



02

EXPEDITIONARY LOGISTICS IN SUPPORT OF ATLANTIC RESOLVE

BY CAPTAIN NICK BURKETT

Over the last decade of warfighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. Army has learned valuable lessons on providing logistical support in austere environments. However, as world tensions have shifted and forces are moving into an undeveloped theater located in developed nations, many of the sustainment methods are no longer applicable. In order to meet those operational and theater requirements new and innovative logistical processes are essential to support military operations in the new but familiar environments.

Logistic operations in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom were centric to austere conditions and economic infrastructure that could not support military operations. Sustainment focused on importing massive quantities of all classes of supply, creating stockpiles, and distributing through lower echelons of

sustainment units by means of tactical convoy or aerial delivery. None of this is feasible for the European theater. This is the logistical problem set faced now by 1st Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) in its role as Special Operations Command – Forward Eastern Europe.

About a year ago, the Army made great strides in providing logistics support to Special Forces units by establishing of Forward Support Companies as an organic company in a Special Forces Group, assigned to individual battalions. Due to the unique nature of special operations and the current organizational structure and staffing of the FSC, there is still a capability gap precluding an all-inclusive sustainment

solution for a Special Forces battalion in a deployed environment. This is especially the case in SOC-FWD EE. As our companies and operational detachments operate in support of the Operation Atlantic Resolve area of responsibility the geographical displacement is across hundreds of miles and across multiple countries. Additionally, as sovereign nations, these countries each requires its own diplomatic clearance, customs control, hazardous material declarations, regulations and restrictions by which we must abide. This provides a unique challenge for logistical support. To add to the complexity, as a forward stationed Special Forces Battalion, 1st Bn., 10 SFG (A) does not have the ready access to the next higher echelon support from the Group Support Battalion locally available to assist.

Army doctrine states that Army Special Operations Forces must rely upon theater infrastructure for all sustainment above organic capabilities; as a result conventional forces integration is critical for 1/10 SFG (A). The battalion works closely with the ARSOF Liaison Element from the 528th Sustainment Brigade (Airborne). The ALE has been the vehicle for SOC-FWD EE to tie into CF logistics since they work directly with the Theater Sustainment Command and can provide direct linkage and points of contact to conventional forces sustainers and our gateway to access conventional forces sustainment resources. The problem set SOC-FWD EE faces in the European theater is that while we actively engage with partner forces, the CF forces that we would normally integrate with to provide a logistics tale are still establishing their own foothold. Because of this fact, the large logistical nodes that were part of the sustainment landscape in Iraq and Afghanistan simply do not exist. As the CF forces develop and improve their logistics footprint in the theater, this capacity is taxed by the arrival of more conventional forces, straining resources, and creating a capabilities gap. One recurring challenge faced by SOC-FWD EE is deploying and redeploying ODAs from their operation areas in Eastern Europe. The FSC does not have the organic

THE GEOGRAPHICAL DISPLACEMENT IS ACROSS HUNDREDS OF MILES AND MULTIPLE COUNTRIES

capabilities to line-haul equipment across Europe, so the FSC outsourced the mission to the 6966th Transportation Company through the 21st TSC. As the conventional Army is moving its large equipment into Europe, they too are utilizing the 6966th. Eventually this demand exceeded the capacity available in the 6966th increasing the strain on its organic capabilities and creating clear demand signal for support augmentation. In order to augment this support requirement the FSC has to provide support to the 6966th augmenting the element that it contracted with to alleviate its movement burden. To mitigate this recurring issue, the FCS is working to license drivers with European commercial driver's licenses, therefore enabling leasing tractor trailers and creating the capacity to self-sustain for equipment movement missions.

SOC-FWD EE has implemented a practice of deploying logistics capabilities rather than personnel and equipment, imported coordinating capabili-



03



01

01, 02

A crane offloads cargo containers full of ammunition from a ship in Germany and then onto a train for transport to the Theater Logistics Support Center-Europe's ammunition depot. The shipment contained around 5,000 tons of ammo, the largest U.S. ammo shipment to Europe in 10 years. U.S. ARMY PHOTOS BY LT. COL. BRAD CULLIGAN (01) & JAMES GRELL (02)



02

ties and empowered the lowest levels to conduct operational level logistics. Historically the GSB and FSC would tie into CF logistical nodes and then distributing to teams spread across Eastern Europe. In the current operating environment, the battalion S4, the ALE and the FSC coordinate with conventional forces operating in the area, creating the capability for ODAs to tap into their supply network as well as any existing Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) supply routes, and prepositioned stocks. The benefit of operating in developed nations is that the battalion can empower ODAs with operational funds to procure their own food, water and

services on the local economy. This enables operations in a near non-existent logistical footprint compared to dependency upon a massive sustainment brigade footprint to provide the same materials and services.

The current MTOE and manning of the battalion's logistics cell is designed to support the entire battalion in an austere environment. SOC-FWD EE is deploying small teams to first-world countries, and as such has taken on additional roles for procurement of non-standard supplies and materials. The battalion S4 is in direct coordination with the 409th Contracting Support Brigade in order to establish Indefinite

Duration/Indefinite Quantity contracts for rental vehicles and blanket purchase agreements for housing in support of the forward deployed units. We have Government Purchase Card Super cards with the ability to purchase \$25,000, usually only maintained at a division- or brigade-level. These capabilities have provided the operational flexibility and depth to meet both sustainment requirements for ODAs conducting long-duration engagements, while providing the maximum available operational flexibility to minimize the operational signature and employ logistics and sustainment capabilities in ongoing force protection efforts.

The FSC has organic to its organization a fuel and water section; however, these capabilities are not feasible while operating in the large, densely packed cities of Europe. Because the environmental impact of fuel operation is out of

the question, SOC-FWD EE has mitigated this impact by creating the capability for ODAs to purchase their own fuel from host-nation sources using Fleet Fuel Cards. There is no organic capability in the FSC to accommodate the frequent and no-notice movements across Europe. To mitigate this demand, the SOC-FWD EE relies upon the FSCs Movement Control section to take on the additional role of Customs Certification Officials. These NCOs now have the ability to certify customs documents to enable teams to rapidly deploy to and redeploy from locations without external support throughout Europe, creating a capability, traditionally maintained at the Theater Sustainment Command level, at the operational level.

While the distance between SOC-FWD EE and its higher logistics headquarters could be an operational hindrance, this geographical separation has actually enabled the FSC to innovate and deploy on-the-fly critical logistics capabilities. Rather than relying upon the higher sustainment element, mechanics and technicians have sought after and qualified for many manufacturer-level certifications to repair SOF specific equipment, achieved CCO certifications as logistical planners, trained to become certified Contracting Officer Representatives working at the company level, and empowered junior NCOs to routinely make direct coordination with theater level sustainment elements. SOC-FWD EE's logistics program is still in its figurative infant stages and perpetually adapting in order

to maintain the flexibility required to provide the appropriate support for the broad spectrum of operations conducted under the umbrella of OAR.

Conducting special operations in immature theaters within developed, sovereign nations has forced logisticians to rethink sustainment. The methods of OEF and OIF are now largely impractical and unfeasible. Sustainment for special operations in the European theater now focuses on procurement at the lowest level. As such, sustainment is faster, more cost effective and operationally sensitive resulting in a near non-existent logistical footprint, ideal for special operations forces. Rather than being focused on conducting convoys and providing sustainment, company and battalion level logisticians are enabling operators to sustain themselves, and taking on increased coordination, distribution and synchronization roles that are normally be executed at much higher echelons of sustainment. **SW**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Captain Nick Burkett is the Commander of Forward Support Company, Special Operations Command – Forward Eastern Europe, and 1st Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group.



04



05



06

03

U.S. and Spanish Soldiers secure a pallet to a CH-47 Chinook during the joint exercise Trident Juncture 15 in Spain. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY 2ND LT. RICHARD HINMAN

04, 05

Forward Support Company Soldiers unload supplies for Operation Resolute Castle 15 in Romania. U.S. ARMY PHOTOS BY SPC. JACCOB HEARN

06

U.S. and Lithuanian logistics forces refuel a truck in preparation for operations in Poland. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SGT. JARRED WOODS