

Not Just Doing Logistics:

LTF 530 in Support of TF Dagger

by Kenneth Finlayson

FOLLOWING the 11 September 2001 terrorist attack that destroyed the World Trade Center, the United States targeted the Islamic-fundamentalist *Taliban* regime in Afghanistan which had taken over the country and provided support and refuge to the *al-Qaeda* terrorists. Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) spearheaded the ground campaign of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) that began in November 2001 and, by May 2002, drove the *Taliban* from power. Joint Special Operations Task Force-North (JSOTF-North) known as Task Force Dagger (TF Dagger) was formed around the 5th Special Forces Group (SFG) to conduct the campaign in the northern half of Afghanistan.¹ The logistical support to TF Dagger was provided by Logistics Task Force 530 (LTF 530). The focus of this article is the preparation and execution of the logistical support mission for TF Dagger as performed by the men and women of LTF 530.

The American forces could not stage directly into Afghanistan to begin operations against the *Taliban*. For the conduct of combat operations in the north, the U.S. forces established Camp Stronghold Freedom at the Karshi-Kanabad Air Base in Uzbekistan. Known as K2, the airfield became the operational and logistics center for TF Dagger beginning with the arrival of the advanced echelon (ADVON) on 6 October 2001.² K2, just across the northern Afghan border, quickly grew as troops and equipment flowed in.

Logistical support to ARSOF units within the U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) was the responsibility of the 528th Special Operations Support Battalion (SOSB).³ A Company, 528th SOSB, commanded by

Captain Christopher Mohan, established the initial base and logistics operations at K2 and supported the build-up of forces in October and November. The long-range plan for support operations called for the deployment of the logistics task force into K2 to take over operations from the 528th, and to be prepared to move into Afghanistan to provide logistical support to JSOTF-North in the northern half of the country. The deployment of the logisticians began on 15 November 2001, and as LTF personnel arrived, they assumed the K2 mission.

Lieutenant Colonel Edward F. Dorman commanded LTF 530, which was task organized from assets of the 530th Supply and Services Battalion (S&S), of the 507th Corps Support Group (CSG), in the 1st Corps Support Command (COSCOM) at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. From the 530th S&S came the 530th Headquarters and Supply Company (HSC) commanded by Captain Mathew Hamilton. The 58th Maintenance Company (General Support), 7th Transportation Battalion, 507th CSG led by Captain Judy Anthony formed the other half of the task force. The two companies, with augmentation, provided the entire range of logistical support.

Headquarters and Support Company's mission was to provide for the reception and distribution of most of the basic classes of Army supply: Class I (subsistence/rations), Class II (clothing and equipment), Class III (petroleum products), Class IV (construction materials), Class V (ammunition), Class VI (personal demand items such as toiletries), Class VII (major end items such as vehicles and weapons), Class VIII (medical supplies), and Class IX (repair parts). The production and distribution of potable



TF Dagger
symbol



528th Support
Battalion DUI



1st COSCOM
SSI



530th Support
Battalion DUI



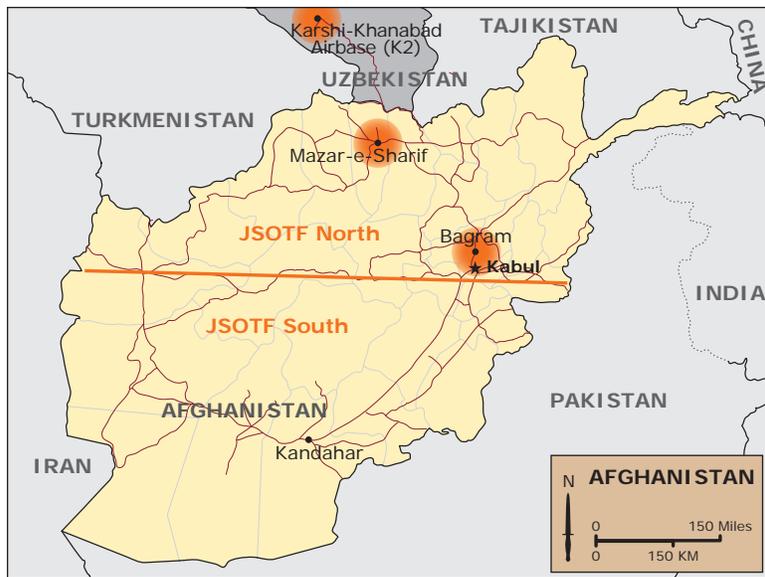
7th
Transportation
Battalion DUI



92nd Engineer
Battalion DUI



10th Mountain
Division SSI



LTF 530 deployed in support of Task Force Dagger. Initially based in Uzbekistan, the LTF eventually provided logistical support from three locations.

water and provision of general support services such as billeting, food service, laundry and bath facilities, and sanitation were also part of the company mission. The 530th HSC ran the Airfield Departure and Arrival Control Group (ADACG) that coordinated the flights in and out of K2 as well as managed the Humanitarian Assistance (HA) commodities flowing in.⁴ HSC had seventy-nine soldiers to accomplish these many and varied tasks.⁵ In a simplistic way, HSC took care of the troops on the ground while the 58th Maintenance Company took care of the equipment.

The maintenance and repair capability of the 58th encompassed wheeled vehicles, radio and communications security equipment, night vision equipment, power generators and equipment, welding and fabric repair specialists, and food service personnel. The fifty people of the 58th were augmented by a composite maintenance support team of twenty personnel that provided repair



The "Log-Ness Monster" on Lake Uzbek, K2.

capability for heavy engineer equipment, small arms repair, tracked vehicles, and other items not covered by the 58th.⁶ As is usual with logistics units, there were just a few personnel to cover each specialty area. When the task force assumed responsibility for the supply support activity (SSA) at K2, the 174 members of the LTF were stretched even more because the population at the air base continued to grow.

K2 was the intermediate staging base (ISB) for TF Dagger operations into Afghanistan. As more and more ARSOF troops were inserted into the country, it became apparent that TF Dagger would soon need to deploy forward into Afghanistan to continue to prosecute the war against the *Taliban*. By 15 November 2001, American Special Forces troops with their Afghan allies had joined with the British Royal Marines at the Afghan city of Bagram. The TF Dagger commander, Colonel John F. Mulholland Jr. directed LTC Dorman to do a site assessment of the former Soviet air base at Bagram as a potential site for TF Dagger in country. Accompanied by a team of engi-



LTF 530 established the Supply Support Activity (SSA) at K2, Uzbekistan and at Bagram and Mazar-e-Sharif in Afghanistan. The SSA at Bagram supported the operations of TF Dagger with all classes of supply and services.



Refueling point for vehicles established by the LTF at Bagram. Refueling of vehicles and aircraft was a major mission of the LTF.

neers, maintenance specialists, and airfield repair personnel, Dorman went to Bagram, twenty-five miles north of Kabul. By the end of December 2001, the LTF assets split between K2 and Bagram, and were providing base operations support for the growing K2 operation and establishing a new logistics hub at the Bagram airfield.⁷ The move to Bagram caused a quantum increase in mission for the LTF.

The arrival of tactical units expanded the mission of the task force beyond just “doing logistics.” It meant that the task force was charged with the entire reception and support mission in northern Afghanistan. This included running the airfield operations, providing medical support for all personnel, maintaining the proper level of force protection, as well as providing the facilities for housing and feeding the Coalition troops. A growing population of enemy detainees demanded the construction and manning of a proper detention facility. Much of the work on the base was accomplished with local labor procured through contracts negotiated by contract officers from the task force. Personnel and finance operations for the troops moving through Bagram were also part of the mission. Included in this complex operation was working with the different Coalition nations—especially in airfield operations and de-mining around the base.

First Lieutenant John V. Rios was the Airfield Arrival Departure Control Group (ADACG) platoon leader: “My primary mission was to run the ADACG and be the liaison between the Air Force TALCE (Tanker Airlift Control Element) and the Army. We would help prepare packages for shipment on fixed wing aircraft, like the C-130s and C-17s. We also set up sling-load operations and prepared a Class I, III, and V issue point to support Operation ANACONDA.”⁸ Rios and his platoon had initially run the busy ADCAG at K2. He left personnel in Uzbekistan to continue that mission.

The airfield at Bagram soon began to receive an



A huge Russian Antonov An-124 aircraft and a U.S. C-130 on the airfield at Bagram in 2001. The chartered Antonov was the largest mass-produced aircraft in the world.



An MH-47E of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment. The Night Stalkers moved their operations to Bagram from K2, supported by LTF 530.



The communications center at Bagram. Communications were a vital part of the logistics support operations.



An Iranian Il-76 at Bagram. The chartered Soviet-made Il-76 delivered cargo and personnel for the Coalition.

increasingly heavy volume of air traffic. U.S. Air Force cargo aircraft, special operations helicopters of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR), and contract aircraft including the giant Antonov An-124 all started arriving at Bagram. The poor condition of the huge airfield at Bagram presented Rios and his team another challenge. Large sections of the runway had to be replaced. That mission was handled jointly by British and American troops under the direction of the LTF.

Runway repair is a major engineering project. The 10,000-foot runway at Bagram was built by the Soviet Union in 1976 and was one of the largest airfields in the country. British and American engineers worked to repair the most heavily damaged sections while flight operations continued around them. Working with their British counterparts, the American engineers dug up the broken slabs, cut them into sections using special con-

crete saws, and poured new concrete for the runway. Later the task force received additional help. In August 2002, a special Air Force runway repair team, the 200th/201st Expeditionary Red Horse Squadron came in. The Red Horse team replaced over 2,500 of the 11,000 11-foot by 13-foot concrete slabs on the runway.⁹ The bomb-cratered and damaged runway was just one reminder of the 10-year war between the Soviet Union and the *Mujahideen*. Throughout the area, extensive mine fields needed to be cleared. This was a daily mission for the Task Force and Coalition allies.

The proliferation of mines in and around Bagram made it imperative to clear every piece of ground prior to use. As the number of troops at the base increased, more and more cleared land was required to house and support the growing population. Mechanical mine-clearing equipment from three nations worked in unison under a plan developed and supervised by the LTF to clear and “certify” the ground as safe for habitation. Three types of mine-clearing equipment, “Aardvarks,” “Mini-flails,” and “MCABS” were used in this multi-national effort to clear mines.

The “Aardvark” was a large mine-clearing flail brought by the Norwegian contingent. The “mini-flail” was operated by the Jordanians and the MCAB (D9 Mobile Com-



The U.S. Air Force's Red Horse Squadron arrived in August 2002. The Red Horse Squadrons specialized in runway repair.



The removal of broken concrete slabs was the first step to repairing the damaged runway.



Special concrete saws were used by the engineers to cut the broken slabs into sections before removal.



Extensive excavation was required before new runway slabs could be poured. The landing of heavy cargo aircraft necessitated a major runway repair effort at Bagram.



The Aardvark mine-clearing vehicle used a chain-flail system to detonate the mines. It was operated in Bagram by the Norwegian contingent.



An effective mine-clearing device, the Aardvark was used extensively to prepare the area for occupation.



A smaller, remote-controlled mine-clearing vehicle, the Mini-flail, was operated by the Jordanians at Bagram.



The D9 Mobile Combat Armored Bulldozer was the primary mine-clearing vehicle in use by the 92nd Engineer Battalion.

bat Armored Bulldozer) was operated by members the 92nd Engineer Battalion (the Black Diamonds). The hollow “boom” of exploding mines became a daily feature of life at Bagram Airbase. Monitoring the areas of the base that were being cleared and identifying the newly demined terrain was a constant focus for the operations center of the LTF. The LTF Operations Center maintained a situation map of demining operations that was continuously updated. Safe lanes for foot and vehicle traffic were marked out and the destruction of unexploded ordnance by EOD (Explosive Ordnance Destruction) personnel attached to the LTF occurred daily. With more cargo coming in on the repaired runway and more acreage safely de-mined and usable, the LTF was able to gradually accommodate the ever-increasing troop population.

First Lieutenant Michael Kukiela began the deployment as the Fuel and Water platoon leader at K2. In December, he moved to Bagram as the Forward Logistics Element (FLE) commander to act as the ADVON for



Refueling vehicles in the early morning hours at Bagram. The litter of discarded Soviet equipment is visible through the ground fog.

the main body of the task force. Initially providing support to the troops of the 10th Mountain Division, Kukiela witnessed the build-up of ARSOF elements, Air Force personnel, and Coalition elements as they flowed into the base. "All the lieutenants had about four or five jobs. My people were stretched very thin and equipment was spread all over the theater. That led to maintenance issues. All the soldiers down to the lowest rank had to think like leaders and do what was needed to support the frontline fighters. At one point, I had troops at K2, Bagram, and Mazar-e-Sharif."¹⁰ Providing for fuel and water and the other classes of supply often meant local procurement of these items, which brought its own issues—politically and in terms of quality. "We had a guy who transported water in a truck that I swear was used in World War II. It had so many holes in it that I think it lost more water that it transported. He was never on time and my guys didn't like him much. However, he was related to the local warlord so he stayed employed," recalled Kukiela.¹¹ Dealing with the local population was a daily necessity for some members of the Task Force.

Master Sergeant Patricio Cardona was a platoon sergeant and the maintenance control supervisor of the 58th Maintenance Company. In addition to his regular duties, he dealt with the local populace as the unit contracting officer. "I was a Field Ordering Officer and had to ensure the acquisition of the proper items needed for the soldiers and the Airbase. This gave me a lot of interaction with the local population."¹² Taking on the onerous job of contracting officer was one way that Cardona ensured his people had what they needed. "We did not have enough resources or people, so I volunteered to become a Field Ordering Officer for ARCENT [Army Central Command, the Army component command of Central Command]. My biggest challenge was to manage all of my combat tasks with



Contracting Officers of the LTF were in daily contact with the local population. Many of the supplies and services provided by the LTF were obtained locally.

the amount of people assigned to me and to get them to slow down their pace of work for safety reasons."¹³ Working with the local population extended to the delivery of Humanitarian Assistance (HA) items.

First Lieutenant Valencia de la Vega, the Adjutant (S-1) of the 530th S&S Battalion, became the LTF S-1. Always a multi-faceted job, de la Vega found herself working personnel and finance issues, supervising mortuary affairs and orchestrating the visits of foreign dignitaries, which included Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld as well as local leaders.¹⁴ "I worked with the local population when trying to source materials and services we needed and I helped package and deliver the school supplies we gave to the local schools."¹⁵ The delivery of HA supplies was an additional LTF task. The mission expanded further when the LTF was directed to establish a Forward Support Base (FSB) in the key city of Mazar-e-Sharif to support the growing Coalition presence there.



Fuel to support operations was contracted and trucked from Pakistan.



Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Brigadier General Gary L. Harrell, U.S. Central Command, visit Bagram Airfield.



Specialist Jason A. Disney distributing Humanitarian Assistance items to the local population in Bagram.



The troop barracks at Bagram. The living conditions at Bagram were more spartan than those at K2.

Mazar-e-Sharif was critical to the flow of humanitarian aid and logistical supplies. The airfield was a focal point for supplies coming into the country. The city was the terminus of the main truck route for supplies from Uzbekistan. First Lieutenant John Rios sent a three-man team from his ADACG at Bagram to help run the airfield, stretching his assets even more.¹⁶ In November 2001, JSOTF-North sent a Civil Affairs team to Mazar-e-Sharif to coordinate the humanitarian assistance program for the Coalition. The Jordanians established a major hospital there and supplies started to flow in. In the early months of 2002, Mazar-e-Sharif became the center of a huge humanitarian assistance effort that ultimately provided over 700 tons of red wheat and winter clothing and toys for the local children.¹⁷ The establishment of the FLE at Mazar-e-Sharif expanded LTF service to three distinct locations, and was done basically “out of hide.”

As the Headquarters and Supply Company commander of the LTF, Captain Mathew Hamilton was keenly aware of the impact that operating at multiple

locations had on his troops. “At K2, the Force Provider Module [self-contained modular living quarters with heat/air conditioning, lights, and running water] made for pretty good living conditions by soldier standards. Of course, actually emplacing the module is where all the work is. At Bagram, living conditions were pretty austere. We occupied existing structures and a few GP Medium tents.”¹⁸ For the troops at Bagram, “living conditions were harsh at the beginning, but once supplies started to come in, we made that place our home,” commented Master Sergeant Patricio Cardona.¹⁹ Specialist Fourth Class Felix L. Morales remembered that with time, things improved. “Living conditions were bad, but with a good attitude, little by little quarters improved. Food improved as well as the showers. In the beginning, it was a two-mile walk to take a shower.”²⁰ The initial shortages of material things gradually improved over time. However, more logisticians were not forthcoming. The priority for personnel was combat troops.

From the beginning of the deployment, LTF 530



LTF 530 established a Supply Support Activity at the airfield in Mazar-e-Sharif. The LTF conducted logistics operations in three distinct locations in support of TF Dagger.



Troop billeting and support operations in Bagram could only be established after the area was cleared of mines and unexploded ordnance.

functioned with tightly constrained numbers of personnel. “The word ‘troop cap’ was in everybody’s vocabulary at the time,” noted Captain Mathew Hamilton. “Part of the agreement between the [United States] and Uzbekistan involved limiting the number of U.S. personnel on the base [at K2]. And, historically in ‘troop cap’ operations, logistics units were subjected to economy of force decisions to provide for higher numbers of maneuver forces.”²¹ From the initial deployment to K2 through the establishment of the FSBs at Bagram and Mazar-e-Sharif, it was the classic “cart before the horse” scenario; logistics troops were trailing the “gunfighters” in the flow of forces into theater. Despite the lack of a robust logistics force, LTF 530 provided extensive base operations support, supplied the full range of logistics services, and supported major tactical operations like Operation ANACONDA from multiple sites in two countries. As summed up by Captain John Rios, “I think LTF 530 was successful and made a name as a result of Task Force Dagger being able to do their mission with no worries about support. When a maneuver unit has to worry about support, then that supporting unit has failed. We did not fail.”²² ♣

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Endnotes

- 1 The Army special operations campaign in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM is documented in *Weapon of Choice: ARSOF in Afghanistan* published by the USASOC History Office and available through the Government Printing Office (ISBN 0-16-072958-0) and Paladin Press, Boulder, Colorado. (ISBN 10: 1-58160-510-2).
- 2 Charles H. Briscoe, ed. *Weapon of Choice: ARSOF in Afghanistan*, (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2003), 64–66.
- 3 The 528th SOSB (Airborne) was inactivated on 2 December 2005. ARSOF support is the responsibility of the Sustainment Brigade (Special Operations) (Airborne) that was activated on the same day.
- 4 Major Mathew T. Hamilton, Headquarters and Supply Company, LTF 530, interview questionnaire to Dr. Kenneth Finlayson, 10 April 2007, Fort Bragg, NC, copy, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 5 507th Deployment Task Organization and Timeline briefing, October 2001, page 8, copy, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 6 507th Deployment Task Organization and Timeline briefing, page 11.
- 7 Colonel Edward F. Dorman III, Sustainment Brigade (Special Operations) (A), interview by Dr. Kenneth Finlayson, 22 March 2007, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 8 First Lieutenant John V. Rios, 530th Combat Support Battalion, interview by Dr. Kenneth Finlayson, 28 April 2007, Fort Bragg, NC, copy, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 9 Red Horse stands for Rapid Engineer Deployable Heavy Operational Repair Squadron Engineers, a self-contained unit of 560 Air Force personnel who specialize in runway repair and civil construction providing billets and facilities for Air Force personnel on deployment. <http://www.afa.org/magazine/feb2003/0203redhorse.asp>.
- 10 First Lieutenant Michael Kukiela, 507th Corps Support Group, interview by Dr. Kenneth Finlayson, 19 April 2007, Fort Bragg, NC, copy, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 11 Kukiela interview, 19 April 2007.
- 12 Master Sergeant Patricio Cardona, 58th Maintenance Company, interview by Dr. Kenneth Finlayson, 5 April 2007, Fort Bragg, NC, copy, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 13 Cardona interview, 5 April 2007.
- 14 First Lieutenant Valencia de la Vega, 530th Supply and Service Battalion, interview by Dr. Kenneth Finlayson, 19 April 2007, Fort Bragg, NC, copy, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 15 De la Vega interview, 19 April 2007.
- 16 Rios interview, 28 April 2007.
- 17 Briscoe, *Weapon of Choice: ARSOF in Afghanistan*, 150–51.
- 18 Hamilton interview, 10 April 2007.
- 19 Cardona interview, 5 April 2007.
- 20 Staff Sergeant Felix F. Morales, 530th Supply and Service Battalion, interview by Dr. Kenneth Finlayson, 4 April 2007, Fort Bragg, NC, copy, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 21 Hamilton interview, 10 April 2007.
- 22 Rios interview, 28 April 2007.

