PREPARED TO DEPLOY 1st Special Forces Group Service Support Company's Water Purification Specialists conduct a training exercise on the Tactical Water Purification System. *U.S. Army photo.*

1ST SPECIAL FORCES GROUP SUPPORT BATTALION: Enabling and Sustaining an Uncertain Future

BY LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOSEPH R. KURZ, MAJOR MICHAEL G. MOUROUZIS AND MAJOR CHRISTOPHER S. JONES

Imagine, less than 20 days ago, guerrilla forces in a small nation-state in the western sub-region of the Pacific Ocean desperately invited U.S. military assistance to force the ouster of a controlling political regime that threatens the free global economic trade through the nearby shipping channels. In fulfillment of an execution order supporting the U.S. Pacific Command Commander's flexible deterrence options, Commander, Special Operations Command–Pacific directed the immediate and rapid deployment of the 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) to a classified cooperative security location adjacent to a denied area to conduct activities directly partnered with the guerrillas. Lead elements of the 1st SFG(A) are enroute to immediately establish a Special Forces operating base and form the core element of a combined/joint special operations task force. The advance party from 1st SFG(A) consists primarily of the Group Support Battalion Headquarters with multiple expeditionary combat support and combat service support capability sets designed and resourced to deploy to an austere environment and establish the temporary staging base required to sustain the CJSOTF-led special operations, actions and activities. Until the theater adequately matures as planned in Phase II of the operations plan, the GSB has sole responsibility for integrating supplies and services provided by existing sustainment organizations stationed in Hawaii and Japan as part of a developed comprehensive concept of support to directly enable and sustain all special warfare and surgical strike missions throughout Phase I.

Although a fictitious state of affairs, the expeditionary and lodgment requirements described above are not much different from the conditions resembling those that 5th SFG(A) experienced in Karshi-Khanabad, Uzbekistan while preparing for the invasion into Afghanistan in October 2001.[1] However, there is one significant difference in terms of supporting capability. In 2001, Special Forces groups did not have organic support battalions as SFGs do today. When 5th SFG(A) launched from K2, the task force relied on a supporting, composite logistics task force gained through the request for forces process under Global Force Management. The ad-hoc LTF consisted of the headquarters and one support company from the 530th Supply and Service Battalion and one maintenance company from the 7th Transportation Battalion, all from the 1st Corps Support Command superimposed above a single SOF Support Company, Company A, 528th Special Operations Support Battalion.[2]

Today, groups avoid the lengthy, bureaucracy associated with the RFF process to gain dedicated support, thanks to significantly more enabling and sustaining power with organic GSBs. For the 1st Special Forces Group Support Battalion, the conjured scenario is not just a possibility. It is rather, a situation considered the impetus for realistic training and maintaining the highest possible readiness posture in order to respond immediately when emergencies occur — whether a national crisis in an uncertain environment or humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts in the PACOM area of responsibility. Authorized quantities of enabler and support assets have grown remarkably since 2005 and proportionately, so too the quality of the supporting efforts.

ALL SYSTEMS GO A 1st SFG(A) Tactical Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Systems Soldier conducts a preflight inspection of the RQ-7B Shadow. *U.S. Army photo by SFC Charles Gaither.*

The 1st GSB mission is unchanged from providing rapidly deployable logistics, medical, administrative, communication, chemical, all-source intelligence support and advanced Special Forces operations training to the 1st SFG(A). However, what is new is an emphasis on getting back to basics and training against a holistic approach to support with an expeditionary mindset. The 1st GSB divides its efforts along three lines of operations. The first LOO, and top priority, is obviously providing direct support to the group headquarters and SF line battalions in order of forces deploying to combat operations, forces participating in exercises and then home station training. The second LOO, also not surprisingly, is routine garrison support in maintaining the highest possible readiness posture for the 1st SFG(A). The third LOO, Mission Essential Task List-related training and leader development is, however, the extra effort beyond simply what the group headquarters and SF line battalion requests of the 1st GSB.

Support for the 1st SFG(A) has never been better largely because resourcing has never been stronger. Not only has the GSB grown in structure, but in 1st SFG(A), the GSB continues growing daily by building competencies and relevancy through providing world-class logistics support to the group headquarters and four SF battalions. With 1st SFG(A) elements steadily deployed to Operation Enduring Freedom-Afghanistan, Operation Enduring-Philippines and more than 52 joint combined exchange training missions to more than 18 Asia-Pacific countries over the past year, for which, the 1st GSB deployed 310 Soldiers (more than half of the battalion) in various combinations in supporting efforts. 1st GSB Soldiers participated in a high volume of small team training events. Exercises including Key Resolve/Foal Eagle, Ulchi Freedom Guardian, Talisman Saber 2013, Ellipse Charlie, Balkatan and Cobra Gold, just to name a few, created tremendous opportunities for support Soldiers to gain experience and hone skills in a manner seldom realistically replicated in garrison environments. The real value comes in subsequently reinvesting those gained experiences and skills back into home-station training to prepare for future operations and exercises.

Generating Sustainment

Adequately generating sustainment for the 1st SFG(A) starts with getting back to training basics. Through a command vision centered on an overall strategy for improvement, the 1st GSB initiated a careful self-assessment, starting with a key-leader planning conference that developed a METL at battalion and company levels. The 1st GSB recently returned to conducting quarterly training briefings of unit training plans based on a careful self-assessment and the collective tasks determined by the key-leaders, then followed with published quarterly training guidance. From that training guidance, the GSB adopted the standard Army 8-Step Training Model for managing unit training with specific guidance to implement "Sergeant's Time" training. Although not necessarily initiatives, these Army basics each rescinded from the GSB over time, having fallen victim to a rigorous operations tempo. Bringing these basics back to the ranks proved beneficial allowing the battalion to make initiatives that do matter.

Enhancing the 1st GSB's ability to generate sustainment, 1st GSB units developed and increased special operations forces–conventional forces interoperability. The 1st GSB Support Operations section fostered relationships with adjacent units and installation-managed supporting organizations and agencies by regularly attending the I Corps G4 Transportation Synchronization meeting. The SPO increased operational planning and coordination with the 593rd Sustainment Brigade at JBLM, and participated in semiannual events such as the I Corps G4 Logistics Conference resulting in increased interoperability with CF capabilities that contributed to local OEF-A pre-mission training events and theater security cooperation program deployments. The battalion also reestablished a collaborative training relationship with 4th Battalion, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment with multiple iterations on establishing forward arming and refueling points. Recognizing that the PACOM area of responsibility contains more than 50 percent of the Earth's surface, and 70 percent of that is water, the 1st GSB implemented a quarterly water-purification training program for the first time in the seven-year history of the battalion.

The SPO, in a combined effort with the group S4, developed and implemented a group-level material readiness review and weekly production snapshot to capture logistics commodity production and analyze trends to predict shortfalls to group operational support. Maintenance technicians from each battalion, and the sustainment technicians from each of the GSB direct support commodity shops, developed the MRR to improve the management of support and ultimately maintain the group at the highest possible readiness posture. The logistics leaders across 1st SFG(A) conduct a working iteration of this meeting monthly for coordination and collaboration with battalion executive officers as the principle audience, followed by a quarterly executive iteration prepared for battalion commanders to increase the overall command emphasis on readiness. Newly developed information management systems now track data previously unrecorded. Key performance indicators now allow 1st SFG(A) to monitor commodity shop production allowing for increased response time to drops in performance. One example of this added benefit to the group was when the SPO corrected a problem with the group's supply support activity that failed to send requisitions via the file transfer protocol. The resulting fix shortened the customer wait time for Class IX repair parts by two weeks.

Rapidly Establishing an Operating Base in an Uncertain Environment

Over the past year, the 1st GSB has renewed its command emphasis on ensuring the unit can perform its mission essential tasks consistent with the battalion's doctrinal design and resourcing. This includes striving to maintain readiness toward establishing an SFOB in an austere environment in response to national emergencies or crisis in the AOR, and if requested, providing tailored capability packages that respond to natural disasters and humanitarian-assistance efforts. One particular 1st GSB initiative proved to matter a great deal in terms of educating the group on the relevancy of the GSB and its contributions. The GSB conducted a capabilities exposition that provided leaders across the group including all battalion command teams, company command teams, SFODB and SFODA key leaders, with an overview of the GSB mission, structure and capabilities available to enable and sustain SOF training and operations.

Practicing the 1st GSB's requirement to establish an SFOB and conduct reception, staging, onward movement and integration activities, the produced two concepts. First, the SPO developed an intermediate-staging base support plan supporting two Task Force Sulu Relief-in-Place deployments in support of OEF-P. By recognizing a gap in support to the deployment of advanced operating bases during planned rest-over-night locations into and from the JSOTF-P, the GSB provided lodging, transportation, administrative support to operators of multiple ODBs at locations without troop deployment infrastructure in place specific to deployment/redeployment operations. As a result, the deployment and redeployment of these ODBs proved successful and ensured accurate personnel and equipment accountability. The second concept toward increasing RSO&I competencies arrived in the associated tasks in preparing the 1st SFG(A) for participation in TS13, for which the SPO planned, coordinated and synchronized the marshalling and deployment of personnel and equipment to Australia. One particular factor of coordination that proved vital to deployment was bringing a bio-inspection team from the Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash. Working in a collaborative effort led by the SPO Team, along with representatives from the 1st SFG staff, and several JBLM garrison elements, all made the marshalling process and projection a success. Because of the thorough planning efforts, 1st SFG(A) completed the DAFF Bio-Inspection two days ahead of schedule, and smoothly shipped a total of 15 20-foot containers and seven trailer-mounted generators. All combined, amounting to more than 133 short tons of equipment and supplies. The result on arrival at the aerial port of debarkation, the Port of Brisbane, Australia, was that 1st SFG(A) sat postured for Phase III operations and a successful exercise with key systems fully prepared and awaiting follow-on transportation.

Leveraging Reinforcing Sustainment Providers

To increase SOF support mechanisms and synchronization within U.S. Army Special Operations Command and the three theater special operations commands that 1st SFG(A) has forces apportioned to, the SPO aggressively pursued multiple venues to engage the 528th Sustainment Brigade, U.S. Army Special Forces Command G4, SOCPAC SOJ4 and Special Operations Command–Korea J4 along with the ARSOF Liaison Element-Korea in support of 1st SFG(A) objectives. Through establishing routine secure video-teleconferences and attending conferences the battalion enhanced support to TSCP events, JCS exercise Key Resolve/Foal Eagle 13 and improved contingency planning at log conferences to refine plans, including OPLAN 5027, that were not updated since 2010. The SPO also established and executed a weekly 1st SFG Logistics Synchronization meeting with SF line battalion S4s and service detachment representatives. The addition of a group transportation warrant officer effectively shortened the distance between operational requirements development and subsequent support execution. The battalion increased its rapid-deployment capability by ensuring that Transportation Coordinator's Automated Information for Movement System II deployment data matched Property Book Unit Supply Enhanced property data, which

proved a vital task that had never occurred in the history of the company. By shifting the focus for support planning within 1st SFG(A) to focus on long-term planning horizons (beyond 180 days) the SPO developed a logistics common operating picture greatly increasing and reducing overall customer wait-time.

Enabling the Elimination of the Uncertainty

Unlike a decade ago, two new capabilities within the GSB, a chemical reconnaissance detachment and a tactical unmanned aerial vehicle platoon, are enabling the elimination of uncertainty in conducting special warfare or surgical strike activities. During pre-mission training at the Yakima Training Center in preparation for 2nd Battalion,1 SFG(A)'s combat rotation to OEF-Afghanistan, the TUAS platoon successfully integrated with ground-force commanders by providing 24-hour, near real-time intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance coverage. The TUAV platoon deployed for more than 30-days in which they flew more than 140 flight hours during 39 sorties all while achieving the highest readiness level for all operators and maintenance personnel, setting a platoon training record and the first-ever integration at the SOTF level.

The 112th Chemical Reconnaissance Detachment embedded with ODA-1335 during Vector Balance Canoe 12-1 to conduct CBRN-specific foreign internal defense with Cambodian CBRN forces — the first FID mission in PACOM for the 112th CRD. To focus on their primary METL task of site exploitation, the CRD conducted several training events in their Exploitation Analysis Center, met with the Washington State Highway Patrol to conduct interoperability training in the Seattle Crime Lab, and completed interdependence training with the Explosive Ordinance Disposal to receive updates on the most recent enemy tactics, techniques and procedures in Afghanistan. Additionally, the CRD met with CBRN personnel from the British Royal Air Force and discussed the challenges of basic site-exploitation and latent fingerprinting to help the RAF reorganize their forensic and CBRN units next year. The CRD also conducted a site visit with the Nuclear Disarmament Team in Oakridge, Tenn., to assess future training opportunities with the 20th Support Command on disablement operations and counter radiological/nuclear threats for combating weapons of mass destructions missions. The battalion significantly enhanced routine training with these events, often at no cost to the battalion, and allowed each unit to share new TTPs and gain different ways to conduct their primary missions thereby again, reinvesting into 1st SFG(A) operations. In coordination with their METL development, the CRD developed CBRN reconnaissance training that included a 36-hour reconnaissance at night in difficult weather and terrain where the detachment leadership assessed each chemical detachment team and tested their reconnaissance equipment.

1st GSB Way Ahead in PACOM

The 1st SFG(A) and its GSB, already function at the foremost edge of emerging U.S. Department of Defense strategy. "While the U.S. military will continue to contribute to security globally, we will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region … The maintenance of peace, stability, the free flow of commerce and of U.S. influence in this dynamic region will depend in part on an underlying balance of military capability and presence."[3] Even as the Army departs OEF-A and refocuses, or orients forces to the PACOM AOR, it does so in a budding manner behind the mature activities, actions and operations that 1st SFG has been conducting in the PACOM AOR without interruption since September 1984.[4] As the 1st SFG(A) remains the largest maneuver force immediately available to the PACOM Commander and supports the objectives for both the SOCKOR and SOCPAC commanding generals, the 1st GSB looks ahead in building upon the requisite capabilities for enabling and sustaining an ARSOF presence. Now, more than ever, the 1st SFG GSB is instrumental in ensuring the group remains positioned for responding to crisis and able to be the strategic force in defeating the anti-access or aerial denial strategy employed by our adversaries. The 1st SFG(A) GSB must prove itself every bit as important as our operators, when it comes to actually delivering on promises when we speak of special warfare and long-duration operations in an immature or hostile theater in the PACOM AOR. In the next 12 months, the 1st GSB will expand on the bare base configuration lessons learned from JCS exercise TS13. In the traditional sense of the "crawl-walk-run" progressive methodology for training, TS13 served as a foundational proof of concept for establishing a bare base SFOB. In November 2013, 1st GSB deployed its expeditionary CS and CSS capabilities to YTC for a week-long unit training event for the further advancement of the capabilities as a rehearsal to the next true test. The 1st GSB is developing plans for participating in the forward establishment of an SFOB for the group headquarters overseas in the Korean Theater of Operations during combined/joint exercise KR/FE 14 to exercise its role in unconventional warfare, FID and counterterrorism in support of PACOM operational plans.

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Conclusion

In seven years since inception, organic GSBs in USASFC (A) have matured significantly in enabling the group's increased special warfare contribution to the TSOCs helping make SFGs the combatant commander's land force of choice during continuous Phase Zero operations and potentially, on through to phase III. In the PACOM AOR, it is the requirement of the 1st GSB, to be prepared to rapidly establish and expand an operating base in an austere and uncertain environment, generate sustainment and leverage existing reinforcing joint theater sustainment providers to extend operational reach and prevent culmination, and enable the elimination of uncertainty. Through direct supporting CS, and CSS capability sets, along with realistic mission essential training events, the 1st GSB proves itself a game-changer to enable ARSOF to conduct special warfare and surgical strike. ***SW***

Notes

1. Wright, Donald P, et al., }A Different Kind Of War: The United States Army In Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)", October 2001-September 2005 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, U.S. Army Combined Arms Center), 59-60.
2. Ibid., 61
3. U.S. Department of Defense, Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense, January 2012 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense), 2.
4. The U.S. Army Center of Military History Website, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) Lineage and Honors, accessed 19 July 2013: http://www.history.army.mil/html/forcestruc/lineages/branches/sf/001sfgp1sf.htm

JUST THE RIGHT TOUCH A Chemical Reconnaissance Detachment Soldier instructs ROK CBRN soldiers on latent fingerprint lifting techniques at Exercise Key Resolve/Foal Eagle in the Republic of Korea. *U.S. Army photo by SFC Matt Henson.*

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Lieutenant Colonel Joseph R. Kurz *is the Commander, Group Support Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne). He was commissioned a second lieutenant, Armor, through the Reserve Officers Training Corps at the University of Central Florida in 1995. From 2004 through 2009, he served in several ARSOF assignments including support operations officer in the Special Operations Sustainment Brigade and later, in 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) as the Group S4 and 3rd Group Support Battalion executive officer. He has deployed in support of Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freecom including duty as the J4 Director of Logistics for Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan. He most recently served as the J5, Chief of Strategic Plans, Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan. Lt. Col. Kurz earned a bachelor's n public administration from University of Central Florida, a master's in logistics management from the Florida Institute of Technology and a master's in military art and science from the School of Advanced Military Studies, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College.*

Major Christopher S. Jones *is the Support Operations Officer, Headquarters, Group Support Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne). Maj.Jones was commissioned a second lieutenant, Infantry, through the Reserve Officers Training Corps at the University of Arizona in 2000. Under the branch detail program, he transferred to the Quartermaster Branch, and from 2005 through 2008, he served in 1st Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) in Stuttgart, Germany, as the battalion S4, later, Commander, Service Detachment, and later, Commander, Headquarters and Support Company. During this assignment, he deployed twice to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. From 2008 through 2011, he served as a Brigade Support Battalion Support Operations Observer-Controller at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, Calif. In 2011, Maj. Jones joined the 1st Special Forces Group (A) as the Group S4 and subsequently deployed to the Republic of the Philippines in support of Operation Enduring Freedom with duty as the J4 Director of Logistics, for the Joint Special Operations Task Force – Philippines. Maj. Jones earned a bachelor's in sociology from the University of Arizona and is currently in the final stages of pursuing a master's in diplomacy and military studies from the Hawaii Pacific University.*