

# News From The Front

## Sustaining the Fight Tonight in a COVID Environment

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# **Sustaining the Fight Tonight in a COVID Environment**

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Further reading on the 19th ESC may be found in the following Sustainment Magazine articles, "Battlefield Sustainment on the Korean Peninsula" by MG Michel M. Russell Sr. & COL William L. Ellis (JUL-SEP 2019 edition); and "Sustaining Fight Tonight Readiness" by BG John P. Sullivan & David E. Dutcher (MAY-JUN 2017 edition).

Front Cover Photograph: SPC Jonathan Bazadoni, 19th ESC

## **Introduction**

From April 2020 to June 2021, the 19th Expeditionary Sustainment Command (ESC) was responsible for Joint Personnel Processing Center (JPPC) operations at the Incheon International Airport in order to mitigate the spread of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). JPPC in a normal environment consists of receiving inbound personnel and providing onward movement transportation.

JPPC in a COVID-19 environment is a balancing act of facilitating reception, staging, onward movement, and integration with preventing the spread of COVID-19. The 19th ESC had to ensure JPPC operations included maintaining positive control of inbound personnel at all times and ensuring personnel comply with all COVID preventative measures. The goal was to get inbound personnel from Incheon to their quarantine facility at Camp Humphreys quickly to ensure an overall enjoyable arrival experience to the Republic of Korea (ROK). Ultimately conducting JPPC operations in a COVID environment increases logistical requirements to ensure personnel well-being and prevent the spread of the virus.

## **Sustaining the Fight Tonight in a COVID Environment**

When families or single service members arrive at Incheon International Airport, they become our teammates in a mission the 19th Expeditionary Sustainment Command (ESC) has been optimizing since the early stages of the pandemic. Moving overseas to a new assignment had always been stressful – especially with children and pets – but adding international quarantine controls meant extra layers of complexity.

With our motto of “Every Soldier Counts” as our guide, the 19th ESC developed a mission that processes military arrivals at Incheon in a safe and expedient manner that reinforces our mission of combating the Coronavirus disease COVID-19 virus with our host-nation partner, the Republic of Korea (ROK).

The 19th ESC had a major role during the initial 90 days of COVID-19’s arrival to the ROK and it was crucial to set the standard for COVID-19 response. This is because while training throughout the Army was modified during this time, logistics could not afford to stop. Personnel still needed to eat, vehicles had to be maintained, and ammunition moved.

To flatten the curve, during the first 90 days, Brigadier General (BG) Simerly, the previous 19th ESC commanding general (CG), oversaw the implementation of stringent health measures. He did this by adjusting task organization of Eighth Army units within Area IV (the southern half of the ROK), standing up a secure tactical command post, and expanding the 19th ESC’s Surgeon Cell to accommodate the increased need for patient tracking. As reflected by the low infection rates in Area IV, 19th ESC expertly kept the virus at bay.

During that uncertain time, the number of service members allowed to conduct a Permanent Change of Station (PCS) move came to a halt for all but a few. Flights to the ROK became increasingly complicated as personnel were expected to complete a 14-day quarantine upon arrival. This strictly monitored quarantine, involved a costly hotel stay managed by the ROK government. Thanks to a strong ROK-U.S. Alliance, U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) was authorized to quarantine our own personnel coming to the country.

### **ROK SUPPORTS THE JPPC**

On April 27, 2020, USFK mandated that all USFK-affiliated personnel traveling internationally to the ROK through the Incheon airport must undergo controlled movement to a military testing facility. The task for moving these service members, contractors, Department of Defense (DOD) civilians, and their dependents fell on the Joint Personnel Processing Center (JPPC) at Incheon. The entire process highlights the importance of a strong alliance and relationship with the ROK. In order to get personnel from the plane to their quarantine facilities, we needed the support and cooperation of the ROK government. Thanks to the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), we were empowered to pass on custody transition from ROK authorities to the JPPC team.

By June 2020, permanent change of station (PCS) cycles were back on and we were facing a historic summer surge. This herculean task required a rigorous system to be in place to safely transport personnel from their place of arrival to their quarantine facilities. While this may sound simple, not all personnel arrived by themselves. Many traveled with large families or pets that challenged this process. Since March 2020, over 20,000 USFK affiliated personnel were processed, underlining the need for a streamlined process.

Joint Publication 1-0 dated Dec. 1, 2020, provides the definition for a JPPC as “a center established in an operational area by the appropriate joint force commander to in-process and out-process personnel upon their arrival in and departure from the theater.” What this JP does not explain, however, is the steps required under pandemic conditions. Personnel traveling to the ROK through Incheon quickly learned there would be a longer-than-expected traveling time after landing.

The extra time, came about through our efforts to ensure everyone is safely/securely integrated into the Korean Peninsula. ROK personnel began the process by facilitating USFK personnel through immigrations and customs. During this time, a ROK medical provider assessed travelers for COVID-19 symptoms. Beginning in January 2021, the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) also ensured all personnel arriving had a negative COVID-19 Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test. Without this, personnel are not be admitted through immigration. If an individual did not have the proper proof, there was the potential for ROK immigration to deport the individual back to their place of origin. Travelers then went through a final security check operated by ROK Army (ROKA) officials after exiting their assigned gate. While there, ROKA validated arrivals’ SOFA status and then conducted a controlled hand off to the USFK JPPC desk personnel.

### **19th ESC TAKES CHARGE**

As individuals pass through security, they receive a distinctive yellow tag, signifying the transfer of responsibility to JPPC personnel. Our team has gone through great lengths to ensure that USFK personnel’s first experience in Korea is a pleasant one. Unlike before COVID-19, the only authorized mode of transportation from Incheon to a COVID-19 testing site or quarantine facility for USFK-



**The 662<sup>nd</sup> MCT commander, CPT Blair Pechner (right), briefs MSC-K commander (left), COL Christopher Noe, and the command team from 19th ESC, BG Steven Allen and CSM Laderek Green, on JPPC operations at the Incheon International Airport.**

affiliated arrivals is a bus provided by JPPC operators. This bus services all USFK-affiliated personnel.

Understanding the critical importance of bringing new personnel into Incheon, three of our battalions within Materiel Support Command – Korea (MSC-K) were called upon to comprise the JPPC team: 25<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion (Movement Control), 498<sup>th</sup> Combat Sustainment Support Battalion (CSSB), and the Korean Service Corps (KSC) Battalion. Each of these battalions have played a vital role at Incheon throughout the past year.

The 25<sup>th</sup> Trans. Battalion (BN) received Mission Command of the JPPC and further passed Command and Control of the operations to 662<sup>nd</sup> Movement Control Team (MCT). Additionally, 517<sup>th</sup> MCT and 665<sup>nd</sup> MCT also provided personnel to support the JPPC mission. Together, they were responsible for receiving all inbound personnel and finding a way to make sure arrivals get to their follow-on quarantine location in a safe and expeditious manner.



**2LT Eric Umans (JPPC OIC) checks the paperwork of an incoming service member to ensure all necessary documents are in place to move him onto follow-on quarantine**

Personnel from the KSC BN have long been integrated with Incheon; however, their support became especially critical during the last year.

28<sup>th</sup> KSC Company receptionists are responsible for assisting the flow of all USFK and their families arriving into country. This consists of baggage claim, paper work, escort to JPPC, etc. As COVID-19 cases increased, they added two more temporary employees to support PCR test result checks.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, KSC BN personnel directly escorted USFK personnel to the USFK JPPC desk, but since January 2021, they now take all personnel first to the ROK COVID-19 center within the airport as the ROK requires all inbound passengers to show proof of negative PCR COVID-19 testing result. Those without the proper paperwork are at risk of being flown back to the United States. If someone does fall into this category, the KSC service members help that person with flight reservations and the extra paperwork required.

34<sup>th</sup> KSC Company also provides support as Protocol Airport Liaison Specialists within USFK Protocol, facilitating pre-coordination for general officers' PCR tests and assisting with the health declaration form.

498<sup>th</sup> CSSB support initially began as bus escorts and van teams. Escorts were responsible for the accountability of incoming personnel from the airport to medical reception center, and quarantine barracks. The van teams were comprised of 2-6 service members whose responsibilities included transporting potential COVID-19 positive/asymptomatic personnel that could not travel with the other incoming personnel for safety reasons. They would also transport oversized cargo or passengers that did not make the regular scheduled buses. Unit members would also provide support to those in quarantine by providing welcome packets and instructions on how to order amenities throughout Camp Humphreys.

These battalions did a tremendous job at the outset of COVID-19; however, their expertise during the subsequent year has helped Korea become the Assignment of Choice that it is today. As the process began, arriving personnel were getting frustrated by the long wait times. By the end of 19th ESC's time as the JPPC lead, personnel were getting on a bus within approximately 60 minutes of passing through customs and after being handed off to JPPC personnel.

## **STREAMLINING THE PROCESS**

With such a demanding goal, 662<sup>nd</sup> MCT did an analysis to see what steps could be implemented to reduce wait times at Incheon. The first issue comes with unexpected arrivals. Although personnel are encouraged to reach out to their unit ahead of time in order to communicate their expected arrival time and date of arrival, this did not happen often enough which led to an inaccurate PCS tracker. This originally led to some friction in matching up the number of buses to the number of arrivals. The issue was that people almost never arrived on a plane number/time that matched the tracker's description.

During 662<sup>nd</sup> MCT's analysis, they asked three main questions: 1) What hours did the majority of passengers fly in? 2) How long did it take a passenger to arrive to the JPPC desk after departing the plane? and 3) How many planes on average arrived per day at each terminal? By asking these questions, they realized that the focus needed to be on inbound flights to Terminals 1 and 2 (the terminals are separated by a 45-minute drive, which added an additional layer of complexity). The analysis found there is a limited number of flights into Incheon and the majority of incoming personnel will fly in from Seattle, Washington. The MCT honed in the exact times the buses needed to arrive to Incheon in order to minimize wait times at the airport. For those others that did not come in with these large flights, 498<sup>th</sup> CSSB had a government van on standby. By shifting the focus this way, wait times were reduced to less than 50 minutes after arrival to the JPPC desk.

The next way that we streamlined the process was by using new systems to in-process personnel faster. Passengers would arrive at the JPPC desk, in order to be manifested for a bus, each passenger would be asked 15-20 questions, and their information would be taken by hand and entered manually into a spreadsheet. The analog entry of each passenger would take 2-3 minutes to complete – leading to long wait times when large

groups inevitably arrived. This system was also problematic because it was often difficult to get both airport terminals to synchronize in order to assign buses to everyone quickly.

The new system we implemented allowed personnel to scan identification (IDs) upon arrival. The 339<sup>th</sup> Quartermaster Company, and the 498<sup>th</sup> CSSB became the operators of the system and their contributions and expertise cannot be understated. They provided a team that had the responsibility of setting up, initializing, and operating the workstations. This required quick data entry, data transfer, and identity verification before being able to place verified personnel on a bus manifest. Thanks to their efforts, passengers could be in-processed and manifested for a bus in under 30 seconds. Passengers no longer waited in long lines or had uncertainty on what bus they would be taking.



**SSG Jovani Fuller (498<sup>th</sup> CSSB) oversees arrivals' information being inputted into the manifest system to ensure all passengers are slotted for a bus seat.**

Another way that we helped incoming personnel was by resolving difficulties for USFK personnel that exhibited signs or symptoms of COVID-19 while transitioning through Incheon. The 19th ESC command surgeon did this by identifying and establishing contact with the KDCA leadership who were mandated with managing the quarantine facilities at Incheon and processing these identified individuals. The 19th ESC command surgeon served as the medical liaison to establish open lines of communication between the KDCA and the 65<sup>th</sup> Medical Brigade. This allowed for improved efficiency of processing infected personnel and ensured containment of potential spread without disrupting the flow of JPPC operations.

One final way that we reduced wait times was by assigning KSC personnel to help passengers struggling to get into the country due to missing information on their PCR test. Personnel would not be permitted through customs if their PCR results were missing the date of birth, the location of the test or the date when the test was taken. In several cases, the PCR tests had been conducted on a military installation and were logged into the Army Medical Protection System (MEDPROS). Unfortunately, MEDPROS is only accessible through a military computer – something that an incoming passenger would



likely not have. KSC employees were vital because they could provide a military computer to pull up passengers' results online to show the missing data. Thanks to the efforts of the KSC battalion, the ability to solve PCR test related problems dropped dramatically and we were able to build rapport with the KDCA in the process.

## **CONCLUSION**

The fight against COVID-19 is far from over, and it will continue to impact military operations around the globe. However, in Korea we have leveraged our broad array of experts across our formations to provide a system that ensures a Soldier or family's arrival to the Land of Morning Calm is efficient and safe. As the JPPC mission shifts from 19th ESC to U.S. Army Garrison-Humphreys, we can proudly say that the systems in place for the summer 2021 PCS season are worthy of our motto: Every Soldier Counts!

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## **ACRONYMS**

<b>2LT</b>	Second Lieutenant
<b>BG</b>	Brigadier General
<b>BN</b>	Battalion
<b>CG</b>	Commanding General
<b>COL</b>	Colonel
<b>CPT</b>	Captain
<b>CSM</b>	Command Sergeant Major
<b>COVID-19</b>	Coronavirus disease
<b>CSSB</b>	Combat Sustainment Support Battalion
<b>DOD</b>	Department of Defense
<b>ESC</b>	Expeditionary Sustainment Command
<b>ID</b>	Identification
<b>JP</b>	Joint Publication
<b>JPPC</b>	Joint Personnel Processing Center
<b>KDCA</b>	Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency
<b>KSC</b>	Korean Service Corps
<b>MCT</b>	Movement Control Team

<b>MEDPROS</b>	Army Medical Protection System
<b>MSC-K</b>	Materiel Support Command-Korea
<b>PCR</b>	Polymerase Chain Reaction
<b>PCS</b>	Permanent Change of Station
<b>ROK</b>	Republic of Korea
<b>ROKA</b>	Republic of Korea Army
<b>SOFA</b>	Status of Forces Agreement
<b>SSG</b>	Staff Sergeant
<b>Trans. BN</b>	Transportation Battalion
<b>USAG</b>	United States Army Garrison
<b>USFK</b>	United States Forces Korea