



Sgt. 1st Class Robert Lower, instructor with the 13th Battalion, 100th Regiment, uses a forklift to move cargo to a boxcar as part of training on how to properly load railcars. The 13th Battalion conducts ammunition supply specialist training at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin. (Photos by Scott T. Sturkol)

# Ammunition Supply NCOS Learn About Railcar Loading

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**N**CO instructors with the 13th Battalion, 100th Regiment, at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, partnered with Burlington-Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railway personnel to practice loading ammunition pallets on railcars during recent training.

The 13th Battalion is an ordnance battalion that provides training and training support to Soldiers in the ordnance maintenance military occupational specialty (MOS) series. The unit is aligned under the 3rd Brigade, 94th Division of the 80th Training Command.

Sgt. 1st Class Douglas Dobitz, an instructor with the 13th Battalion, helped organize the training. He said it was necessary for instructors to be well-versed in railcar loading because the unit's training mission will expand in coming years.

Beginning in fiscal year 2017, the 13th Battalion will begin teaching senior and advanced leadership courses for the Army's 89B ammunition specialist career field.

"We hope to take this now and pass it on to our students through our program of instruction," Dobitz said. "It does not make us experts by any means, but it gives us basic knowledge and valuable resources.

"Shipping ammunition can be a dangerous thing, so actually being able to go in and look at how a railcar is loaded (with ammunition pallets) really makes sense as to how it should be done," Dobitz said. "Eventually, we will bring the students out here and show them how this is done as well."

Sgt. 1st Class Robert Lower, also an instructor with the 13th Battalion, said learning more about the capabilities of rail transportation of ammunition was beneficial.



Bob Coulter, left, manager of load-and-ride systems with Burlington-Northern Santa Fe Railway, talks to NCO instructors about the capabilities of a boxcar as part of railcar-loading training.

“I enjoyed it,” Lower said. “It’s something that is different and I think it’s going to be very useful for our students.”

For Sgt. 1st Class Sarah Johnson, another instructor with the 13th Battalion, understanding the specific requirements for loading a railcar is key to how the battalion will implement the training through their program of instruction.

“This was really good training,” Johnson said. “Seeing it firsthand is important to me because we want to get it right when we start training students on this process.”

Dobitz said that when the 89B Senior Leadership Course and Advanced Leadership Course begin in 2017, the students will learn more than just the basics of railcar loading.

“Those students are going to have to actually plan the railcar loads,” Dobitz said. “They’ll see a drawing as part of a plan, but they will have to plan it from there.

Plus, being able to load railcars might be considered a lost skill for some of our students. This will bring those skills back to our career field.”

The railcar training began with BNSF personnel providing a two-hour classroom overview about what types of railcars are used to haul cargo. The training then moved to a practical exercise, which included loading a railcar at the installation’s railyard near Highway 21 on Fort McCoy’s South Post. NCOs with the 13th Battalion provided a forklift and simulated ammunition pallets to conduct the training.

“This showed them how to load ordnance on a railcar so they can transport it across country safely without any damage,” said Bob Coulter, manager of load-and-ride systems at BNSF.

A company representative with Superior Packaging Inc. of Duluth, Minn., also was on hand to show the types of material used to properly secure and protect a load of ordnance in a railcar while it travels. Material, such as cardboard packaging used to load and secure cargo during transportation, is referred to as dunnage.

Coulter said load planning and dunnage use all are factors in how a railcar is loaded.

“(Transporting ordnance) requires a lot of thought and planning, and you have to have the right equipment,” he said.

The railcar used in the training is 50 feet long and not quite 10 feet wide. Though it is older than most railcars in use today, Coulter said the NCOs were able to see how much larger it is than other storage and transport methods that have been used.

“This is the same basic idea as loading a (shipping container) — it’s just on a larger scale,” Coulter said. ■



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