.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Properly planned, resourced, and executed rear operations can be a tremendous learning opportunity. Unfortunately, even after years of deployments and rotations, the doctrine on rear detachment operations is limited. Army Techniques Publication 3-91, *Division Operations*, dedicates twelve paragraphs to the topic at the division echelon, leaving detailed planning at lower echelons to the experience of previous leaders and dusty continuity books.[7] Perhaps it is time to further study and consider rear detachment in doctrine, as regardless of what the next war looks like, there will be requirements for families, soldiers, equipment, and facilities at home station. Rear detachment operations could be part of a more extensive doctrine on the rear area. Given the reach of information and cyber operations, the home station is closer than ever to the front. Hopefully, this article can provide a primer and highlight several characteristics common to many rear detachments, provide examples from experience, and offer several lessons to drive further conversation on this critical and consistent topic. ∎

Notes

1. Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 3-35, *Army Deployment and Redeployment* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], 2023), D-2.

2. Project Management Institute, *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK Guide)*, 6th ed. (Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute, 2017), 715.

3. Ibid., 554.

4. Field Manual 5-0, *Planning and Orders Production* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 2022), 5-8.

5. Army Regulation 600-8-22, *Military Awards* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 2019), 3-6.

6. Sarah Bailey, "'Maintenance' Program Successful," Army.mil, 8 July 2013, accessed 8 June 2023, https://www.army.mil/article/106999/maintenance_program_successful.

7. ATP 3-91, *Division Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 2014), 4-9.