



Staying Ahead of Change

By Captain Stephen T. Peterson

Every engineer battalion in the Active Army will redeploy, restation, or restructure (R3) this year. However, the 94th Engineer Battalion (Combat) (Heavy) completed all three of these transforming actions in the same calendar year. The 94th redeployed from Mosul, Iraq, in January 2006, and restationed from Vilseck, Germany, to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, in June 2006. Throughout the entire change, they restructured from a three-company engineer battalion (combat) (heavy) to a modular five-company construction effects battalion. This combined effect is best visualized by Figure 1, BG Todd Semonite's "Perfect Storm" slide.

Staffing and decisions for these three separate actions go through different commands and agencies without systemic coordination at the Army level. Decisions made through one process have effects on the other two; thus, changes are inevitable.

Keys to Staying Ahead of R3

Change is not the enemy or a threat; lack of proactive planning and execution is! Dynamic changes create dynamic fusion opportunities and continuity challenges. Just as we must stay one step ahead of the threat in Iraq and Afghanistan, leaders must proactively plan and execute to stay one step ahead of change. As the 94th modularized, it learned the value of staying one step ahead of change.

Proactive Planning

The battalion conducted an effective and deliberate military decision-making process (MDMP) for redeployment that clearly integrated battalion staff and company operations. However, the battalion did not use the same level of planning for restationing or restructuring. Actions in one phase had

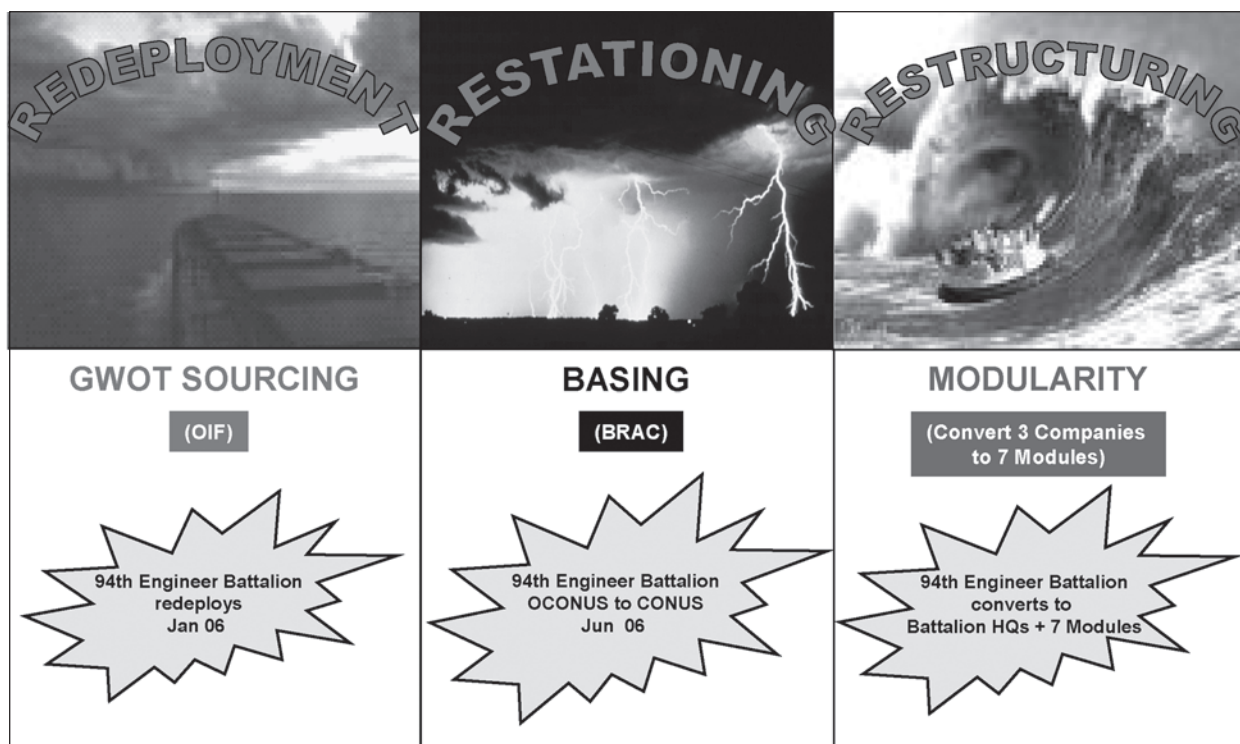


Figure 1

effects on the others. One operation order must address R3 as three separate lines of operation that are executed concurrently—a higher-level MDMP and planning process. The sheer planning requirement outweighed the experience and capabilities at the battalion level.

The greatest hindrance to a deliberate MDMP for restationing was the inability at the battalion level to change key assumptions to facts. Key assumptions dictate multiple branch plans. The best example of a key assumption is “unit move” versus “cadre move.” The Department of the Army had to decide if it would be a unit move (everyone goes with the unit to Fort Leonard Wood) or cadre move (10 percent of the battalion moves to Fort Leonard Wood and 90 percent changes duty station based on the Army’s needs). The final decision was made a month before the move, with the Army compromising between the two.

Instead of restationing with a coordinated plan, the move was executed from daily audibles. The battalion’s main focus was clearing Vilseck, so more focus was needed on planning and coordinating the move to Fort Leonard Wood. The advanced echelon (ADVON) must establish a substantial presence at least six months prior to better assist in the planning of the move.

Restructuring was an underlying line of operation that started in Iraq and finished with fielding new equipment to the battalion. The end state was clearly defined in the approved modular modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE). However, the process of getting from the old MTOE to the new one was cumbersome, complicated, and covered in supply transactions. The 94th went from a headquarters support company and two line companies to a headquarters and headquarters company, a field service company, a vertical company (77th Engineer Company), two horizontal companies (103d Engineer Company and 232d Engineer Company), a concrete detachment (83d Concrete Team), and a survey and design team (156th Survey Team) and added the Fort Leonard Wood firefighter detachment (562d Firefighter Detachment) in October 2006. The number of lateral transfers of personnel and equipment was monumental. Although the battalion property book office effectively spaced the requirements over 16 months, it was supply-centric and not directly synchronized with other staff sections or battalion lines of operation. Never delay a supply or restructuring action if it can be done immediately.

Fusion

Through early identification of the “perfect storm” condition for the 94th and the creation of the United States Army Engineer School Fusion Cell, the Engineer Branch maximized opportunities and found funds for the tremendous cost of R3. Military and community leaders on both sides of the ocean took progressive action to ensure the success of the 94th Engineer Battalion upon restationing. The battalion received a warm welcome from both the military community of Fort Leonard Wood and the surrounding areas.

Based on proactive and forward-thinking leadership, the battalion set conditions for success at Fort Leonard Wood in 2006 while still deployed in 2005.

- Companies began lateral transfers of equipment to the new modular MTOE based on directives from the property book office.
- The battalion commander requested and received approval from the United States Central Command, the United States European Command, and the United States Forces Command to ship equipment straight from Iraq to Fort Leonard Wood.
- They carefully designated the cadre of leadership—an invaluable officer or noncommissioned officer in each staff section—that would take the battalion through the entire process, ensuring continuity.

The battalion command sergeant major convened a committee, the post redeployment effects committee for incident suppression and elimination (PRECISE), that consisted of first sergeants and junior enlisted who developed an effective action plan for the battalion’s move from Iraq to Germany. The priority of effort for restationing revolved around four mission-essential tasks: *welcome*, *receive*, *integrate*, and *acclimate* every Soldier and family member to the new duty station. Each is a clear and achievable task.

Family Readiness Groups

The battalion Family Readiness Group (FRG) steering committee and the company FRGs were critical to continuity during this turbulent period for family members. Accurate and timely information flow greatly reduced the stress and uncertainty of R3. The active and responsive chains of concern and contact lists worked well during redeployment and restationing. FRGs were the glue of continuity during the unit move, quickly establishing a sense of community. The battalion hosted a consolidated FRG meeting in the first three months, but the companies started their own meetings in the fourth month. Transferring available FRG funds at the company and battalion levels provided resources to host events and welcome families to Fort Leonard Wood.

The significant reduction in pay from deployment to an outside the continental United States (OCONUS) assignment to a continental United States (CONUS) assignment created stress for the families. Also, OCONUS to CONUS moving expenses averaged twice as much as the dislocation allowance (DLA). Leaders and FRGs should facilitate financial planning and budgeting to reduce financial stress and other stresses inherent with a move.

Personnel

By far, the most stressful factor in the move for leaders, Soldiers, and family members was the late order process. Delayed orders meant unnecessary stress on the Soldier, family members, and the Vilseck community (Stryker Brigade inbound simultaneously). Once at Fort Leonard Wood, Soldiers and

family members were without their privately-owned vehicles and household goods for months.

The S-1 is a critical area for transitioning through restationing effectively. Evaluations, awards, legal actions, and orders affect all battalion members, whether leaving the unit or moving with the unit. Upon restationing, the S-1 must quickly establish inprocessing procedures, new unit identification codes, and new office symbols.

Communications

Shoot, move, and communicate! These are always the three critical tasks to every combat operation. R3 is all about moving and communicating. Similar to deployments, site surveys and advance parties are essential. An early and thorough site survey sets the conditions for everything that follows. Establish an ADVON early (180 days prior) with adequate personnel (at least one noncommissioned officer per company and staff section), and ramp-up as the time gets closer. Conduct weekly video teleconferences between the ADVON and the main body. A communication breakdown resulted in the battalion loading six military-owned demountable containers (MILVANs) of furniture that was covered by a furniture contract at Fort Leonard Wood.

At company level, the process was extremely challenging for property and supply accountability. Mass consolidation of primary hand receipt holders before leaving Iraq was normal. For example, headquarters and headquarters company went from 24 primary hand receipt holders to 9 (designated Fort Leonard Wood cadre). Companies left almost 75 percent of their rolling stock in Iraq and conducted large-scale lateral transfers between companies. Lastly, the transition between unit level logistics system, S-4 module (ULLS-S4) and property book unit supply enhanced (PBUSE) adds another layer of property accountability.

R3 Costs

The 94th Engineer Battalion is not the first unit nor will it be the last to conduct R3 efforts simultaneously. The 94th will not be deployable for a while. The cost, monetary and time, of reestablishing all systems (operations, supply, motor pool, arms room, driver training, standing operating procedures, additional duties, and policy letters) is staggering—especially at reduced strength. Although Fort Leonard Wood and engineer leaders did their best to support the restationing on short notice, the battalion still operates out of temporary barracks, motor pools, arms rooms, and

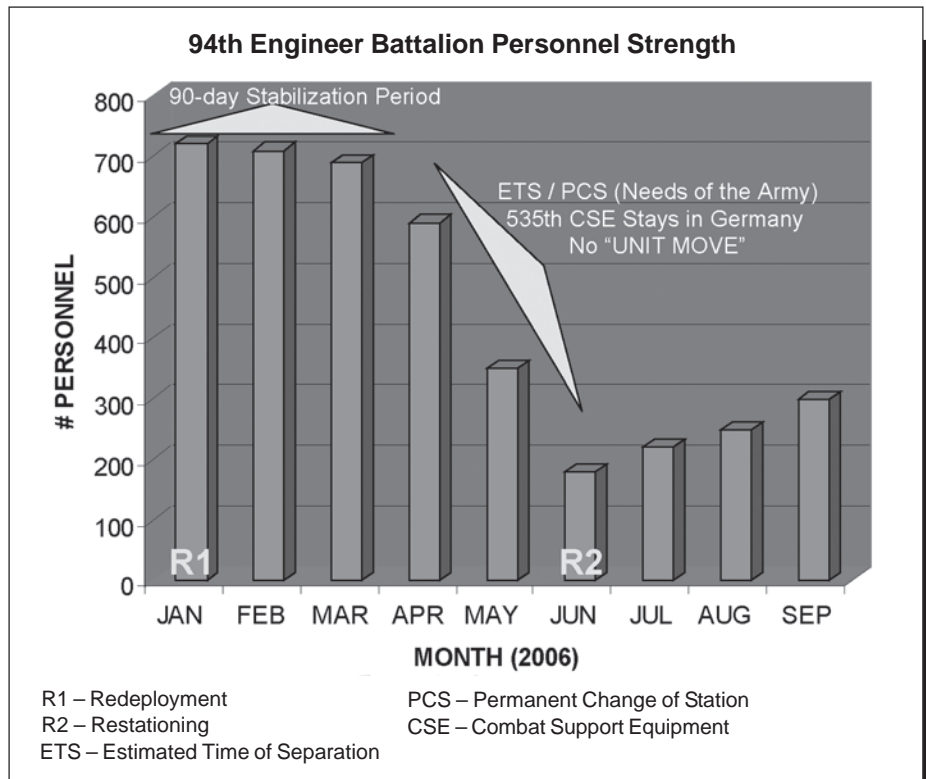


Figure 2

company headquarters. Dealing with new facilities and their shortages is a massive time and effort requirement for field grade officers and Soldiers alike. The process requires tactical patience. Each company has completed at least three 100 percent inventories in the last year, in addition to almost a 100 percent turnover of equipment in lateral transfers. Supply is the main effort and involves almost 30 percent of the time.

With the personnel changeover rate (see Figure 2), administrative systems must be solid. Leaders must factor and fight the extraordinary cost of untimely evaluations, late awards, inadequate sponsorships, delayed promotion boards and noncommissioned officer education system (NCOES) opportunities, and incorrect enlisted record briefs (ERBs). Most importantly, the stress and turbulence experienced is not directly measurable, but quite evident.

Conclusion

Leaders and Soldiers must embrace and plan for change. Leaders must maintain a positive attitude about change and highlight the advantages while mitigating the negative aspects. Our commander's three critical watch words successfully guided us through R3: *deliberate, disciplined, and focused.*

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