

MILITARY

Army asking: Dude, where's my car? Lots of vehicles in lots of lots

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Imagine a parking lot as large as 100 football fields and filled with nearly every type, make and model of U.S. military vehicle, covered in dust and dirt and baking under a desert sun in Kuwait.

Your job: Find one specific vehicle, read its serial number and catalog it for transport back to the United States.

That's part of the daunting task facing the Responsible Reset Task Force, which must inspect thousands of vehicles used in the Iraq War and decide which ones are worth sending back to the United States.

"There's just this huge, big expanse of sand with a fence around it," said Army Col. Jeffrey Carra, the task force's former chief of operations. "Forty rows of stuff that's just parked head to tail."

The Army is responsible for about 15,000 vehicles at four U.S. military bases in Kuwait, some with a dozen lots. About 9,000 vehicles will stay with the U.S. forces in Kuwait, but up to 6,000 will be shipped home, Col. Carra said.

They include Humvees, trucks, trailers, cranes, bulldozers, tanks, personnel carriers and howitzers. One Humvee can cost more than \$1 million, and a tank, a couple of million.

"I'm sure it's over a billion dollars," Col. Carra said of the value of the military vehicles in Kuwait.

Before a vehicle can come stateside, it needs to be stripped of extra equipment, washed, sterilized and brought to a port. It will spend more than a month at sea before arriving in the United States. Roughly 5,000 vehicles that came out of Iraq are now en route to the United States.

The vehicle then will be transported to a depot to be refurbished to factory standards and redistributed wherever necessary.

About 2,000 contractors are also involved in the program. They are supposed to take an average of 20 hours to find and prepare a vehicle for shipment, but they usually take much longer.

Sometimes a contractor carrying a handheld scanner spends days walking around a parking lot the size of a sports stadium parking lot in search of a specific vehicle.

It cost \$20 million over a seven-month period to complete the process at just one lot, according to an Army study. That cost did not include shipping, which can run thousands of dollars per vehicle. Shipping a single vehicle from Afghanistan to the United States costs \$7,000.

One of the U.S. bases, Camp Arifjan in Kuwait, contains dozens of lots. Lot 58 is its main sorting area. It is 174 acres, or



ARMY PHOTOGRAPH

TIGHT FORMATION: U.S. military vehicles in Kuwait are being returned to the U.S. if they are no longer needed by forces in the Middle East. About 6,000 Army Humvees, trucks, trailers, cranes, bulldozers, tanks and howitzers await shipment in lots.

the size of about 174 football fields, and can hold up to 2,000 vehicles.

Camp Arifjan is the only Army base equipped with special technology for speedy wireless tracking of the vehicles.

The technology, called AMATS, involves affixing a small mobile-phone-sized tag to each vehicle with the vehicle's serial number and unique identity programmed into it. That tag can be located by satellite using GPS technology.

"It's freaking awesome," Col. Carra said about the technological capability to pinpoint a vehicle's location.

"You can say, 'Oh that's going to be in Lot 58, row 17, the fourth one from the front,'" Col. Carra said.

The technology has halved the cost of readying the vehicles, according to the case study.

Mary Ann Wagner, who worked with the Army for five years to develop the technology, said the system can cut costs by 50 percent over seven months.

"Because we don't need as many people going around with handheld readers, we're able to reduce labor costs," said Ms.



ARMY PHOTOGRAPH

A collection of vehicles built to resist mine blasts and protect occupants from ambush are parked in a holding yard at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, awaiting shipment.

Wagner, president of Cubic Global Tracking Solutions and XIO Strategies.

The technology also has been installed at the naval base in Kuwait and at the Kuwaiti port of Shuaibah to track vehicles being shipped.

Vehicles will be shipping out from Kuwait throughout the summer before the Responsible Reset Task Force can say, "Mission accomplished."

"We're trying to figure out how to do that for Afghanistan," Col. Carra said.

He estimated that there are 50,000 pieces of rolling stock — anything big with wheels — in Afghanistan.

"The problem is the military has many, many vehicles and high valuable assets," Ms. Wagner said. "Keeping track of those assets are important."

Better technology could prevent equipment theft by contractors.

"I'm not naive. I'm sure there was some," Col. Carra said.

Military assets lose value over time, especially if the technology becomes dated, so some things cost less to leave behind than to bring home and refurbish, he added.

"If you've got a 10-year-old car, and it needs a \$2,000 repair and \$1,000 for transportation, but you can buy new for \$4,000," he said, "it may make more sense to buy a new one."

