

LEGITI MIZING AMMUNITION

LOGISTICS IN INDO-PACIFIC COMPETITION

■ *By Chief Warrant Officer 4 Zachary J. Keough*

In an environment composed mostly of air and sea, Army missions remain integral parts of joint and multidomain operations, and unified action, in the Indo-Pacific. Maintaining free and open access to the maritime domain in the Indo-Pacific remains a cornerstone of U.S. strategy and is paramount to its national security. U.S. Army Pacific remains committed to this strategy by providing ground forces to support security cooperation activities. These efforts align with the Army's overarching objectives in the regionally aligned readiness and modernization model designed for competition while posturing for crisis response and to prevail in conflict should the need arise.

Army, joint, and multinational cooperation activities in the Indo-Pacific continue to broaden. However, the current posture of ammunition logistics support in the theater will present challenges in the event of an exigency. Traditional practices of ammunition support to Army forces (ARFOR) participating in security cooperation activities are cumbersome and limit the commander's deterrence and sustainment options. These shortfalls present opportunities for U.S. Army Pacific to shape its theater munitions enterprise and to leverage U.S. Army Forces Command units to meet the dynamic challenges posed by a pacing threat.

Mobilizing Expeditionary Ammunition Support

Security cooperation activities are not a new concept for U.S. Army

Pacific. In recent years, Army-sanctioned security cooperation activities occurred under the moniker of Operation Pathways. In this period, ARFOR became responsible for sourcing ammunition from either home station or Japan and the onward movement to the point of need. Before the advent of Operation Pathways, the former 83rd Ordnance Battalion in Japan delivered ammunition to the warfighter in a limited capacity. After the battalion's deactivation in 2013, the responsibility shifted to ARFOR to source ammunition accordingly. These practices overwhelmed ARFOR with logistical challenges and stultified the commander's freedom of action and prolonged endurance.

In 2024, the integration of modular ordnance (ammunition) teams will relieve ARFOR of these responsibilities and permit maneuver and fires units to focus on key security and training objectives with partners and allies. These small teams will establish an expeditionary ammunition supply point (ASP) and employ ammunition logistics information systems and emergent technologies to aid their efforts to support the force. They are also responsible for the reception and staging of ammunition at the point of need. After concluding the mission, the supported forces will turn in unused ammunition and associated materials to the ASP, which will prepare the assets for retrograde. This capability affords commanders convenient sourcing at the point of employment and

increased flexibility in providing ammunition logistics support.

Defining a S'Pacific Purpose in Competition

Security cooperation activities in the Indo-Pacific theater provide modular ordnance (ammunition) companies with opportunities to rehearse their craft, understand foreign environments, establish partner relationships, and maintain operational readiness. Since the drawdown of U.S. forces in support of counterinsurgency operations, modular ordnance (ammunition) companies witnessed fewer opportunities to provide support to the warfighter in foreign environments.

In recent years, the European theater established requirements for these specially trained units to support security cooperation activities. Unfortunately, the protracted missions in the European theater limit the amount and frequency of opportunities for modular ordnance (ammunition) units to hone their craft in support of real-world missions abroad. The quantity, duration, and frequency of missions in the Indo-Pacific provide increased opportunities to assign multiple teams from different modular ordnance (ammunition) companies, including the Army Reserve and National Guard. The shorter increments of supporting security cooperation activities in the region do not devalue these opportunities. The ammunition professionals who compose these small teams will support fast-paced

operations in a foreign environment while maintaining strict accountability of Army ammunition, missiles, and explosives throughout the mission.

Assured Sustainment and Talent Development

The integration of modular ordnance (ammunition) teams into security cooperation activities west of the International Date Line creates efficiencies in ammunition support, beginning at the source of origin. The gradual growth in security cooperation activities in the Indo-Pacific is stressing the workload of the supporting ammunition supply activities in Japan and warrants a corresponding increase in the workforce. The restationing of the 205th Ordnance Platoon to Japan provides assurance and insurance in sustainment. The platoon enables the supporting agency to seamlessly transition its support in the event of crises or armed conflict with minimal to no disruption in the volume of munitions throughput. Integrating the 205th Ordnance Platoon into the Japan support activities enables the supporting commander to surge capabilities when and where needed across the region.

Until now, ammunition Soldiers have had few opportunities to hone their craft on a consistent basis; the integration of the platoon into an ammunition supply activity will provide them with more such opportunities. Talent development enhances job satisfaction and retention while providing

opportunities to shape future leaders in the field. This restationing effort provides a significant return on investment for the theater Army ammunition enterprise and the Army as a whole.

Adding Value

Recently, U.S. Army Pacific established a requirement for an ammunition warrant officer to perform functions as an observer coach/trainer (OC/T) for the Army's newest combined training center, the Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center (JPMRC). The assignment of the ammunition warrant officer to the 196th Infantry Brigade with the duty title of OC/T is the first among maneuver combat training centers. The OC/T is a seasoned professional who collects and communicates observations for the purpose of informing doctrine, collective mission essential tasks, and individual critical tasks managed in the institutional domain. The OC/T will perform these functions for JPMRC.

The titular nature of JPMRC implies another venue for security cooperation efforts but with the implementation of a live, virtual, and constructive (LVC) scenario. In select JPMRC rotations, the OC/T will have the opportunity to observe the practices of supply chain and distribution management of ammunition from the point of need to the point of employment. The observations collected and presented by the OC/T will enable the training audience to see themselves perform in stressful

environments, encouraging ingenuity and resourcefulness. Additionally, these events provide an opportunity for seasoned professionals to coach and mentor junior leaders in environments in which they will expect to operate in the conditions of an exigency. The value of the OC/T cannot be overstated.

Experimenting with Emergent and Existing Capabilities

The Indo-Pacific is the preferred theater for experimentation. In concert with U.S. Army Futures Command, the teams will employ new automated systems as a proof of concept for the Set and Sustain the Theater for Ammunition initiative. Among these emergent capabilities are the Expeditionary Ammunition Site Planning Software and the Configured Load Planning Engine. These two systems comprise a suite of artificial intelligence-enabled capabilities designed to optimize ammunition management, planning, and distribution.

The modular ordnance (ammunition) teams will operationalize these capabilities in contested logistics environments to provide the Futures and Concepts Center with valuable feedback for refinement. In the future, these teams will operationalize other emergent capabilities with the intent to provide visibility of assets and operations at echelon through a virtual common operating picture. Feedback from these teams will inform the product engineers for improvement but will also inform

the training developers for inclusion in the institutional curriculum.

Making the Most of an Opportunity

Army units require valuable training before any mission. The prioritization for skill-specific training for sustainers should correspond to the same priority afforded to the warfighter in anticipation of a real-world mission. Modular ordnance (ammunition) units are no exception but have little opportunity in garrison to prepare. The Joint Munitions Command (JMC) provides valuable training opportunities in concert with the organic industry base at multiple locations to help sharpen this perishable skill set. JMC refers to this training opportunity as modular ordnance-specific training.

This training is vital for modular ordnance (ammunition) units in preparation for deployment to operations in Central and Southwest Asia. With modular ordnance (ammunition) units supporting security cooperation activities in multiple theaters, organizational commanders should ensure their ammunition professionals obtain proficiency in training before arriving in theater. Otherwise, the teams are forced to learn in stride, compounding the stress already incurred by the nature of the mission, which lends itself to potential adverse effects. Depriving these modular ordnance (ammunition) teams of the opportunity to obtain essential, skill-specific training ahead of a real-world mission is a disservice to the

force and hinders the team's ability to provide responsive, time-sensitive support. These teams must arrive in theater trained and prepared.

Conclusion

The U.S. Army Pacific theater munitions enterprise is setting a precedent for other sustainment-posturing initiatives to position forward capabilities west of the International Date Line. U.S. Army Pacific will present multiple venues for ammunition professionals to obtain proficiency in their craft while providing real-world support in competition. Security cooperation activities in the Indo-Pacific provide opportunities for modular ordnance (ammunition) units to support the Army, joint, and multinational forces in a manner congruent with operations and contingency plans. Meanwhile, U.S. Army Pacific is posturing its ammunition logistics support formation forward to surge capabilities at key joint theater distribution centers to meet the increasing demand for ammunition throughput in the region.

Additionally, the presence of an ammunition warrant officer performing OC/T functions during select JPMRC rotations ensures that junior leaders receive the coaching and mentorship presented in an LVC scenario. The observations collected and shared by the OC/T will help inform student curriculum and doctrinal precepts as they pertain to the uniquely vast and varied terrain of the archipelagos that constitute the theater. Concurrently, the ammunition professionals will have

the opportunity to inform the U.S. Army Futures Command with vital feedback regarding its emergent automation.

Finally, training begets preparedness. Organizational commanders should prioritize formal pre-deployment training to ensure ammunition professionals are successful in performing ammunition logistics functions and mission-essential tasks in support of U.S. Army Pacific's theater security cooperation program.

Chief Warrant Officer 4 Zachary J. Keough is the senior Army ammunition warrant officer in the Indo-Pacific assigned to the U.S. Army Pacific G-4. He has more than 29 years of logistics experience specializing in ammunition logistics planning and operations. He holds a Master of Business Administration from the University of Phoenix. He is a graduate of Warrant Officer Senior Service Education, the Security Cooperation Management Course, and the Theater Sustainment Planners Course.