



FORGING THE

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STRIKE!

Screaming Eagles barge to JRTC Rotation 20-09

By **CHUCK CANNON**
Command information officer

ALEXANDRIA, La. — As the Joint Readiness Training Center prepares to put the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) through the crucible of JRTC Rotation 20-09, it's with the knowledge that not only will the training provided by the world-class OPFOR (Opposing Force) Geronimos and observer, controller/trainers prepare the Screaming Eagles for future combat, it also shows Forces Command the viability of moving an infantry brigade combat team to the nation's Southern ports via the United States' river system.

Add the economic impact of nearly 10,000 Soldiers coming to Central Louisiana, along with more than 2,000 pieces of equipment arriving by barge and off-loaded at the Central Louisiana Regional Port (CLRP) before conveying to the JRTC during the next two months for Rotations 20-09 and 20-10, and it's understandable the excitement shown by the area's political leaders.

Strategically deploying forces

Brig. Gen. Patrick D. Frank, commander, JRTC and Fort Polk, said lessons learned during JRTC rotations — such as moving equipment by barge — are important for the Army.

"Barge operations here at the Port of Alexandria are significant because they assist the Army in understanding how to strategically deploy our forces," Frank said. "The division (101st Abn Div) sending a brigade combat team from Fort Campbell (Kentucky), coming along the water-



Barge decks carrying equipment belonging to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) are lined up next to the Central Louisiana Regional Port in Alexandria, La., July 29 after their trip along U.S. waterways from Fort Campbell, Ky. The 2nd BCT, 101st Abn Div will participate in Rotation 20-09 at the Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk, La.

ways of the United States, allows the Army to see how we can move large formations to our Southern ports."

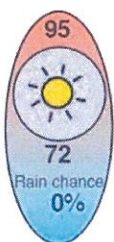
Frank said that's one of the important parts of deployability that are learned at JRTC.

"Whether we come by barge, rail, strategic air

or commercial line haul, all of those are different aspects of deploying formations that we learn every rotation at JRTC," he said. "That goes right back to the Army as far as how we would deploy

Please see **Barge**, page 6

Weekend weather



Friday



Saturday



Sunday

Inside the Guardian

- TF trains cadets 3
- Trail Improved 11
- Housing scams 5
- Job enjoyment 12
- Medal for sacrifice 9
- Back-to-school 14

Barge

Continued from page 1

large formation combat forces if required."

Cost effective

Another aspect of the barge operations Frank referenced was their cost effectiveness. To move a BCT from Fort Campbell, Kentucky via rail or truck would have cost about \$6 million, Frank said. By barge, the cost dropped to about \$3 million.

"At JRTC and Fort Polk we are always attempting in our operations and how we conduct rotations to ensure that we are as efficient as possible in spending taxpayers' dollars," he said.

"Coming by barge is one of those efficiency points. When we have a unit we can bring by barge, the 101st Airborne Division, that allows us to save Forces Command resources for additional training of other formations."

Frank spoke at the CLRP to a group of central Louisiana political and economic leaders Aug. 3. He said the reason for bringing them to the port was so they could see the impact it has on JRTC operations.

"We began this about two years ago with 101st and we had a lot of lessons learned from that first move," he said. "Those lessons were included in our dialogue points with the port management team, and we increased their capacity down here just by ongoing discussions with leaders here in Alexandria and across the region."

Frank said JRTC leadership told the port operations team that if certain enhancements were made at the port, the Army could move more of the brigade combat team by barge than what was being moved at the time.

"The city and the region got behind those initiatives and it's great to see them take place here," Frank said.

Port partnership

Terry Spruill, CLRP board president, said being able to utilize the port to its full potential is one of the goals of his organization.

"It's the mission of this port to find ways to provide positive economic impact to this region, and having the military come in is one way to do that," he said.

Spruill said the port board took to heart JRTC's recommendations on improvements.

"We've expanded the lower dock, we've put a road in over the levee for heavier equipment to traverse, and we created a seven-acre staging area so vehicles have a place to line up before beginning their convoys to JRTC," he said. "By partnering with the military, we were able to offset those costs."

Spruill said that for the first time in the port's existence there will be back-to-back rotations at JRTC coming to the area via barge.

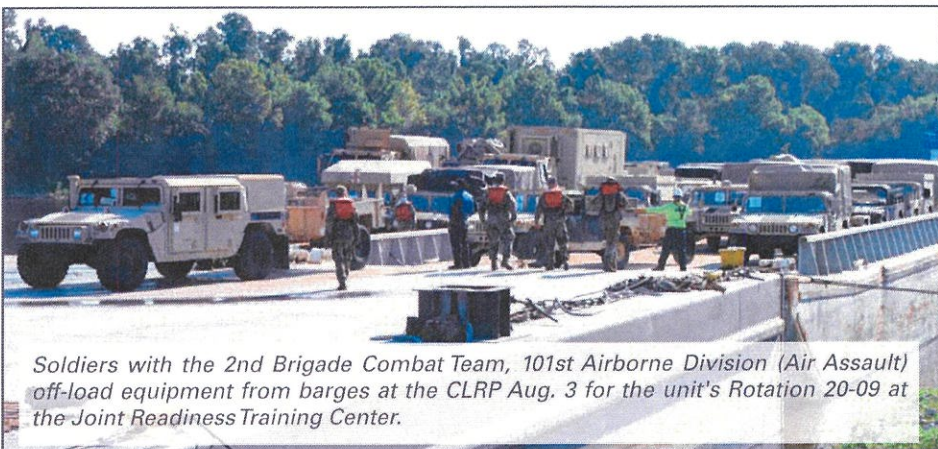
"That tells me the military sees how well this is coordinated and performs for them, so they have decided they can do two almost simultaneously, which is hopefully good for them and us," he said. "We try to price our service with what we think is reasonable, and this is a win for us and the military."

Among the governmental leaders who attended the briefing at the port was Alexandria Mayor Jeff Hall. He said the port is another way the Central Louisiana area has postured itself to support the military.

"We've had leadership in the past that did the right thing, with investments like this at the



Maj. Jason Day, support operations officer for the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) (right) explains barge operations to leaders of the Central Louisiana community and the Joint Readiness Training Center at the Central Louisiana Regional Port in Alexandria Aug. 3.



Soldiers with the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) off-load equipment from barges at the CLRP Aug. 3 for the unit's Rotation 20-09 at the Joint Readiness Training Center.

port," he said. "This was a great investment and location, and as we know, river, interstate, air and rail transportation is intermodal reality that not everyone is going to have. To have it within a short distance to the JRTC Box, is phenomenal, and we've got to support it."

Hall said as a leader in the Alexandria community, he wholeheartedly supports the efforts, and whatever the city can do to expand and bring more of this type activity to central Louisiana.

"I'm glad to be a part of it and whatever we can do as a group we're going to contribute and make it even better," he said. "We want to continue to improve the port, grow it, and take advantage of any opportunity that comes about."

Hall said it's important that central Louisiana takes a leadership role in providing assistance to the JRTC and Fort Polk.

"That's what we're trying to do in central Louisiana," he said. "We want to work together with England Air Park and JRTC to make this happen very smoothly. This allows us to become more of an operational component of what the JRTC is doing in training our Soldiers."

Deborah Randolph, president, Central

Louisiana Regional Chamber of Commerce, called the partnership between the JRTC and the port to utilize the Red River to bring equipment in for rotations "great."

"We're pleased the port can be of service to the Army, and we appreciate the Army's business," she said. "It has a great economic impact for our region. Fort Polk is the largest employer in the state of Louisiana, and we appreciate having it here."

Randolph said the residents of central Louisiana love and support Soldiers and their Families and appreciate their service.

"We're committed to the installation, and we recognize it has a tremendous economic impact, not only for just our region, but for all of the state of Louisiana," she said.

Power Projection Platform

Maj. Jason Day, support operations officer for the 2nd BCT, 101st Abn Div, said his unit received plenty of support throughout the entire trip from Fort Campbell to Alexandria.

"We have a new and improved lock at Fort Campbell," he said. "The work was just complet-

Please see Barge, page 7

Barge

Continued from page 6

ed and we're the first unit to actually use it."

Day said barge operations — called brown body shipping in the transportation world — from Fort Campbell to Alexandria, is a tremendous power projection platform.

"Using rail, which you would typically see for us, cost about \$5-6 million," he said. "We do this (barge) and we're saving about \$3 million."

Day said the barge company was flexible and responsive to everything his unit needed during the trip.

"We had planned for four days to upload the equipment, but we got after it and with the barge company's help finished in two days," he said. "When we were going through the locks on the trip down you usually have to wait your turn, but because we were moving military equipment, I guess they were giving us priority through the locks so that sped it up a bit. We were expecting around 12 days for the trip, but because of them letting us move to the front of the line at the docks, we completed the trip in about 7 days."

Day said with savings of almost \$3 million per trip, he believes barges will be how the 101st will move in the future.

"In a large-scale event, rail traffic is most likely going to be taken up by the heavy brigade combat teams with their tanks and all the heavy stuff," he said. "For us, using the barge just makes more sense as a power projection platform."

Back-to-back rotations

For the next JRJC rotation — 20-10 — the 2nd BCT's sister unit, the 1st BCT, will follow.

"They will use the same decks (platforms pushed by the barges bearing the vehicles) we came in on," Day said. "Once these are off-loaded, they'll go back to Fort Campbell, load up the 1st BCT, bring them down, off-load them here, load us back up and take us home. They'll then come back and take the 1st BCT home when they're through with Rotation 20-10."

Sgt. 1st Class Kevin Simmons, transportation NCOIC for the JRJC Sustainment Operations Center, said as the 1,047 pieces of equipment are off-loaded, they are moved to the staging area and prepped for convoy to Fort Polk.

"We're limiting the convoys to 25 vehicles at a time, at 15-minute intervals," he said.

Simmons said 2nd BCT, 101st Abn Div Torch arrived Aug. 2.

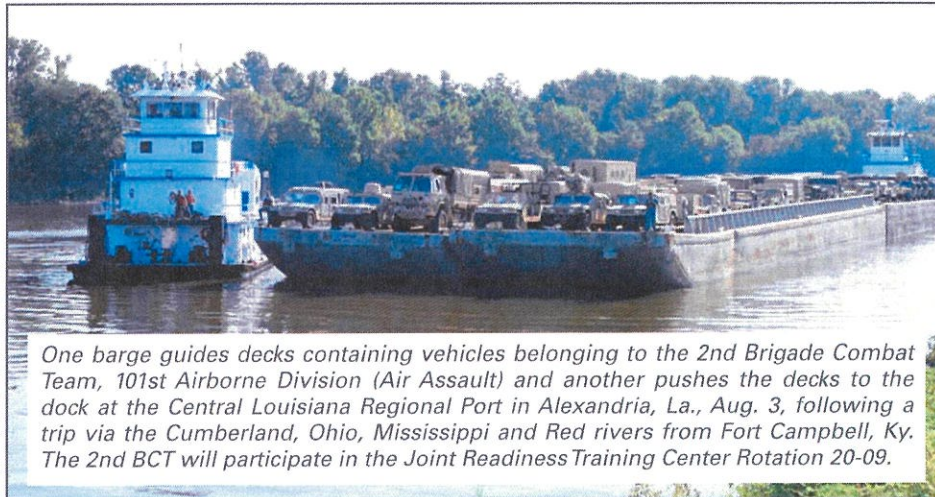
"We did a recon with leadership, identified points of friction, mitigated them, then today (Aug. 3) began downloading the barges at 8 a.m. The first convoy moved out at 8:30 a.m., with the final convoy today scheduled to leave at 5 p.m. We will follow the same schedule tomorrow (Aug. 4) and expect to be finished by late afternoon."

Simmons said there were 350 Soldiers in the Torch to off-load and convoy the equipment. He said the Soldiers came from Fort Campbell by bus, as will the rest of the unit during the next week.

Managing safety concerns

Mike Rude, safety manager for 101st Abn Div, said there were a different set of concerns when dealing with barge operations.

"The issues we have to watch out for are the water, weak swimmers and current," he said. "Barge operations are unique in that one of the



One barge guides decks containing vehicles belonging to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) and another pushes the decks to the dock at the Central Louisiana Regional Port in Alexandria, La., Aug. 3, following a trip via the Cumberland, Ohio, Mississippi and Red rivers from Fort Campbell, Ky. The 2nd BCT will participate in the Joint Readiness Training Center Rotation 20-09.



Vehicles belonging to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, from Fort Campbell, Ky., prepare to off-load from a barge at the Central Louisiana Regional Port in Alexandria, La., Aug. 3.



Soldiers with the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) move to decks pushed by barges to begin off-loading equipment at the CLRJ for the unit's Rotation 20-09 at the Joint Readiness Training Center Aug. 3.

barges today was not even with the dock and therefore you've got to have specific leverage to get the vehicles up which causes problems. So not only is safety concerned with humans but also resources and materials to make sure they

don't damage equipment or hurt themselves."

Rude said he is always surprised at Soldiers' ability to tackle obstacles as they pop up.

Please see **Barge**, page 8

Barge

Continued from page 7

"What amazes me is that the Soldiers are able to adapt and overcome," he said. "You're always going to have problems and there are always going to be situations arising. It's fun to watch and see who is the more experienced Soldier and how they adjust and overcome the situation, and see the younger Soldiers watch and learn."

Corps of Engineers lends a hand

Vincent Schu, project manager for the barge company, said he's been pleased with the current operation.

"This is our fourth time with the military and everyone has been great," he said. "We went 90 miles on the Cumberland River and picked up the Ohio River at Paducah, Kentucky. Went about 43 miles on the Ohio to Cairo, Illinois where we entered the lower Mississippi River at mile 952. We then went 652 miles from Cairo to the Red River, crossed through the locks, then came 90 miles up the Red River to Alexandria."

Schu said the Army Corps of Engineers provided assistance to help the barges through a river closure at Victoria Bend on the Mississippi River.

"They also gave us priority at all the locks," he said. "But the big thing was communication going into it from the very beginning. The only snag we had was Victoria Bend, but we knew that was happening, we consulted with the Corps of Engineers before arriving, and they got us priority to get through. We went around probably 30 boats. If we had to wait in line with everyone one else it would have taken quite a bit longer."

For the trip from Fort Campbell to the Red River, Schu said each barge pushed 15 decks of equipment. Once they hit the Red River, he said each barge could only push six decks due to the size of the locks."

"All in all, it was a great trip and we always look forward to working with the military," he said.

As the briefing wound down, Frank was asked about the prospects of the 101st Abn Div coming to the JRTC and Fort Polk for rotations 20-09 and 20-10, and how they might fare against the 1st Battalion, 509th Infantry Regiment (Airborne) Geronimos.

"The 101st is an outstanding unit and I'm sure they'll do a good job," he said. "It is always great to see the Screaming Eagle patch entering the box. It's got all of JRTC excited for the next two rotations."



CHUCK DANNON - GUARDIAN

Brig. Gen. Patrick D. Frank (foreground, facing left), commander, Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk, visits with Soldiers assigned to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), Aug. 3, as they prepare to off-load equipment at the Central Louisiana Regional Port in Alexandria, La., before convoying to Fort Polk and participating in JRTC Rotation 20-09.



Above: Vincent Schu, project manager for Yazoo River Towing, the barge company tasked with moving the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) via U.S. waterways from Fort Campbell, Ky., to the Central Louisiana Regional Port in Alexandria, La., directs a barge to the CLRP dock Aug. 3.

Left: Maj. Jason Day, support operations officer for the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) (right) explains barge operations to Alexandria, La., Mayor Jeff Hall at the Central Louisiana Regional Port in Alexandria Aug. 3. The 2nd BCT, 101st Abn Div moved 1,047 pieces of equipment from Fort Campbell, Ky., to Alexandria via barge along the Cumberland, Ohio, Mississippi and Red rivers.

