

LEVERAGING THE DEPLOYABLE COMMAND POST

By Major Jon Brierton

In 2008, engineer units in the United States Army Reserve completed transformation to a fully modular force. Nearly all the engineer units struggled with turning in old equipment and reorganizing their formations to the new modular structure. With the new modular organization finalized, the question arose: Do engineer modularity and the deployable command post (DCP) concept and structure work in the Army Reserve? The old models of legacy formations and operations worked for a legacy force, but will they work for a modular force, and how do we function day to day with DCPs?

Making the Concept Work

This article describes how the 463d Engineer Battalion makes modularity and the DCP concept work in the Army Reserve. The battalion has been able to leverage the concepts of modularity through a mix of current doctrinal and legacy staff functionality. The derived command post configurations enabled the staff to effectively provide command and control across the battalion's sphere of influence.

As the new operations (S-3) officer of the 463d, which was newly reorganized as a modular engineer battalion, I was uncertain how the modular staff was supposed to function. I sought guidance from the battalion commander on his intent and vision for the command. Furthermore, I consulted with my peers and other field grade engineer officers across the Army Reserve to see what other units were doing, what techniques were being used, and what issues and challenges they were dealing with. My goal was to seek out and leverage the best tactics, techniques, and procedures rapidly in order to develop a plan that would meet the battalion commander's intent of maximizing training time for operations in preparation for a potential deployment the following year.

Doctrinal Foundation

The DCP construct dates back to 2003 as a concept in the Objective Force Initiatives for higher-echelon headquarters staffs configuring for contingency operations. Today, we see engineer brigades and higher commands operating DCPs in Iraq and Afghanistan. The two DCPs operate on a cyclic rotation, with DCP-1 planning and executing a given operation while DCP-2 is planning the next operation or standing down for resupply/recovery. The DCP concept provides flexibility and

continuous battle command for full spectrum operations.¹ Both DCPs can perform independent operations in noncontiguous areas of operations.² According to the table of organization and equipment (TO&E) unit reference book published by the United States Army Maneuver Support Center (now the United States Army Maneuver Support Center of Excellence [MSCoE]), the doctrinal purpose of the DCP for a modular engineer battalion is to exercise battle command over dispersed locations or to augment the brigade troops battalion of maneuver brigade combat teams.³ The reference also provides the layout for each of the two DCPs and descriptions of personnel and equipment authorizations.

Operational Environment

In general terms, Army Reserve units are either preparing for or executing battle assemblies or extended combat training operations or conducting missions in an area of responsibility to support contingency operations. In today's era of persistent conflict, many Army Reserve units do all of the above simultaneously. Further, as a result of numerous deployments to support contingency operations and many other external factors, unit personnel strength is declining and more Soldiers are nondeployable. The effects include undermanned staffs with essential or primary positions filled by lower grade or less-experienced personnel. This is not necessarily a bad thing, because it provides opportunities for junior Soldiers to step up and perform at the next level, ultimately improving our junior leader core leadership attributes. However, all these factors make planning and executing operations even more difficult. Combine these factors with an aggressive Army Force Generation "available" year training plan developed in preparation for a deployment, and the outcome is a battalion leadership triad faced with a complex synchronization and resource challenge.

Concept Challenges

While reflecting on the DCP doctrine, consulting with peers, and observing higher headquarters trying to operate daily under the DCP construct, it became apparent during battle assembly/home station periods that the DCP concept inhibits staff cohesion. Further, it degrades unity of effort by promoting stovepiping and additional battle rhythm requirements. One reason it did not work was that the staff members who transformed the unit—and had a better understanding of how to

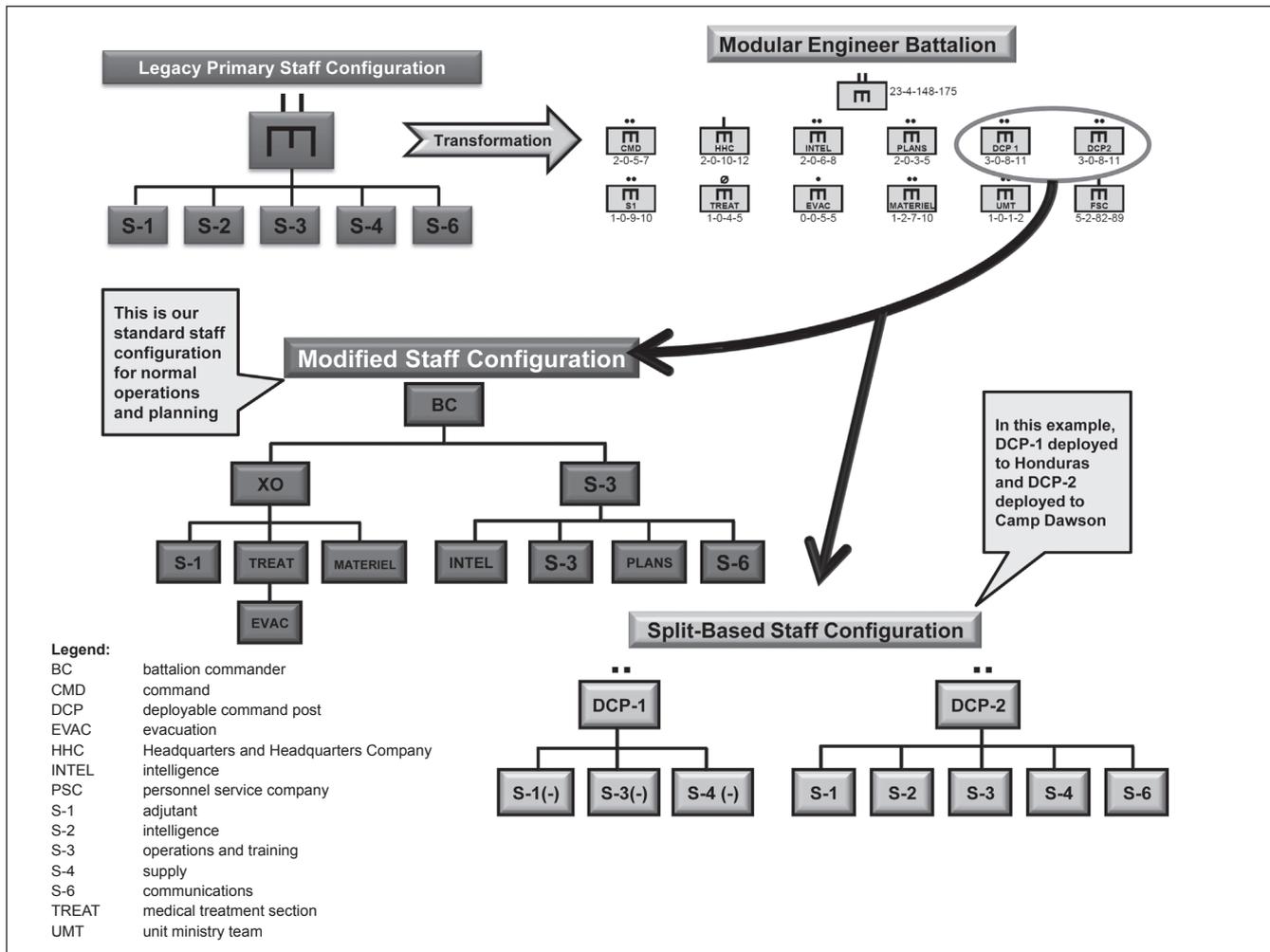


Figure 1

operate under the modular concepts—were gone, due to promotions and other transfers. The new staff members did not fully grasp the new concepts and complexities of operating under the DCP construct. Another reason was that there were not enough Soldiers assigned, and the battalion could not afford to have the staff split and going in two separate directions. Staffs operate better under a legacy construct and mentality because it is familiar and has proven to work efficiently. However, when the battalion transitions from a training focus to an operational focus conducting split-based or decentralized operations, the DCP concept works because it provides flexibility and effective command and control.

Concept Incorporation

As the start of the new training year approached, the battalion staff developed an aggressive plan to leverage training events in order to set conditions for a potential deployment while continually striving to improve readiness. The MSCoE unit reference book provides a doctrinal DCP organizational template that is in line with the unit manning roster. However, this configuration does not always fit every situation. The first order of

business was to develop DCP structures that would best fit the battalion's situation and training plan for both normal and split-based operations (Figure 1). For normal operational periods, the staff was configured in legacy functional roles with the executive officer (XO) in charge of the adjutant and supply staff primary officers, and the S-3 officer was in charge of the intelligence, communications, and S-3 section (which included plans). This staff configuration would not work for split-based operations, because not all staff functions reside under one of the battalion field grade officers. Many other situations and external influences required alterations to the standard DCP structure as well. For instance, according to doctrine, the DCP-1 commander is the battalion XO. However, in this instance, the XO was not available for the mission, so the battalion commander led DCP-1 and the S-3 officer led DCP-2.

One of the key attributes of modularity is tailorable “plug-and-play” functionality. The DCP offers the same tailorable flexibility. The DCP-1 staff was formulated and manned with approximately 14 personnel to achieve command and control of engineer forces conducting construction operations to support Operation Beyond the Horizons in Honduras. Logisticians who focused their efforts on providing operational and

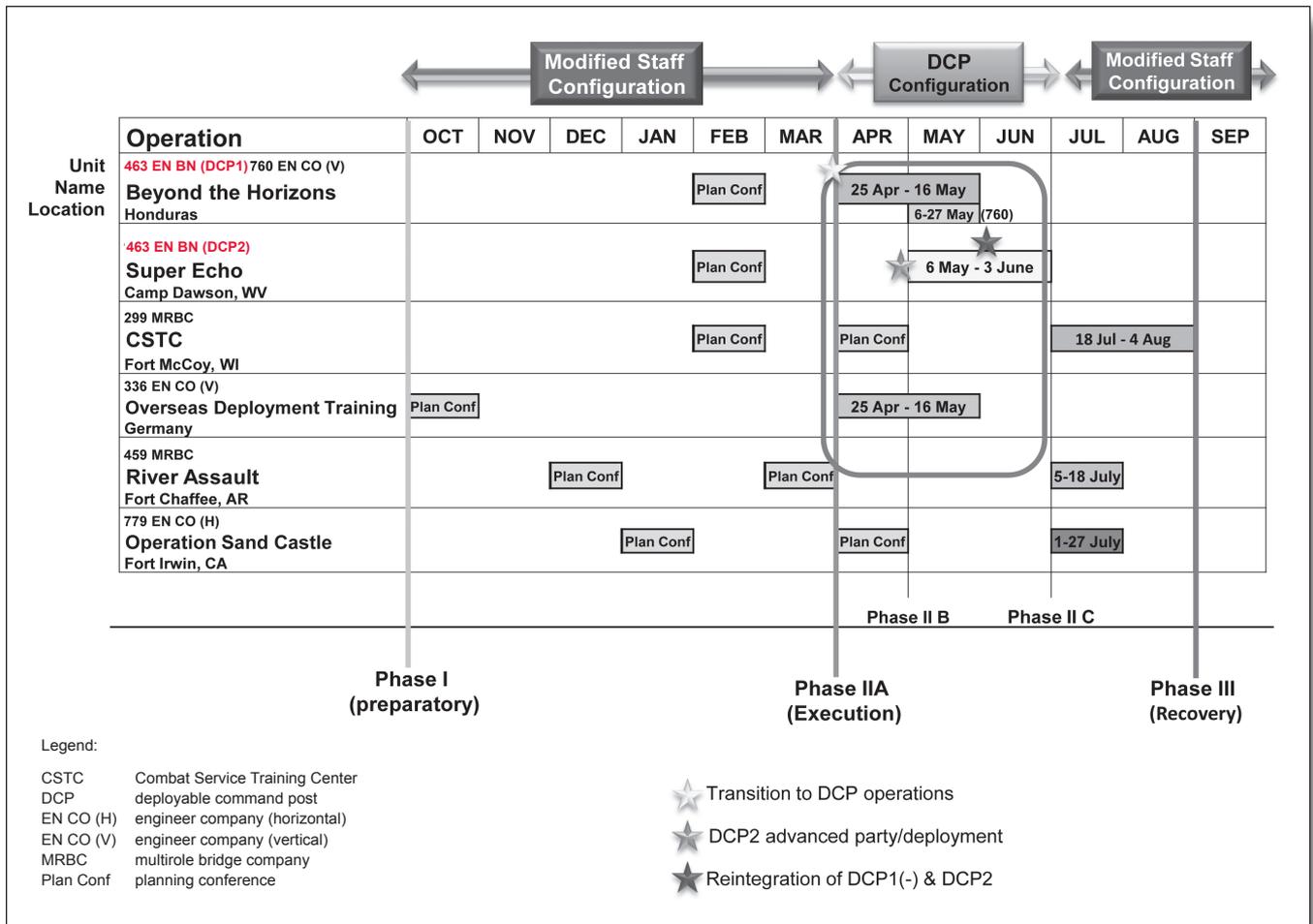


Figure 2

engineer logistic support to the Beyond the Horizons rotational task force comprised the majority of the DCP-1 staff. To manage expectations and provide some predictability, the battalion developed a phased approach to meeting training goals, fulfilling operational requirements, and meeting the commander's intent (Figure 2).

Phase I. During this phase, the plan established expectations and provided task and purpose for the battalion and all of the subordinate units by phase. The battalion operated along legacy functional staff lines and maintained the normal battle rhythm.

Phase II. As we approached Phase II, battle rhythm requirements increased, and we transitioned into DCP staff configurations.

- During Phase II-A, the battalion commander and his DCP-1 staff deployed to Honduras to support Operation Beyond the Horizons, while I led DCP-2, consisting of the remainder of the staff, in Wheeling, West Virginia. DCP-2 was responsible for maintaining situational awareness and battle tracking of DCP-1 in Honduras and the 336th Engineer Company in Germany. DCP-2 was also setting conditions for subordinate unit extended combat training while conducting day-to-day operations and preparing for our deployment to Camp

Dawson, West Virginia, to support Operation Super Echo, the 412th Theater Engineer Command's course to combine military occupational specialty (MOS) 21J, vertical construction operator, with MOS 21E, horizontal construction operator.

- During Phase II-B, DCP-2 deployed to Camp Dawson and hosted Operation Super Echo while concurrently providing tactically focused extended combat training for headquarters and field service companies and maintaining situational awareness and battle tracking across the battalion. Midway through Phase II-B, DCP-1 redeployed to the continental United States and joined DCP-2 at Camp Dawson. With both the command posts together at Camp Dawson under the battalion commander, the staff reassembled and resumed normal functionality and planned for future operations for the remainder of training year 2009 and the first quarter of training year 2010.

Lessons Learned

To meet the commander's intent and improve readiness across the battalion, the major points to make the DCP concept work are to—

- Alter the task organization to fit the situation in order to leverage flexibility during split-based or decentralized operations.
- Operate as a legacy functional staff during normal operational periods with the XO or DCP-1 commander overseeing the adjutant and supply staff sections, while the S-3 or DCP-2 commander oversees the intelligence, S-3, and communications staff sections.
- Synchronize staffs jointly between the XO at DCP-1 and the S-3 at DCP-2.
- Develop depth on the bench by empowering NCOs through cross-training in multiple staff section roles while inculcating the traits of agility and flexibility.
- Ensure staff situational awareness and understanding by maintaining a common operational picture and battle rhythm.

Ultimately, the DCP concept was designed to enable flexibility and provide continuous battle command. This does not necessarily mean that DCP-1 is the day shift and DCP-2 is the night shift or vice versa. However, they could function that way if the situation dictated.

Conclusion

The DCP construct, coupled with synchronized staff actions, enables the battalion to maintain unity of effort during split-based operations or deployments while retaining agility and flexibility. Although not the textbook example, the 463d Engineer Battalion was able to leverage the capabilities of the DCP concept and the junior staff to meet the commander's intent. Furthermore, through executing the lessons learned, the 463d improved readiness within the battalion and across the 412th Theater Engineer Command. 

"Hammer On, Drive It Home!"

Major Brierton is the executive officer of the 463d Engineer Battalion. He has served as the chief of operations for the 412th Theater Engineer Command, deployed to Iraq as the plans officer and battle captain for the 983d Engineer Battalion, and commanded a light equipment engineer company. He is a graduate of the United States Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and holds a master's in organizational management from the University of Phoenix.

Endnotes

¹Field Manual 3-34, *Engineer Operations*, April 2009, p. 2-9.

²United States Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Pamphlet 525-3-01, *United States Army Objective Force Battle Command (C4ISR) Concept*, 2003, p. 43.

³Maneuver Support Table of Organization and Equipment Reference Book, United States Army Maneuver Support Center of Excellence, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, April 2008, p. 9-22.