

Support Operations in an ABCT



Maintenance and Mobility with the Hercules and LET

by MAJ John Paulson

Armored brigade combat teams require constant heavy lift support for sustainment and recovery operations. The division sustainment brigade's heavy and medium truck companies are designed to support the movement of 96 tracked vehicles in one series for onward movement in or out of theater. The Support Operations Office must prioritize the truck companies' support for two to three brigades, their deployments, and maintenance requirements. Heavy and medium truck companies cannot support smaller ad hoc missions at the battalion level. Commercial line haul (CLH) assets are contracted for smaller movements to support movement needs. These contracts can be costly and require two to four weeks of planning, depending on the distance, road system, and payload.

At the brigade level, the forward support company and headquarters and headquarters company in each battalion have organic assets that, if trained and planned properly, readily address support requirements within the brigade while easing the burden on division assets. In 4-10 CAV, 3rd ABCT, 4 ID, the Cavalry Squadron realized lessons learned during its training cycle and rotation to Poland in support of Operation European Assure, Deter and Reinforce 2024. Utilizing its organic M88A3s and Light Equipment

Transporter (LET), the squadron completed two unique mission sets moving containerized equipment and tracked vehicles without external support.

Maintenance planning estimates must retain options and address shortfalls.¹ During the squadron's 24-02 training rotation at the National Training Center (NTC), the squadron was spread across all three corridors simultaneously. The squadron identified risk in its operations outpacing its sustainment plan, with three of six M88A3s non-mission capable. The Iron Brigade coordinated fourteen Heavy Equipment Transporter (HET) collection

points to keep squadron recovery assets forward while using brigade-resourced HETs for larger movements.

With several light track deadlines, the squadron still faced a resource shortfall in moving the light track fleet from the point of recovery to the unit maintenance collection point. Given the tow capacity and gross weight of the M984, the squadron prioritized wheeled Wrecker support to recover M113 and M1068 variants. This enabled priority of M88A3 support to the M1A2 and M2A3 fleets. A heavy reliance on the M88A3 continued through NTC and into the United States

Figure 1. A U.S. Army Light Equipment Transport Vehicle assigned to 1st Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division, pulls a D7R Dozer during Marne Focus at Fort Stewart, Georgia, April 7, 2024. (U.S. Army photo by PFC Santiago Lepper)



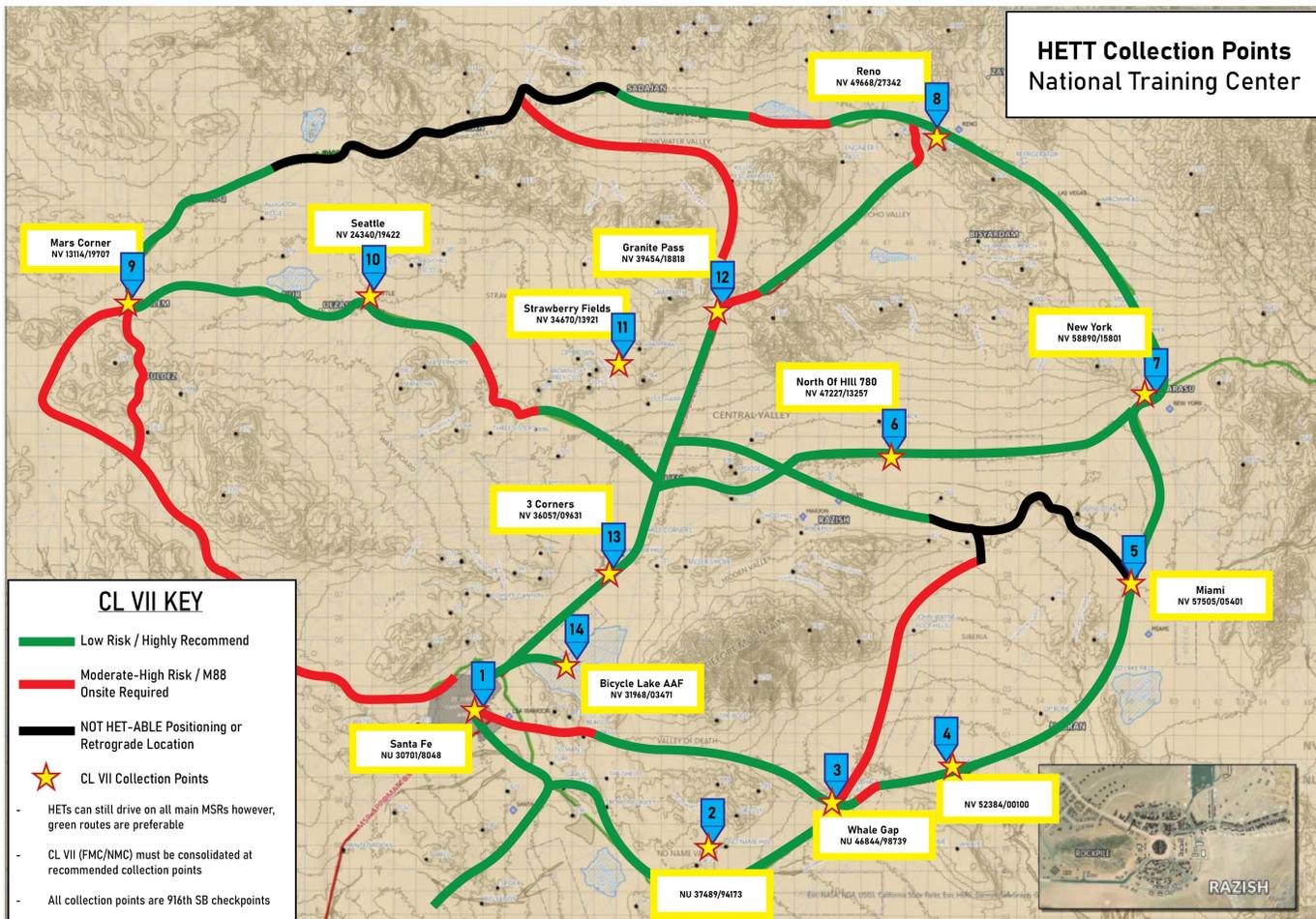


Figure 2: Recovery Concept for NTC 24-02 (U.S. Army graphic)

European Command (USEUCOM) deployment.

In March 2024, 4-10 CAV deployed to Logistics Support Area (LSA) South, Poland, with a concrete slab motorpool near the Mielno Range Complex. This motorpool did not provide any overhead cover or lift, and the squadron relied on organic lift assets between forward repair systems (FRS), M88A3s, and its Heavy Expanded Mobility Tactical Trucks (HEMTT) with a crane for light tracks and decks. While this left a major reliance on the M88A3 for services and unscheduled repairs, the maintainers received training opportunities to improve their competency in using platform-based hoists. In a unique case, the squadron received a short-notice task to support containerized equipment loading onto LETs. The problem set entailed four fully loaded 20-foot containers near LSA South set for transport the next day. Due to the distance and maintenance issues, a 30k forklift was not feasible to complete the task. The container weights

exceeded the 23,283 lbs. limit for the Enhanced Container Handling Unit (E-CHU), but were well within the M88A3's 64,000lbs 'pick and carry' capacity (Figure 3).

The squadron completed the mission with zero deficiencies through its H9, H8, and hazardous materials (HAZMAT) certified support and recovery team and 88Ms. Proper knowledge of rigging and pre-equipment inspections ensured a safe and controlled mission for personnel and equipment.²

During redeployment from USEUCOM, 4-10 CAV controlled the port node in Bremerhaven, Germany, from October to January. Maintenance was vital to support the fleet, given the unique redeployment schedule over five vessels and the freezing weather. Port authorities denied 'heavy maintenance' or repairs involving petroleum, lubricants, and oil. The squadron procured a maintenance pad at LSA Garlstedt with the assistance of the German Army, 21st Theater Sustainment Command (21

TSC), and 1 CD. The Port of Bremerhaven is 37 minutes or 24 miles from LSA Garlstedt on city roads and the autobahn. During initial planning, 21 TSC sourced CLH trucks to move eight tracked vehicles. This planning required weeks to coordinate with German transportation authorities to confirm routes and deconflict local construction and traffic. Over the four months at port, more tracked vehicles required evacuation to LSA Garlstedt for heavy maintenance. The squadron could not predict or aggregate all movement requests to synchronize the movement and maintenance plans. The staff and Master Driver found a practical solution to reduce cost and time through the brigade's organic LETs.

An additional six light tracks required transportation to LSA Garlstedt for heavy maintenance. Using brigade organic capabilities reduced financial and timing demands on the unit. The staff coordinated monthly March Credits through 21 TSC for an approved



Figure 3: M88A3 loading a container onto a trailer. Note the safety guide cables on the lower corners. (Photo by author)



Figure 4: A 91H chains an M1068 to a LET. (Photo by author)

window for the LET to move vehicles to and from the port. Using organic equipment over CLH provided more control over planned maintenance as well as a cost savings. The squadron used M88A3s to lift and load light tracks onto the LETs, further reducing demands on external assets. Boasting M88A3's usefulness even more, mechanics sustained the LET movements through M88A3's fuel transfer tools.

When planning maintenance and movements, it is vital to understand the logistical enterprise. Understanding your unit's capabilities and competencies, the environment, and echelons above brigade will identify

limitations early on. Armored brigade combat teams must accurately address planning estimates to implement a sustainment plan anticipating resource shortfall. Staff, forward support companies, and the brigade support battalion must create a flexible plan to offer the commander options and ensure mission success. From the lessons learned over the past two years, mechanics and sustainers must be properly trained on their equipment. Building monthly and quarterly training plans focused on advanced operator training will build trust and competency in organic capabilities. Emphasizing a Master Driver program that

challenges and trains operators to meet the demands of future missions will enhance a unit's effectiveness.

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Notes

1 Department of the Army. (01 April 2025). Ground Equipment Battle Damage Assessment, Repair, and Recovery (ATP 4-31). https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/ARN43423-ATP_4-31-000-WEB-1.pdf.

2 Ibid.

