

Third Army

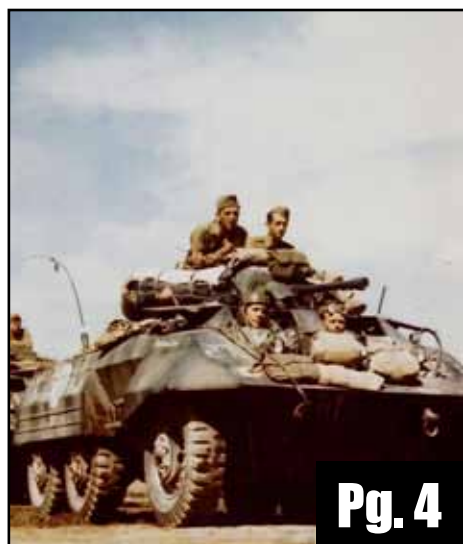
NICKEL II

The world's largest logistical operation since World War II



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Third Army helps shape the future while performing Responsible Drawdown of Forces in Iraq.

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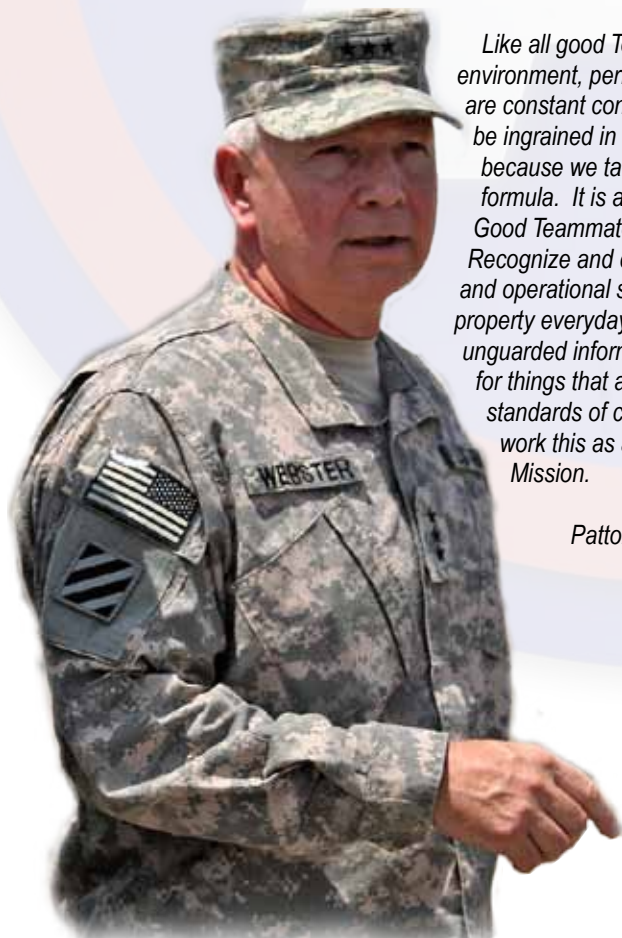
COMMAND CORNER

A message from Lt. Gen. Webster

To the Third Army/USARCENT Team,

Congratulations for the extraordinary accomplishments of the last year. Our path to Operation New Dawn and the expansion of combat operations in Afghanistan for Operation Enduring Freedom had many challenges, but our dedicated Team accomplished the operational milestones and more. Despite harsh weather conditions, challenging transportation networks, and enemy resistance, our Team achieved something of historic note. We – Our Team – the Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Airmen, Civilians, Contractors and Partner Nations – energized and sustained the fight in Afghanistan with enhanced operational support and logistics, while simultaneously performing a Responsible Drawdown of Forces in Iraq. We saved the American taxpayers more than \$2.4 billion in cost avoidance measures by regenerating OIF equipment and supplies for home station training and OEF needs. More than 40 percent of the equipment reclaimed from Iraq made its way to Sustain our forces in Afghanistan because of our Team's hard work. One hundred twenty three Theater Security Cooperation events happened across 15 Nations because of what we did together, Shaping the Future. Third Army's tireless actions have helped to replenish war stocks that keep us Ready Tonight to confront any foe and protect our national interests.

Job well done, but not over. Our Mission continues as we move into a new phase of Operation Nickel II, the largest logistical operation since World War II. We continue the transfer of equipment and movement of supplies to enable the Iraqi Security Forces to complete their mission. We continue to increase our Army stockpiles and prepositioned fleets for contingency operations. We are not yet complete with equipment transfers or emplacing life support for our Forces in Afghanistan. We are not done with the Responsible Drawdown of Forces in Iraq. We are sustaining operations in Afghanistan at the highest levels ever. Our Nation is counting on us, as are the Iraqi and Afghan people.



Like all good Teams, we must count on each other. We work and live in a harsh environment, performing duties that are inherently dangerous. Safety and vigilance are constant considerations that must be part of our daily procedures. Safety must be ingrained in our most mundane tasks. Too often, we lose great Teammates because we take shortcuts or fail to follow the standard. Safety is not a secret formula. It is about getting back to the basics: Standards + Discipline = Safety. Good Teammates watch out for each other. Therefore, we must remain vigilant. Recognize and correct unsafe acts. Recognize and correct violations of physical and operational security (OPSEC). We lose equipment, supplies and personal property everyday due to common theft. Our enemies are constantly collecting our unguarded information. For those reasons, we must constantly be on the lookout for things that aren't right – and make corrections on the spot! From enforcing our standards of conduct to reporting suspicious activity, success is only possible if we work this as a total Team effort. Be proud of all we have done and continue the Mission.

Patton's Own!

Operation Nickel

- A history



Dec. 16, 1944: Snowstorms cover the Ardennes in Belgium where the Germans use the grounding of Allied air forces to begin an assault across an 80-mile front. Initial allied reports conclude this was only an anticipated and localized counterattack, not Hitler's all-out attack.



Dec. 17, 1944: Allied commanders realize fighting in the Ardennes is a major offensive then order significant reinforcements. Maj. Gen. Gavin of the 82nd Airborne Division arrived on the scene and ordered the 101st elements there to hold Bastogne. The 82nd Airborne Division engaged the battle north of the Bulge.



Dec. 19, 1944: Initial confusion within the German army's supply lines delay their attack sufficiently to allow the 101st Airborne Division to solidify hasty positions in Bastogne. The fierce defense of Bastogne makes it impossible for the Germans to take the town. Allied commanders meet at Verdun to discuss their course of action. Gen. Patton's Third Army (located in northeastern France) reveals plans to move north to counterattack, attacking with two divisions within 48 hours, to the disbelief of other generals present. Before the meeting, however, Gen. Patton prepared contingency plans for a northward turn and massive repositioning of Third Army — code name: Operation Nickel.



Dec. 20, 1944: German Panzer columns swing past both sides of Bastogne, cutting off the town but the Germans fail to secure vital crossroads.

Story by Pfc. Dan Rangel
Print Journalist
Third Army Public Affairs

Officially named the Ardennes-Alsace campaign, it was one of the most decisive battles of World War II, and is known to the general public simply as the Battle of the Bulge.

The 'Bulge' is a reference to the initial incursion Nazi Germany put into the Allies' line of advance, as seen in maps presented in newspapers at the time.

Nazi leader Adolf Hitler's goal for these operations was to split the British and American Allied line in half, to capture Antwerp, Belgium, and then surround and destroy Allied armies, forcing the Western Allies to negotiate a peace treaty in Germany's favor.

The surprise attack against a weakly-defended section of the Allied line was achieved during heavy overcast weather and snowstorms, which grounded the Allies'

overwhelmingly superior air forces.

German forces were no match for the Allies during temperate weather conditions when the Allies could incorporate their air advantage into battle; however, with air power taken out of the equation, German Tiger tanks dealt an effective blow against Allied forces — thus forming the 'Bulge'.

Near the key town of Bastogne — which was located at a strategic crossroads — American forces managed to put up fierce resistance. Terrain favoring the defenders threw the German timetable behind schedule, a schedule that depended on the limited amount of time they had an advantage due to weather.

But the combination of the heroic defense of Bastogne, clearing weather conditions (allowing Allied air attacks) and Allied reinforcements, which arrived as part of Third Army's Operation Nickel, sealed the failure of the German offensive.



Dec. 21, 1944: German forces completely surround Bastogne. Inside the perimeter most of the medical supplies and medical personnel have been captured. Food is scarce, but the Germans fail to penetrate American lines despite initial success and move forward from Bastogne.



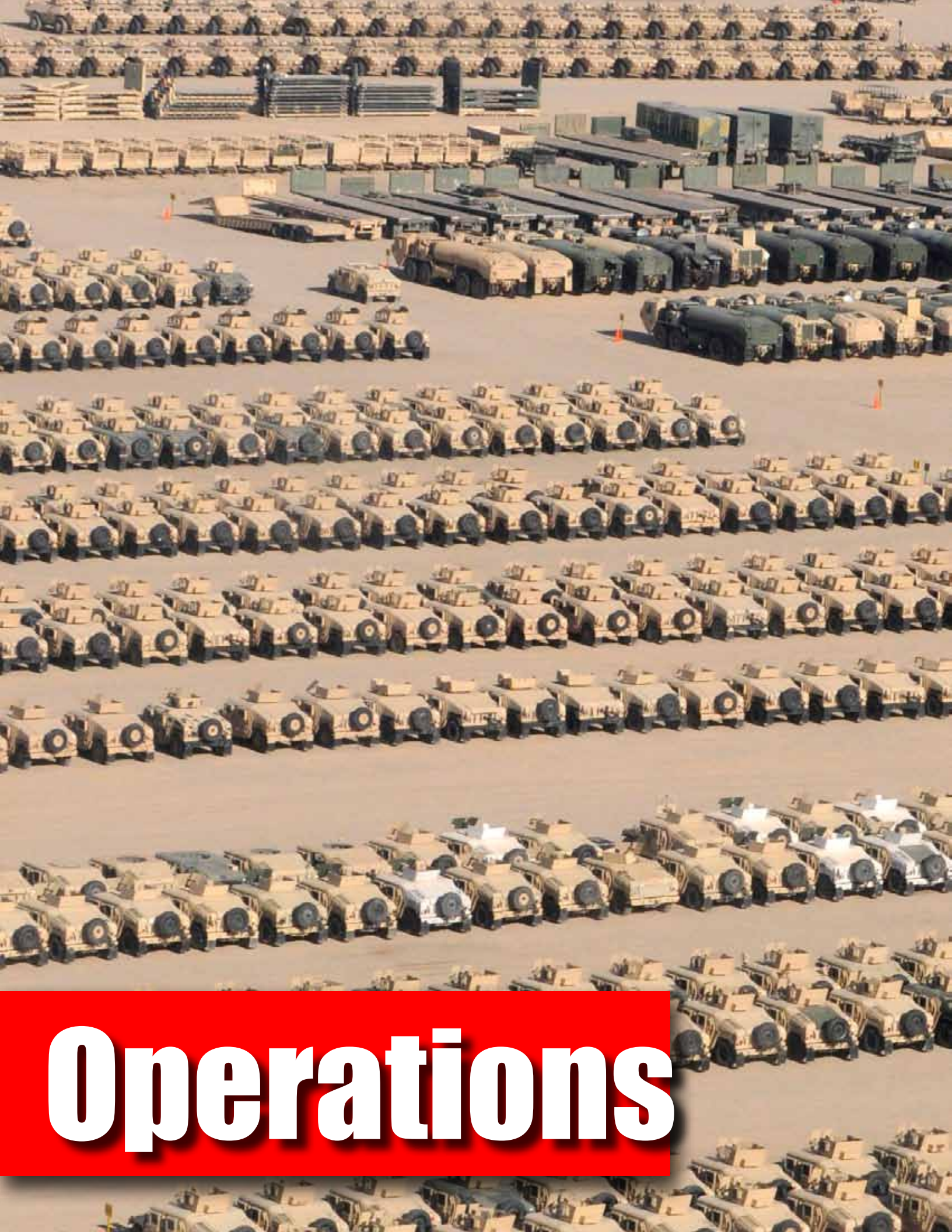
Dec. 22, 1944: Due to supply shortages, American artillery ammunition is restricted to 10 rounds per gun per day. Despite determined German attacks the perimeter holds. The German commander requests Bastogne's surrender. Brig. Gen. Anthony McAuliffe, acting commander of the 101st Airborne Division responds simply, "Nuts!"



Dec. 23, 1944: Weather conditions improve, allowing Allied air forces to attack, launching bombing raids on the German supply points in their rear as Third Army's advance north accelerates.



Dec. 26, 1944: Third Army's lead element, Company D, 1st Battalion, 37th Armor Regiment of the 4th Armored Division, reaches Bastogne, ending the siege. Winston Churchill, addressing the House of Commons in London following the 'Battle of the Bulge' said, "This is undoubtedly the greatest American battle of the war and will, I believe, be regarded as an ever-famous American victory."



Operations





Flatbed and heavy equipment transport vehicles with the 1st Sustainment Brigade, 1st Theater Sustainment Command, Third Army, are lined up as part of the Durable Express convoy. These convoys travel to eight out of the twenty-one Retrograde Property Assistance Team yards to load and transport retrograde cargo out of Iraq as part of the Responsible Drawdown of Iraq and the Build-up of Afghanistan as part of Nickel II. Nickel II is the U.S. Army's largest logistical operation since World War II.

Third Army

A world class logistics company

*Story and Photos by
Pfc. Dan Rangel
Third Army Public Affairs*

The Responsible Drawdown of Iraq and the Build-up in Afghanistan has been nicknamed Nickel II, an allusion to Gen. George S. Patton's repositioning of Third Army during World War II. Not since then has the American military undertaken such a shift of priorities.

"President Obama's guidance is to draw-down forces in Iraq to 50,000 [Troops] and Build-up Forces in Afghanistan by 30,000," said Brig. Gen. John O'Connor, chief of logistics for Third Army. Brig. Gen. O'Connor is charged with balancing the capabilities and requirements for both Iraq and Afghanistan.

People of the Army's Surface Deployment and Distribution Command, the Air Force's Aerial Movement Command, U.S. Army

Central Command's Deployment Distribution Operations Center, U.S. Air Force's Central Command, U.S. Naval Force's Central Command, the Responsible Reset Task Force and the rest of the military materiel enterprise, made Operation Nickel II possible.

The operation culminated at the end of August, when the Responsible Drawdown of Iraq had withdrawn more than 67,000 Troops (bringing the new total in Iraq below 50,000, which is in accordance with President Obama's guidance). In addition, 18,000 vehicles left Iraq and were returned to the U.S.

"From a logistical perspective, this is one of the most complicated and dynamic set of maneuvers and deployments in military history," Brig. Gen. O'Connor said.

"Here in Kuwait, we act as the center of gravity for all things logistics," he said. "Our job is to

orchestrate this complex operation, integrating and prioritizing the movements of people and equipment through multiple information databases and systems to make sure we have accountability, visibility, and oversight in support of our Warfighters."

One of the information centers used for such oversight is the Combined Operational Intelligence Center, a NASA-like, mission-control center located in Third Army's area of operations.

The information brought together at the command COIC allows for the deliberate, accountable, cost-effective shift of everything involving the Responsible Drawdown of Iraq.

However, even with the most sophisticated information systems, getting Servicemembers and supplies from Iraq into Afghanistan raises a number of issues, not the least of

which is distance.

There are two primary routes Third Army uses to get supplies from Iraq to Afghanistan, both go around Iran. (The most direct way to get from Baghdad to Kabul is through Iran, but it is off limits due to the country's sensitive relationship with the U.S.)

To effectively execute the in-theater logistics-management mission, Third Army produces a holistic view of the daily status of logistical events in the COIC for Lt. Gen. William G. Webster, Third Army's commanding general, and dozens of other key leaders. The daily status includes assessments of progress and actionable information.

This holistic logistics view is the Third Army - Theater Common Operating Picture, which consolidates, analyzes, validates, assimilates, and presents the volume of data found in a variety of divergent formats and is obtained from the multitude of sources required to produce the total operating picture.

"This particular system is essentially an Oracle database that ties together all of our automation systems," Brig. Gen. O'Connor said.

One of the primary feeds in A-TCOP is the Army War Reserve Depot System. AWRDS is an automated information system capable of building and maintaining databases containing Army War Reserve stocks and other equipment data. The AWRDS system uses bar-code and Radio-Frequency Identification technology to collect



Third Army retrograde Mine-Resistant Ambush-Protected vehicles await transport as part of the Responsible Drawdown of Iraq and the Build-up in Afghanistan as part of Nickel II. Nickel II is the U.S. Army's largest logistical operation since World War II.

equipment data and track and maintain changes in cargo configurations.

Brig. Gen. O'Connor described the four-step process Third Army uses to assess what to do with equipment.

"Consume what's already there, redistribute assets within Iraq and Afghanistan (or one of the other 20 countries we oversee), transfer equipment to other governments through foreign military sales or excess defense article transfers and turn equipment over to the Defense Logistics Agency for reutilization," he said.

Third Army has moved from keeping a logistics stockpiling model to lowering their logistical footprint as close to 'zero' as possible.

"We are attempting to consume all that we can within the theater," Brig. Gen. O'Connor said. "We are gauging our consumption rates

with stock objectives ... this includes consumables like rations, fuel, ammunition, and repair parts."

The race to move all this equipment began in March and peaked Aug. 31 after the end of combat operations in Iraq.

"The actual plan we are executing now is constantly being updated as we maintain our flexibility. We are still in contact and need to ensure that we 'right size' to maintain what's needed on the ground for the remaining forces in Iraq," Brig. Gen. O'Connor said.

Third Army leadership continually balances the needs of Afghanistan with their responsibilities in Iraq.

"Nothing is done in a vacuum — at least nothing successful," he said. "The plan is always being updated based on lessons learned."



Third Army retrograde humvees await transport as part of the Responsible Drawdown of Iraq and the Build-up in Afghanistan as part of Nickel II.





Logistics



A convoy of Third Army vehicles prepares to be retrograded and redistributed to the Iraq and Afghanistan theaters to help lower Third Army's logistical footprint in support of Nickel II, the largest logistical operation since World War II.

Operation Nickel II: 1st TSC key player in Drawdown from Iraq, logistics operations in 2010

*Story and Photos by Natalie Cole
1st Theater Sustainment Command
Public Affairs Office*

In the past year, Troops and civilians have been moving millions of pieces of equipment, from tanks to tools, in support of the Responsible Drawdown of Iraq and the Build-up in Afghanistan. The First Team has been front and center in these historic logistics efforts.

The 1st Theater Sustainment Command has used its network of transportation capabilities - ports, planes, tractor trailers, convoys, customs points and fuel – to keep supplies and equipment moving 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The 1st TSC has transported the food, water, ammunition, building materials, armored vehicles and repair parts to sustain Warfighters in the Third Army's area

of operations. The First Team would like to recognize the important work of the team of Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines of all ranks and military occupations. The following example offer a snapshot into the 1st TSC's support of Operation Nickel II.

RPAT Yards keep things moving, accounted for ahead of schedule

A key part of Operation Nickel II has been transporting armored vehicles and equipment to the United States or to other operations in theater, a process known as retrograde. The 1st TSC has supported the retrograde of millions of pieces of equipment by managing the Redistribution and Property Assistance Teams in Iraq.



A Third Army Humvee is loaded onto a Heavy Equipment Transport Vehicle via forklift so the vehicles can be transported in support of the Responsible Drawdown of Iraq and the Build-up in Afghanistan as part of Nickel II, the largest logistical operation since World War II.

Troops headed home from Iraq begin their journey to the United States with a stop at the RPAT yards to turn in their equipment. At the RPAT yards, teams of logistics Troops and civilians account for each piece of equipment - large or small - that comes into the lot. The inventory involves comparing the items units turn in with the original inventory list, known as a property log. The RPAT's work ensures accountability of all the moving parts involved in the retrograde.

To keep pace with the mass movement, the RPATs have worked around the clock to inventory and ship out items. The RPAT teams have also adapted to serve units

who have turned in their equipment ahead of schedule. With the non-stop service and efficient turn-in, the RPATS met their September and October projections by the end of August.

After the retrograde, armored vehicles damaged or battle-worn are repaired in the United States and then reintegrated back into the Army. Known as reset, this process of salvaging, repairing and reusing vehicles saves the military millions of dollars. The 1st TSC has completed retrograde and reset operations in partnership with the Army Materiel Command's Responsible Reset Task Force, known as R2TF.



Port Ops





1185th plays key role in supporting Responsible Drawdown

*Story and Photos by Natalie Cole
1st Theater Sustainment Command
Public Affairs Office*

For much of the war, the complex logistical process of supplying the warfighters in theater has been behind the scenes. Now, with the push to get people and equipment out of Iraq, the work of surface distribution commands at sea ports is in the spotlight. Images of the war have shifted from combat Troops in battle throughout deserts and urban landscapes to convoys of armored vehicles leaving Iraq destined for sea ports in the Persian Gulf.

One such unit that contributes to the heavy lifting of the Drawdown is the 1185th Deployment Distribution Support Battalion, a reserve unit from Lancaster, Pa. The 1185th is responsible for operations at the Port of Shuaiba in Kuwait.

On a continual basis, thousands of damaged and battle-worn armored vehicles from Iraq arrive to Port of Shuaiba to be shipped back to the U.S. Troops of the 1185th are responsible for inventorying the equipment, cleaning it, inspecting it and finally loading it on a ship bound for the U.S. By the time equipment reaches the port, it has been cleaned and inspected multiple times by Troops.

At the port, armored vehicles are inspected one last time by U.S. Navy customs.

Sgt. 1st Class Michael McMullen, noncommissioned officer in charge of cargo management for 1185th, said the coordination among different logistics Troops is essential for preparing equipment to meet the standards of customs. He said, "The main thing is having everything done right before it gets to the port."

Stryker armored vehicles with 4th Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division are loaded up and strapped down aboard a vessel at the Seaport of Demarcation, Kuwait Sep. 10.

Once they reach the U.S., the armored vehicles begin a process known as retrograde. Retrograde is another term for repairing or retiring damaged equipment and reassigning it for use elsewhere in the Army.

“Today’s work in Iraq is tomorrow’s work in Kuwait is next week’s work at the port,” said Lt. Col. Walter Chwastyk, commander of the 1185th

Usually, port operations are an unseen effort, taking a backseat to the more typical images of combat.

However, working on the port is a demanding job that comes with its own hazards. For example, cranes and forklifts are often oversized, as they need the capability to lift armored vehicles onto flatbed trucks and ships. Furthermore, the large amount of commercial shipping traffic on the port can create dangerous working conditions.

“The fact that we’re moving large pieces of equipment – in the day, at night, in sandstorms, 24 hours – can make ports lethal,” said Maj. Eric Delellis, 1185th operations officer for Port of Shuaiba.

Weather is also a challenge, as Kuwait



A convoy of armored vehicles from Iraq arrives at the Port of Shuaiba in Kuwait, July 22. The 1185th Deployment Distribution Support Battalion orchestrates the transportation of the vehicles, which will board the Motor Vessel Liberty for shipment back to the U.S to support the Reset of our Army.

is one of the hottest places on earth.

“High winds and sandstorms are prevalent,” said Delellis. In such instances, the port closes, which forces Troops to juggle the timing of incoming vessels, cargo that needs to go out, and cargo that is coming in. “It’s a real chess match,” he added.

In the face of the dangers, safety is paramount, and Troops have the training needed to perform their duties safely, said Chwastyk.

Despite all the combined challenges of port operations, the 1185th continues to meet their own goals. For example, Chwastyk said that his Troops maintain

a 10-day dwell time, which refers to the amount of time vehicles stay at the port before going home. He added that “this can be thankless work” but that Troops have upheld high standard of performance “to meet our goals of moving equipment.”

The 1185th is a subordinate battalion of the 595th Transportation Brigade headquartered at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. The 595th is part of the Surface, Deployment and Distribution Command, and conducts port operations within Third Army’s 20-country area of responsibility.



Heavy equipment transport vehicles stand ready to roll in support of Nickel II, the U.S. Army’s largest logistical operations since World War II.



A driver loads a nonoperational Humvee from Iraq onto the Motor Vessel Liberty at Port of Shuaiba, Kuwait. The Liberty will carry 6,000 tons of military cargo from the port to the U.S. Port operations, managed by 595th Transportation Brigade.

595th Transportation Brigade ensures success of responsible drawdown

*Story and Photo
by 595th Transportation Brigade
Public Affairs Office*

To achieve President Barrack Obama's directive of having no more than 50,000 military personnel in Iraq by the end of August 2010, the 595th Transportation Brigade executed more than two brigade combat team door-to-door moves per month during Operation Nickel II. Two subordinate transportation battalions, the 840th and 1185th Transportation Battalion, and the attached U.S. Coast Guard Redeployment Assistance-Inspection Detachment team, ensured the success of the largest logistics operation since World War II. During the Responsible Drawdown of Iraq, the door-to-door redeployment process seemed to be a great success eliminating the need for over 2,000 theater trucks and security assets.

The 840th Trans. Bn., commanded by Lt. Col. David Banian and located in Balad, Iraq has operational oversight of three of the busiest ports in the Central Command area of operations.

Since the start of Operation Nickel II, the battalion redeployed 24 BCTs and separate brigades back to the continental United States, coordinated the movement of more than 29,000 containers, and moved over 14,500 pieces of Army Materiel Command retrograde cargo. They've also executed nine Iraq to Afghanistan equipment and material movements over the Northern Distribution Network or via the Pakistan Ground Lines of Communication.

"The Soldiers did an outstanding job – very professional and service orientated when working with the multiple military and civilian agencies we interact with on a daily basis," said Lt. Col. Stephanie Willenbrock, Battalion Redeployment officer in charge. "The Soldiers were very flexible and proactively troubleshoot issues to ensure the entire operation went smoothly."

Members of the Coast Guards RAID team, lead by Lt. Cmdr. Mike Bennett, worked alongside the 840th's personnel.

Based at Balad, Basrah and

Baghdad, Iraq, RAID teams traveled to more than 30 different Forward and Contingency Operating Bases. They supported Army missions by providing expertise on the proper shipment of hazardous materials by ship and ensuring it was accurately documented, as well as inspecting container structural integrity. Team members also trained Army unit movement officers and HAZMAT certifiers on cargo shipment requirements.

"A lot of us had never done anything like this before," said Petty Officer 2nd Class Bonnie Wysocki, who spent eight months in Iraq before moving to Kuwait for the last two months of her deployment. "We had never really been this exposed to the Army mission and culture before, so it's definitely been a learning experience. But, we've made friends across different services, from Reserve to active duty and from unit to unit, so that's pretty neat. I've met a lot of great 840th and 595th personnel who I will stay in touch with after this deployment."

A man with a shaved head, wearing a white t-shirt, is focused on working on a large, weathered metal vehicle chassis. He is using a tool to work on a series of circular holes along the side of the chassis. The background is a cluttered workshop with various tools, hoses, and equipment. The word "Retrograde" is overlaid in large white letters on a red background.

Retrograde

Lawrence Chandler, a civilian heavy-wheeled vehicle mechanic with over 15 years of experience, tears down a retrograde truck at a maintenance bay located at Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan. The equipment is then repaired so that it can be reused by Soldiers in Afghanistan. "When we get vehicles, we tear them down and build them back up, so they can get them back out there on the ground as soon as possible," said Chandler.



2-401st AFSB supports retrograde operations

*Story and Photos by
Ned Bryan
2nd Battalion, 401st Army Field Support
Battalion Retrograde Operations*

The 2nd Battalion, 401st Army Field Support Battalion is one of the very few organizations in the force structure to perform full spectrum logistical operations at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels; the myriad missions performed by this single battalion in Kuwait can be difficult to grasp. In addition to its three primary missions (Army Propositioned Stock, Presidential Directives in support of the Responsible Drawdown of Iraq and Operation New Dawn, and direct Theater support for Operation Enduring Freedom) the battalion also supports multiple secondary missions. These secondary missions range from Foreign Military Sales to issuing equipment directly to organizational units stationed in Kuwait. The battalion continues to perform as one of the premiere logistical operations in today's military. The battalion processed

nearly 160,000 pieces of equipment this past fiscal year: over 35,000 pieces of rolling stock, over 80,000 pieces of nonrolling stock, and almost 45,000 pieces of nonstandard equipment. The maintenance operation completed over 15,000 work orders compiling over 1.24 million man hours of labor.

How the battalion handles retrograde is unique in that before equipment is processed for transport to the continental United States several other factors must be considered at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. One of the first physical processes that take place at the battalion level is a determination of whether or not the asset meets a pre-established in-theater requirement. These requirements are established by the Department of the Army, Central Command, Third Army and 1st Theater Sustainment Command. The battalion's role is to assess if the asset meets the criteria for any of the requirements established and then source the asset into that requirement or continue to process the asset for retrograde back to the U.S. In the last 12 months, the battalion received over

24,000 pieces of rolling stock out of Iraq. Of that total, over 15,000 were processed for retrograde to the U.S. Nearly 3,000 were disposed of through the Defense Logistics Agency Distribution based on the condition code of the equipment and the disposition instructions from the Life Cycle Management Command item managers.

The remaining 6,000 pieces were retained or harvested to support in-theater requirements. Harvested retrograde from the Operation Iraqi Freedom drawdown sourced war reserve stocks, OEF requirements, Heavy Advise and Assist BDE, theater sustainment stocks, and the CENTCOM Theater Reserve.

Retrograde in and of itself is a simple process, but because of the battalion's unique relationship with the Warfighter, coupled with its location and logistical capabilities, it facilitates full-spectrum support opportunities. Receiving assets coming out of OIF/OND provides tactical level support to those units redeploying and harvesting those assets for in-theater requirements supports both operational and strategic requirements. The most important strategic level contribution the battalion provides is to feed the Army Force Generation Reset process. We accomplish this by retrograding roughly 15,000 pieces of rolling stock and nearly 80,000 pieces of nonrolling stock back to the depots. These depots can then recondition these items and make them available to re-equipping the force structure.

Once it is determined an asset is not required to support any in-theater requirement and has not received disposition to Defense Logistics Agency Disposition the item will begin the process of being retrograded to the U.S.

Processing retrograde assets is a complex mission involving multiple synchronized operations that include: 1) receiving the convoys coming out of Iraq; 2) offloading the assets; 3) accounting for the assets; 4) harvesting assets for theater requirements; 5) de-installing Command Control Communications Computers and Intelligence enablers; 6) washing assets for agricultural customs clearing; 7) transporting the assets through all of these processes to include getting them to the port and eventually onto the ships that will return the assets to the U.S.; 8) producing all of the required supply and transportation documentation including military shipping labels and Radio Frequency Identification tags.

During the peak of phase IV of the Responsible Drawdown the battalion averaged over 2,150 pieces of rolling stock and 80 containers of nonrolling stock. The total number of nonrolling stock assets retrograded is over 80,000 plus an additional 13,000 pieces of nonstandard equipment shipped back to the U.S.

The retrograde mission is just one example of how the battalion satisfies requirements across the strategic, operational, and tactical levels supporting both CONUS and theater requirements.



The 2nd Battalion, 401st Army Field Support Battalion Retrograde Operations performs as one of the premiere logistical operations in today's military. Contractors subordinate to the 2-401st guide a heavy equipment transport vehicle as it is moved to an alternate location.



ACSE-A

ARCENT Coordination and Support Element- Afghanistan

Workers with the 401st Army Field Support Brigade maintain, repair and upgrade retrograde equipment coming in from the Responsible Drawdown in Iraq, at Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan in support of the Build-up of Forces in Afghanistan.







401st AFSB supports Build-up in Afghanistan

*Story and Photos by Spc. Eric Guzman
27th Public Affairs Detachment*

An integral part of Operation Nickel II's advancement lies in the timely refurbishing and refitting of retrograde equipment prior to its deployment into a combat environment, where the lives of servicemembers depend on the gear they're provided.

The success of the Drawdown of Iraq and Build-up in Afghanistan are crucial elements to the fulfillment of Third Army's mission in the Middle East.

Several visitors were given a tour of the 401st Army Field Support Battalion facilities to see their significant role in the Build-up of Afghanistan at Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan, July 27.

"We're doing upgrades on these vehicles," said Terrance Rutch, a civilian contractor. "It's a two and a half day process - we're doing the suspension right now, adding independent suspension system upgrades to the trucks."

With a chance to view the upgrades being performed came a chance to get hands-on experience with some of the equipment that stands ready to be pushed to Troops here later this year.

Among the visitors was Maj. Gen. Peter Vangjel, Third Army deputy commanding general, who received a hands-on look at several of the newly outfitted vehicles, including a Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle equipped with a remote-controlled

top-mounted .50-caliber machine gun and a surveillance robot known as the "ThrowBot."

"We're a small shop but we take care of a wide range of robots," said Master Sgt. Tully Culp, noncommissioned officer in charge of the Joint Robotics Repair Detachment - Afghanistan.

"We have shops at different locations in the area of operation. What we do as the robotics team in Afghanistan, I have about 23 people that take care of everything a robot can do."

The opportunity to both watch the refitting of equipment destined for ground Troops in Afghanistan and to also operate the finished products gives senior leaders a better grasp of what the Soldiers in theater have to work with. This provides them the knowledge of knowing that their Troops are well outfitted and ready to handle any situation.

"The ThrowBot has video capabilities. Say you were sitting outside of a window, you could throw this guy through a window and control it so you can see what your threat is on the inside," said Culp. "This can keep a lot of our guys on the ground safe."

Thanks to the hard work of Soldiers from the 401st AFSB and contractors alike, an incredible outflow of vehicles and equipment is being sustained until Operation Nickel II is complete, and the Troops in Afghanistan have the gear they need to Sustain the Fight and ultimately complete the mission.





Support



CETs provide convoy security

*Story and Photos by
Spc. V. Michelle Woods
1st Sustainment Brigade*

1st Platoon, 64th Transportation Company, 1st Sustainment Brigade, consists of drivers on convoy escort teams who provide security to convoys traveling to and from Iraq and Kuwait in support of the Responsible Drawdown of Iraq and Operation New Dawn.

The Convoy Escort Team consist of hand-picked Soldiers who were identified for their professionalism, prior combat experience and responsible nature, said Sgt. 1st Class Michael J. Crewse, who serves as a platoon sergeant with 1st Plt., 64th TC, 1SB.

“We’re like infantry on wheels,” said Spc. Sebastian Arbelaez, vehicle operator, 1st Plt., 64th TC, 1SB.

“It kind of feels like you are an infantryman as a truck driver,

providing that security for the rest of the convoy,” said Sgt. Brandon J. Robertson, vehicle operator and gunner, 1st Plt., 64th TC, 1SB. “I search and scan for a lot of things, small-arms, and stuff like that. It’s actually a stressful job up there because you’re constantly looking for threats. It’s all about staying vigilant and not getting complacent.”

Stationed out of Fort Lee, Va., 1st Platoon has provided security to more than 60 convoys delivering supplies to bases throughout Iraq and assisting with the drawdown of U.S. equipment from Iraq.

With the last of U.S. combat Troops withdrawn, 1st Platoon CET Soldiers depend on their own training and the Iraqi forces to ensure the roads are safe for convoys.

“I know they (U.S. combat Troops) had a big load on their plate to make

sure things are secure and peaceful,” said Robertson. “And now it’s up to the Iraqi army and Iraqi police. We’re doing our job rolling things in and out, more so out, so we can make sure everybody can get home safe.”

Despite the withdrawal of combat Troops, Crewse said he is confident in his platoon’s ability to provide reliable security. He said 1st Platoon Soldiers train prior to, and during deployment. The training includes handling and firing the .50 caliber machine gun and a 40 hour block of instruction focusing on the different aspects of the Caiman Mine-Resistant Ambush-Protected vehicle. Soldiers are taught basic characteristics of the vehicle, how the vehicle will react to off-road and urban terrain, as well as sudden stops.

The CET also goes through a series of simulation and virtual-training exercises.

“The train-up is to give us the opportunity to get a feel of what we’re going to go through before we hit ground in theater (Iraq),” said Robertson.

In addition to the CETs training, there are several experienced veterans in 1st Platoon who have previously deployed to combat zones.



Soldiers from 1st Platoon, 64th Trans. Co., Convoy Escort Team, receive a convoy brief from Sgt. 1st Class Michael Crewse prior to crossing into Iraq. The CET escorts and provides security to convoys traveling throughout Kuwait and Iraq in support of the Responsible Drawdown.



Mine-Resistant Ambush-Protected vehicles are staged in a single file line prior to crossing into Iraq. The 1st Platoon, 64th Transportation Company, Convoy Escort Team provides security to convoys traveling throughout Kuwait and Iraq using MRAPs in support of the Responsible Drawdown.

“We are proficient and well trained at what we do,” said Crewse. “I have Sgt. Joseph Sipes for example, who has deployed to Afghanistan and has extensive combat experience, as well as Sgt. Emmanuel Bonilla. We would be able to repel any attacks if need be.”

Spc. Gary Ruffcorn, a 12-year combat veteran, has deployed to Iraq four times, to include Operation Iraqi Freedom I. Serving as a truck driver in all deployments, his extensive knowledge of the Iraqi roads is another advantage for the CET.

Along with the responsibilities of the CET come challenges.

One challenge the Soldiers face is the agonizing wait and complacency that comes with convoy missions. The CETs wait for roadside bomb clearance, sandstorms to clear and threat levels to decrease, among others. Patience is necessary in order to tolerate the inconsistent schedule.

“What helps me stay focused is just doing the job,” said Robertson. “You have to take care of each other.”

Ranging from four to 15 days, CET missions can become mundane and exhausting. Soldiers can be expected to be on duty for up to 24 hours straight depending on mission requirements and the severity of any problems that arise.

Crewse said the long distances, the unknown aspects of the day-to-day and fighting complacency are challenges his Soldiers face while on missions. The California native and 20-year veteran constantly reminds his Soldiers of the importance of staying vigilant.

“Fortunately we have not received any direct IED attacks onto our vehicle systems, however with Operation New Dawn, it does not mean that the dangers do not still lurk,” said Crewse. “It’s still extremely important that these men and women under my charge maintain their vigilance, professionalism and their dedication like they’ve done since day one.”

Motivation runs high for the 1st Platoon CETs despite working long hours in a desolate, foreign country. The Soldiers are closing in on the end of their deployment and looking forward to returning to Virginia.

The Drawdown of Iraq and Operation New Dawn are significant markers in American history. 1st Platoon Soldiers participated in the largest drawdown of U.S. forces since World War II as well as the end of U.S. combat operations in Iraq.

Crewse said he feels humble, proud and honored to be a part of American history.

“After 20 plus years of faithful

Army service, this is probably the greatest group of men and women that I have had the pleasure to work with,” said Crewse.

Robertson, who has served two deployments in Iraq and one in Afghanistan, said it makes him feel honored to take part in several historical moments in Iraq.

“Compared to my last deployment, it’s a big deal,” said Robertson. “When this (OIF) first kicked off, all this stuff had to come in, and now it all has to be drawn back out. And as they change up the operations, it’s really cool. I don’t mind being a part of history. It’s great.”

The drivers and CETs greatly assisted with the war in Iraq, ensuring Soldiers had necessary supplies to fight effectively. They also play a vital role in the drawdown and Operation New Dawn, continuing to provide supplies for Soldiers in Iraq and security for convoys, while withdrawing U.S. equipment.

“I love my job,” said Crewse. I firmly believe that without our professionalism and dedication to excellence, that a lot of bad things could happen. I’m extremely proud of these men and women.”

“As they say in the Army, nothing moves without transportation,” said Robertson. “You need us.”





Drawdown



Brigade Support Battalion supports 4-2 SBCT retrograde

In Kuwait, the Brigade Support Battalion, 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, under the guidance of the 1st Theater Sustainment Command and Third Army, supports the drawdown of forces from Iraq by facilitating a smooth self-retrograde from Iraq for the 4th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division.



A convoy of stryker armored vehicles from the 4th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, wait in line before being sent into the Four Corners downgrading lanes at Camp Virginia, Kuwait, Aug. 17. The process was part of the 4-2 SBCT's self-retrograde out of Iraq.

*Story and Photos by
Spc. Spencer T. Rhodes
53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team
Public Affairs Office*

The 4th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division's withdrawal from Iraq is historic as U.S. forces transition from Operation Iraqi Freedom into Operation New Dawn. During OIF, units would perform a relief in place, and leave their equipment for incoming units to fall in on. With the Responsible Drawdown of Forces in Iraq, and no replacement for the 4-2 SBCT, the unit is driving their stryker armored vehicles from Iraq to Camp Virginia in Kuwait, and conducting a self-retrograde operation with all their equipment.

The Brigade Support Battalion commander, Lt. Col. Thomas Cannington, says Camp Virginia is the retrograde site for all 4-2 SBCT Soldiers leaving Iraq. The BSB worked hard to create a staging area specifically for the Stryker Brigade, called "Four Corners."

This staging area will allow the 4-2 SBCT to quickly and efficiently strip all unnecessary gear and weapons systems from their vehicles before they move to the wash racks.

"We are their support site to help prep their equipment. That's why Four

Corners was established, for them to come in and download all their combat vehicles and get them ready for cleaning and shipping back to Ft. Lewis," said Cannington.

The preparation for the brigade contained extensive participation from many parties within Camp Virginia. Capt. Eric Moore, the Camp Virginia action officer and contracting officer representative, has been in charge of coordinating the retrograde operation on Camp Virginia for the past two months.

Moore emphasizes the importance of coordinating with different parties and keeping a continual flow of communication, particularly with the contractors on post, to get the staging area set up in a short period of time, before the bulk of the 4-2 SBCT arrived in theater.

"A lot of it was coordinating with contractors to support what was formerly a barren desert into fully functional motor pools and maintenance areas," said Moore.

The Strykers are all being downloaded to their original form, meaning any extra technology added to the vehicle in support of the mission in Iraq is being removed. As each Stryker comes through, they go through a series of disposal lanes allowing them to discard items like trash, ammo, water cases, and other materials that are not

attached to the stryker itself.

In addition to the Stryker vehicles, the entire brigade, over the course of three weeks, will move through Camp Virginia putting a strain on Camp operations. Moore says the average transient time on Camp Virginia is 24 to 72 hours.

"Many of the Soldier's daily missions are maintaining the quality of life, security and the operations on camp. For such a large group to come in, it requires additional support and coordination during the daily missions," said Moore.

According to Master Sgt. Dennis Robinson, billeting noncommissioned officer for the BSB, advanced planning was imperative prior to the 4-2 SBCT rolling through Camp Virginia. Because of the large number of Soldiers, a specific living area was set aside, so other transient Soldiers living in temporary billeting would not be adversely affected.

Throughout their deployment, the BSB has tackled multiple projects, some of them as large as the 4-2 SBCT retrograde mission coming to Camp Virginia. The majority of the Stryker Brigade went through Camp Virginia in just over three weeks. Even after those three weeks are over, the BSB will continue to accommodate Soldiers coming out of Iraq.

4-2 SBCT completes historic self-retrograde

*Story and Photos by Natalie Cole
1st Theater Sustainment Command
Public Affairs Office*

The Kuwait-Iraq border buzzed with media Aug. 16 – 19 as more than 2,000 infantry Soldiers convoyed out of Iraq against the backdrop of a pre-dawn desert. The 4th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division's departure from the seven-year war zone marked the Army's transition to stability operations.

The media cleared out shortly after the 4-2 SBCT

crossed the border. However, while the 4-2 SBCT's year-long mission in Iraq ended when they entered Kuwait, their hard work did not. In fact, Troops with the 4-2 SBCT have spent the last month working around the clock in Kuwait, preparing more than 300 Stryker vehicles for shipment back to the United States.

The 4-2 SBCT has made history as the first brigade since 2004 to complete a self-retrograde. Typically, units redeploying from Iraq turn their gear in on the ground and then fly home, a process which makes redeployment easier



and faster. However, with the push to get people and equipment out of Iraq in August, the 4-2 SBCT did the work themselves to free up manpower and resources.

After arriving in Kuwait, Soldiers began to work right away using the facilities and transportation capabilities managed by the 1st Theater Sustainment Command. First, the Soldiers drove their Strykers through the “four-corners”, a series of assembly-line style customs and cleaning stations set up especially for self-retrograde. Then, before clearing customs, the Soldiers had to clean a year’s worth of sand and debris out of their Strykers. In the final step of the self-retrograde, the Soldiers loaded the Strykers onto flatbed trucks for

one last convoy to the sea port, where the vehicles will sail back to the U.S. aboard a cargo ship in the coming weeks.

Because of the relentless daytime heat, the Soldiers did much of the heavy lifting and cleaning of the self-retrograde at night. However, some work had to be done in the heat of the day, and the Soldiers fought through the high temperatures to get their equipment ready to go. “It might be hard work. It’s a lot of sweat, but this is the end,” said 2nd Lt. Larry Pugh, a unit movement officer who helped load Strykers onto flat bed trucks.

The 4-2 SBCT has a special four-Soldier team of logistics Troops who have been splitting their time among Camp Arifjan, Camp Virginia and the ports to ensure everything and everyone gets home.

Warrant Officer Winston Browne, a mobility warrant officer with the 4-2 SBCT, is one of the team members. “It takes a lot of patience and ... drive to deploy and redeploy a unit,” he said. “Especially a Stryker Brigade because it’s so ... new to the Army arsenal. There are a lot of files that haven’t been created to match [our] specific needs such as the body armor for the Stryker.” As a result, movement officers have had to manually enter information about Strykers into the Army’s supply tracking system that accounts for equipment.

Browne agreed with Pugh that Soldiers have kept up the energy and flexibility needed for the self-retrograde by staying focused on the end reward. “They had a date on the wall, and it may have changed a time or two, but ... their drive was definitely getting home to their family,” Browne said.

Pfc. Joshua Allen Ewing, with the 4-2 SBCT, drove one of the Strykers across the border and took part in the self-retrograde in Kuwait. The 21-year-old cavalry scout said his focus during the convoy was to “get here as safely, as quickly as possible.” When asked what part of the support for the self-retrograde surprised him

the most, Ewing said “The civilians. When we got here, they made the first set of the four corners go amazingly quick. It was a couple hours, and we were told it might be a couple of days,” he said.

Spc. Clifton Daigle, from Bogalusa, La., is a Chemical Biological Radiological Nuclear specialist who also rolled into Kuwait with the 4-2 SBCT. He said the size of the self-retrograde operation was impressive. “I didn’t think it’d be this large of a scale. From the second we rolled in, there have been people running around constantly. I don’t think I’ve seen the same person twice,” said Daigle. “Everything we’ve needed, we’ve definitely got and there have been no troubles.”

For Soldiers on the ground, the self-retrograde required driving, cleaning, lifting and loading. Browne said Soldiers’ efforts are now a part of the brigade’s history. “For them to take part in this and how they feel about it ... I’m 100 percent sure that they’re filled with pride as far as getting the mission accomplished and getting home,” he said.

Sgt. 1st Class Jaritta Morgan, from Atlanta, is the noncommissioned officer in charge of the 4-2 SBCT’s supplies and movement. She is also part of the four-Soldier team working with the 1st TSC and units in Kuwait. She said as the days have gone by, she has started to feel the significance of her role in the 4-2 SBCT self-retrograde and the brigade’s publicized departure from Iraq. “The overwhelming feeling was going online and seeing the pictures of the guys crossing the border,” she said, adding that she recognized the faces of Soldiers she has worked with while deployed. “You get a little welled up inside.”

Browne said he felt the self-retrograde was a once-in-a-lifetime undertaking. “To do this was a unique experience. I will never have an opportunity to do this again,” he said.

The last large group of 4-2 SBCT Troops flew out of the Life Support Area in Kuwait Sept. 9.



A convoy of heavy equipment transport vehicles moves Stryker vehicles to the Port of Shuaiba as part of Nickel II, the U.S. Army’s largest logistical operation since World War II.



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