



Soldiers fuel their vehicle at the intermediate staging base in support of Joint Readiness Training Center rotation 16-01 at Fort Polk, Louisiana, on Sept. 24, 2015. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Terrance D. Rhodes)

Providing Intermediate Staging Base Support for JRTC Training

■ By Capt. Carlos “Mike” Sanford, Capt. Brian E. Jones, and Capt. Zachary McDonald

Sustainment units are often described as being “in the rear with the gear,” but this description contradicts the vital logistics support that the 129th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion (CSSB) provided to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), while deployed to the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Polk, Louisiana, in the fall of 2015. To provide this support, the 129th CSSB established a logistics node approximately 55 miles away from the JRTC at the intermediate staging base (ISB) in Alexandria.

Preparation and Planning

With the entire battalion together

at its home station of Fort Campbell, Kentucky, for the first time in several years—after completing a variety of complex missions in Afghanistan, Kuwait, and West Africa—leaders began to focus on training and building a unified sense of purpose. The battalion went through a series of tough field training exercises at Fort Campbell; Camp Atterbury, Indiana; and Fort Knox, Kentucky, to validate nearly 20 platoons.

The planning phase for JRTC 16-01 challenged the 129th CSSB. Planning to the smallest detail was the key to mission success. The high operational tempo of the 101st Airborne Division kept subordinate units in constant motion while they tran-

sitioned between progress phases. To balance the need for information with the mission, the 129th CSSB ran regular synchronization meetings to pass requests for information upward.

The support operations section had the lion’s share of planning to develop the CSSB’s concept of support and synchronize it with the 526th Brigade Support Battalion, the CSSB’s primary customer throughout the exercise.

Deployment

The 101st Airborne Division required all units to maximize the pre-positioned equipment already at Fort Polk to reduce transportation costs. However, the 129th CSSB still line-hauled more than 100 pieces of

equipment to meet the large class I (subsistence) and class III (petroleum, oils, and lubricants) requirements. More than 300 railcars were used to move all of the equipment from 101st Airborne Division Sustainment Brigade and 2nd Brigade Combat Team from Fort Campbell to Louisiana.

The most expedient and cost-effective transportation method was three convoys of 52 M915 tractors with M872 trailers. The 594th Transportation Company conducted the 600-plus mile, one-way trips. Using the 594th Transportation Company's assets saved the division more than \$150,000 and provided valuable convoy experience and training to the Soldiers from the 594th Transportation Company, the 227th Composite Supply Company (CSC), and the 584th Support Maintenance Company (SMC).

Both the 227th CSC and the 74th Composite Truck Company (CTC) were heavily used. The 74th CTC executed personnel movements, most of the class I movements, and convoy security while the 227th CSC was tasked with providing water purification and storage assets, fuel transport, and all materials handling equipment support on the ISB.

Running the ISB

Two days after arriving at the JRTC, the 129th CSSB took control of the ISB where nearly 4,000 Soldiers would begin the reception, staging, onward movement, and integration process. They would arrive, stage their equipment, and then convoy to the Fort Polk training area, also known as "the box." As the ISB owner, the 129th CSSB's mayor cell faced a unique challenge. Because it was not the primary rotational training unit, it did not have the same level of authority needed to influence units occupying the ISB.

As one of the commander's key tasks of ensuring the main body had potable water upon arriving at the ISB, the 227th CSC used two tactical water purification systems and four water treatment specialists to setup and pu-

rify more than 15,000 gallons of water. The 227th CSC also provided fuel support to more than 1,000 pieces of equipment.

Once the brigade combat team left the ISB, the 129th CSSB's primary mission was to provide all classes of supply to the Geronimo Drop Zone at Fort Polk. In addition to commodity support, the 74th CTC provided troop transport, including moves from the box to Peason Ridge, north of Fort Polk, for live-fire training.

Leveraging Enablers

While at the JRTC, the 129th CSSB was augmented with additional sustainment assets from the Kentucky Army National Guard, including the 307th SMC who supplemented the 584th SMC with additional mechanics and supported the ISB with a quick reaction force.

The 138th Signal Company provided both classified and unclassified internet, telephone, and FM radio communications. It also established two retransmitting sites along the main supply route from the ISB to the box. This allowed communications during convoys and greatly increased the battalion's command and control over all of the elements on the road.

Here are some lessons learned from the 129th CSSB's operations in support of this JRTC rotation. Allowing the CSSB to control all of the commodities in the ISB lets the brigade combat team to focus on reception, staging, onward movement, and integration. Integrated home-station training should take place among the CSSB, the sustainment brigade, and the brigade support battalion.

Assigning a lead action officer who will be available throughout the entire planning process is vital. While working through the military decisionmaking process, it is not uncommon for the entire concept of the operation to change two or three times before the exercise hits its execution phase. Having a single person and their team to col-

lect, analyze, and disseminate key information saves the unit time and avoids the frustration of operating under guidance created using outdated information.

Another lesson learned is to ensure that M172 lowboy trailers are available to transport materials handling equipment between Fort Polk and the ISB. These trailers need to be brought from home station because none are available in the pre-positioned equipment yard at Fort Polk.

Finally, the ISB mayor cell should have access to a government purchase card for buying essential supplies requiring immediate acquisition. Separate funding for the ISB should be established by the sustainment brigade.

Capt. Carlos "Mike" Sanford is an Army Staff intern with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Office of the Secretary of Defense, pursuing a master's degree policy management from Georgetown University. He was the S-3 for the 129th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion (CSSB), 101st Airborne Division Sustainment Brigade, at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. He holds a bachelor's degree in history from Methodist University and a master's degree in logistics management from the Florida Institute of Technology. He is a graduate of the Transportation Officer Basic Course and Combined Logistics Captains Career Course.

Capt. Brian E. Jones is student in the Logistics Captain's Career Course. He was the S-3 plans officer for the 129th CSSB and holds bachelor's degrees in criminal justice and psychology from Elmira College. He is a graduate of the Ordnance Officer Basic Course, Air Assault School, and Pathfinder School.

Capt. Zachary McDonald was an assistant S-3 for the 129th CSSB. He holds a bachelor's degree in history from Shepherd University, and he is a graduate of the Transportation Officer Basic Course, Logistics Captain's Career Course, and Air Assault School.