



Sgt. Mary Irving, 731st Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, Alabama National Guard, and Air Force Tech. Sgt. George Peoples, 117th Air Refueling Wing, move bottled water at the distribution center in Birmingham, Alabama, in May 2011. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Katherine Dowd)

The National Guard's Contributions to Expeditionary Logistics

■ By Brig. Gen. Sylvester Cannon and Col. Steven G. Shepherd

The overall effectiveness of the Total Force has never been more visible than in the recent military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. Since the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, and the subsequent military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, operations and relationships among the components and especially our sustainment forces have reached new heights. In the Army, the nation's largest branch of the military, executing operations among the Active and Reserve components is relatively seamless.

Reserve Component Sustainers

The Army National Guard and Army Reserve currently make up ap-

proximately 80 percent of the Army's sustainment forces. Specifically, the National Guard has 24 percent of the Army sustainment force in its formations. Current projections indicate that reliance upon sustainment units in the National Guard will continue to increase during the current draw-down of active Army forces.

The National Guard currently has three sustainment commands in its military force structure: the 135th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary) (ESC) located in Birmingham, Alabama; the 184th ESC located in Laurel, Mississippi; and the 167th Theater Sustainment Command located at Fort McClellan, Alabama.

Army Techniques Publication 4-94, Theater Sustainment Command, specifies that the role of the ESC is to deploy to an area of operations or joint area of operations to provide mission command capabilities when multiple sustainment brigades are employed or when the theater sustainment command determines that a forward command is required.

Since 2003, the 135th ESC and its subordinate units have deployed 22 times in support of Operations Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom, New Dawn, and Multi-National Force Observer Sinai. The command's subordinate units include combat sustainment support battalions, transportation

companies, component repair companies, quartermaster companies, and surface maintenance companies.

Afghanistan

Historically, expeditionary logistics has always been important in sustainment operations, but it is even more important now as the Army tries to find ways to support and sustain its smaller, lighter maneuver forces in remote locations across the globe. Since 9/11, National Guard units ranging from companies to general officer-led sustainment commands have made significant contributions to the success of our joint forces domestically and overseas.

The 135th ESC was the first ESC in the National Guard to deploy to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Designated as Joint Sustainment Command–Afghanistan, and supplemented with Air Force, Navy, and Marine personnel, the 135th ESC coordinated logistics support for all supplies, personnel, and equipment for the Afghanistan theater.

The unit commanded two active Army sustainment brigades, the 82nd and the 43rd, and a number of subordinate battalions and companies from all components of the total force. During its tour of duty, the 135th ESC oversaw the surge of an additional 30,000 troops to Afghanistan.

The 135th ESC also provided logistics coordination for more than 200 forward operating bases and camps. Many of these bases and camps were established in remote locations and in very austere environments. They supported service members from all branches of the armed forces, contractors, and coalition partners. Executing sustainment operations was a massive effort; everyone needed to be well supplied with water, food, ammunition, and mail on a regular basis.

Kuwait

Within three years of performing its sustainment mission in Afghanistan, the 135th ESC was called upon to perform expeditionary logistics again, this time in Kuwait. Consid-

ering the operational reach of their sustainment efforts, a number of key leader engagements were required to help shape and sustain logistics operations in the region.

During the unit's tour in Kuwait, the 135th ESC coordinated logistics operations in the surrounding joint sustainment area, which included Kuwait, Iraq, Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan, and Afghanistan. Several key areas were identified as critical to overall mission success: contract management, watercraft operations, finance and postal operations, aerial delivery, and mortuary affairs.

Using new innovative processes, the 135th avoided unnecessary costs to the government. For container management, more than \$80 million was saved through contract cost reduction techniques and improved contract oversight. An additional \$145 million was saved by retrograding and refurbishing armor and ammunition.

Finance and postal operations were conducted in four countries in nine different locations. More than \$70 million in financial transactions were processed and nearly three million pounds of mail were delivered.

The 135th ESC also provided mission command for aerial delivery and mortuary affairs operations, providing coordination for over a million pounds of supplies and 130 mortuary affairs evacuation missions.

Defense Support of Civil Authorities

National Guard units are unique in that they have both a federal and a state mission. Stateside, in cases of natural disasters, domestic events, and civil disturbances, the National Guard conducts Defense Support of Civil Authorities. All Defense Support of Civil Authorities operations require expeditionary logistics to support personnel or equipment supporting the local citizens.

In April 2011, just months after the 135th ESC returned from Afghanistan, 62 tornadoes swept through Alabama, killing hundreds and leaving thousands suddenly homeless. The 135th ESC, designated Joint

Task Force Vulcan, set up a logistics support area and multiple points of distribution throughout the state to distribute food, water, and tarps to storm victims.

The National Guard's contributions to the total force and expeditionary logistics have been a key enabler to the national military strategy. National Guard sustainment forces have proven to be critical in providing the capability and capacity needed to solidify enduring military operations in a number of volatile and unstable environments, both domestically and internationally. The integration of National Guard forces in individual and multicomponent collective training events and in combat operations as they conduct multi-echelon support has been the key to success for the Army in the 21st century and will continue to be in years to come.

Brig. Gen. Sylvester Cannon is the commanding general of 135th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary), Alabama National Guard, in Birmingham, Alabama, and the deputy commanding general, Army National Guard, Combined Arms Support Command, at Fort Lee, Virginia. He holds a bachelor degree in accounting from the University of Alabama and a master's in human resource management from Troy State University. He is a graduate of the Military Police Basic Course, Quartermaster Advance Course, Combined Arms and Service Staff School, Command and General Staff College, and the Army War College.

Col. Steven G. Shepherd is the chief of staff for the 135th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary), Alabama National Guard. He holds a master's degree in strategic studies from the Army War College, a juris doctorate degree from Birmingham School of Law, and a bachelor's degree in history from the University of Alabama-Birmingham. He is a graduate of the Armor Officer Basic Course, the Quartermaster Officer Advanced Course, and the Combined Arms and Services Staff School.