



A shipment of M1A Abrams tanks departs on the first leg of its journey to Iraq. The Defense Contract Management Agency provides a unique service to its customers by overseeing complex Foreign Military Shipments like this. (Photo by Brian M. Hahn, DCMA – General Dynamics Land Systems protocol officer)

Transportation Branch follows long and winding ‘contract to combat’ road

Martha Bushong | Staff Writer

Shipping something as large as an aircraft engine overseas isn’t exactly like mailing a care package to a family member or loved one. Shipping a small military radio can be equally daunting. It isn’t as if the local post office or commercial mail store can handle the size, scope or special requirements of foreign military shipments. One of the many important contract management services the Defense Contract Management Agency provides to contractors, however, includes shipping exactly these kinds of items to deployed warfighters worldwide by land, sea or air.

“I think given adequate contract data, we are capable of moving any item,” said Kenneth McManus, a DCMA supervisor who oversees the functions of six worksites in the Northeast. With more than 23 years of experience in DCMA’s Transportation Branch, McManus has witnessed some interesting scenarios. He describes his

interaction with customers as, “Rarely routine, never dull!”

“We have continual requests for expedited shipment movements via air,” continued McManus. “Usually we can support these requests as long as the request is consistent with the contract terms.” The most unusual request McManus ever had involved sending a shipment of fully constructed helicopters to the government of Colombia.

Although branches of the military have their own transportation services and personnel, DCMA is unique because it provides transportation services from contractor facilities to end-users; military transporters do not. Another unique aspect is DCMA’s role in the duty-free process; no other Department of Defense element performs this function. Over the last year, the DCMA Transportation Branch helped move more than 11,000 shipments to Afghanistan and Iraq and

an additional 10,000 to other locations around the globe.

The shipments of M1A1 Abrams tanks to Iraq provide a perfect case study illustrating the critical role the transportation center plays and precisely how a major shipment flows through the DCMA transportation pipeline. Sales of weapon systems to foreign militaries can be one of the biggest challenges the Transportation Branch faces, especially when the shipment involves classified items such as the M1A1 Abrams tank. Even after DCMA employees complete management/administration, industrial surveillance, product quality assurance, and vehicle test and acceptance functions, the tanks stay within agency oversight through the Transportation Branch.

Wanda Jackson is a DCMA transportation management specialist at the Joint Systems Manufacturing Center, a government-owned, contractor-operated

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— Wanda Jackson, Defense Contract Management Agency transportation management specialist

manufacturing facility operated by General Dynamics Land System where the tanks are built. Jackson is part of a team that supports procurement for Iraq. “Transportation is ever-changing,” said Jackson. “There are always numerous situations underway globally.”

Moving a major weapons system like the M1A1 Abrams tank has unique challenges, and it is up to Jackson and her team to keep informed about the issues. “We have to watch the alerts, try to keep up with the current world situation and do our best to meet all of the requirements,” she said.

The 70-ton weight and 26-foot length of an M1A1 Abrams are only the beginning of the challenges transportation specialists face when moving this equipment. An M1A1 Abrams security classification guide provides the rules and regulations that mandate how tanks must be transported and safeguarded. The security procedures protect the system according to the

“Defense Transportation Regulations.” These regulations safeguard classified, sensitive and armored tactical vehicle shipments in transit and have their own unique classification guide.

Working with the program managers from the buying command at the case’s beginning, along with U.S. Army Security Assistance Command, makes the complex requirements easier to manage. “Many shippers do not realize the amount of work it takes to transport a classified major weapon system and the amount of preplanning required,” said Jackson.

Before DCMA releases items for shipment, specialists develop a comprehensive transportation plan that details specific actions for each shipment. “Developing a transportation plan requires months of coordination, teamwork and reams of paper,” said Jackson. “With the M1A1 Abrams shipments, some of these actions included establishing rail

routings, booking tanks on board sea vessels, dealing with numerous external agencies, such as Customs and the U.S. Army Transportation Command, as well as keeping the Office of the Secretary of Defense informed throughout the process.”

The first shipment of 11 tanks rolled out of the Joint Systems Manufacturing Center in June 2010. The team’s expertise played a vital role in delivering the shipment to Iraq about a month-and-a-half later. As of January 2011, 99 tanks had been shipped to Iraq to help modernize the Iraqi Army. The team’s scrupulous attention to detail and steadfast support of the customer provided them with on-time deliveries that met all regulatory requirements.

In April, Jackson accepted the “Shipper of Merit Award” on behalf of her team at the Surface Deployment Distribution Command Symposium in Dallas. The award recognizes shipping activities that have shown great performance over the past year. “Without everyone’s help, this mission could not go forward,” said Jackson. “It truly takes teamwork.”

Cathy Fox, DCMA North Central team chief, said, “We are honored to get this award. Wanda (Jackson) and her team made it happen.” 

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