In the fall of 2017, my unit traveled from Ft. Bliss, TX (El Paso) to Ft. Irwin, CA to conduct a monthlong training exercise at the National Training Center (NTC) in order to prepare for our upcoming deployment to the Middle East. Throughout the exercise I performed the role of intelligence planner - developing what the opposing forces’ most like plan of attack against my unit would be so that the operations staff could plan a realistic mission in response.

At the end of the exercise we began preparing to deploy our equipment from Ft. Irwin to the Middle East. Due to the lack of a clear plan for how the equipment would be tracked as it left Ft. Irwin, a sense of confusion quickly developed about the deployment’s progress amongst the unit’s senior leaders. Typically, such information would be tracked by a member of the logistics staff. However, because I had demonstrated the ability to effectively communicate during the exercise by giving numerous briefings to the staff and commander, my unit’s executive officer chose me to be to be the coordinator for tracking all of our equipment as it flowed out of the country.

This was a challenging task for a number of reasons, beyond the obvious fact that I was not trained to do the job and was starting the job after the equipment had already started making its way to port. The first task was to understand all of the intermediate stations and destinations the equipment hand to travel through. We had to put each piece of equipment through several maintenance and compliance checks at Ft. Irwin to ensure it was prepared for shipment. Each maintenance/compliance station had a different team in charge of reporting which pieces of equipment had passed through the station. These teams all reported their numbers in different formats, all of which were analog.

The second task was to figure out exactly how much equipment each of our unit’s departments had. Each department already had an appointed coordinator to track their equipment deployment, but similar to the maintenance/compliance teams they all had their own system for tracking equipment.

After leaving Ft. Irwin, the equipment was sent to one of three places: either San Diego, CA or Corpus Christi, TX to be shipped to the Middle East, or back to Ft. Bliss TX. Equipment sent back to Ft. Bliss either did not deploy to the Middle East, or it was shipped via airplane. Once in the Middle East, most of the equipment would arrive via ship to Kuwait, but some would be shipped overland from Saudi Arabia. And even when all of the equipment arrived in Kuwait, some equipment would then travel to Iraq or Syria.

While at Ft. Irwin I had to make-do with paper inventories, screenshots, Excel spreadsheets, and face-to-ace meeting to get a picture of where all the equipment was and where it was headed. But after returning to Ft. Bliss for a few weeks before flying to Kuwait, my priority was to develop a more efficient and accurate way to track all of the equipment. The end result was the database in this folder, which was continuously refined and updated once I got to Kuwait and began overseeing the reception of all the equipment we had shipped over. I relied heavily on this database to give daily status updates to the executive officer on how much equipment each department had received and how much they were still waiting for. I was even able to use it to help a few departments track down equipment they thought had been lost.