

Commanding a Modular Battalion

By Lieutenant Colonel Douglas A. LeVien, Major Robert B. Rochon, and Command Sergeant Major Herbert M. Hill

Units from the 593d Special Troops Battalion (STB), 593d Sustainment Brigade, located at Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM), Washington, have been deployed for more than 1,500 consecutive days in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation New Dawn.

The 593d STB consists of the 112th Military Mail Terminal, the 9th Financial Management Company (FMCO), the 22d Human Resources Company (HRC), the 140th Movement Control Team (MCT), the 265th MCT, and the 593d Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC). These 6 units, totaling 750 Soldiers, are capable of deploying as 22 separate detachments ranging in size from a 5-Soldier personnel accountability team to a 276-Soldier sustainment brigade headquarters. These 22 detachments include postal plans and operations units, postal platoons, casualty liaison teams from the 22d HRC, and finance detachments from the 9th FMCO.

Since June 2010, the battalion has deployed 263 Soldiers from 15 separate detachments and redeployed 245 Soldiers from 13 separate detachments. The battalion currently has 5 units (just less than 200 Soldiers) deployed, and it is projected to deploy 4 additional units of less than 100 Soldiers during the next 6 months. At one time, the 22d HRC had Soldiers deployed to Afghanistan, Iraq, Kuwait, and Qatar. Because commanding HRCs and FMCOs is so challenging, they are commanded by majors instead of captains.

The STB's deployments and exercises have spanned simultaneously across three continents in the countries of Iraq, Kuwait, Afghanistan, Qatar, Australia, and Japan. Multiple deployments add difficulty and stress to a battalion's mission command, training requirements, families, family readiness groups (FRGs), and career progression. In addition to these deployments, the 593d STB still has the garrison support requirements of finance, postal service, and Soldier in-processing and out-processing in support of more than 38,000 Soldiers and family members at JBLM, the Army's third largest installation.

Short-Notice Deployment Preparedness

In addition to regular deployments and garrison support requirements, the 593d STB supports other short-notice deployable missions. The 22d HRC is responsible for supporting the global response force mission with a 21-Soldier postal platoon. The STB has mission command responsibilities for the 593d Sustainment Brigade's deployable sustainment task force, which supports disaster

relief efforts throughout North America. The 593d STB recently assumed the Ranger ready force mission supporting the 2d Ranger Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment.

These two missions are no-notice, "wheels up" deployments that occur within 18 to 96 hours of notification. They require key leaders to follow the military decision-making process and conduct emergency deployment readiness exercises and rock drills to ensure the readiness and proficiency of the unit and its ability to conduct the missions.

Post Office

The 593d STB established a military-run post office on 1 December 2011. This is one of only two all-military-run post offices in the Forces Command. The purpose of this post office is not only to provide postal support to Soldiers and family members on a growing installation but also to train Soldiers on postal operations. This training enhances the skills of the human resources specialist Soldiers within the STB and prepares them for future deployments.

Training

In order to support all the requirements both in garrison and while deployed, the 593d STB has an aggressive and deliberate training schedule. The battalion S-3 continually schedules human resources technical training at the Silver Scimitar exercise at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, or the Diamond Saber exercise at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, for finance Soldiers.

The S-3 office schedules and oversees tactical training and weapons qualification at JBLM. It also schedules and oversees convoy live-fire exercises, mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicle driver and egress training, training for drivers using night-vision devices, 9-line medevac training, and improvised explosive device recognition training at the Yakima Training Center (YTC) in Yakima, Washington.

The battalion conducts predeployment training at YTC quarterly. The greatest advantage to training at YTC is that it provides commanders with an opportunity to conduct tactical training without the day-to-day distractions associated with garrison operations. These training events receive full participation from all units and result in well-trained and confident Soldiers who are prepared to deploy for any contingency operation.

Using the eight-step training model and lessons learned from deployments to develop well-resourced and realistic home-station training has led to two Soldiers being rec-



A 593d Special Troops Battalion Soldier is greeted by family members at a redeployment ceremony.

ognized as distinguished honor graduates at the Henry H. Lind Noncommissioned Officer Academy Warrior Leader Course.

Manning

The current 593d STB modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) authorizes only one major as the battalion executive officer and one captain as the training officer-in-charge in the S-3. However, the battalion added an additional major to the S-3 shop to increase the shop's experience level, provide oversight of all training and missions, and meet the additional mission requirements resulting from the 57th Transportation Battalion's inactivation. The additional major has proven invaluable to the organization. The 593d STB recommends this as a permanent change to the MTOE; many other battalions throughout the Army have also added a major to their S-3 shops.

The 593d STB added an S-6 to support all tactical communications and typical battalion communication issues that quickly overwhelm the HHC communications shop. The battalion also added a battalion motor technician to enhance its ability to support the additional missions it adopted from the 57th Transportation Battalion. Lastly, to support its operating tempo, the battalion added a human resources officer and a financial manager to the battalion S-3 shop.

These additional officers allow the battalion to plan more realistic training that includes not only tactical training but also MOS-specific technical training. Such training

events provide the best of both worlds by including tactical and technical training in the same event. To support these training events, the STB added 4 platoon leaders and platoon sergeants to the 276-person HHC. These leaders are authorized on the brigade staff but conduct platoon leader and platoon sergeant duties on a full-time basis.

Lines of Communication

The transformation to a modular Army led these teams and detachments to deploy in a constant rotation. In nearly 4 years, the STB as a whole battalion has not been located in the same place, or even on the same continent, at any given time. The detachments' leaders have likely worked, either deployed or in garrison, for many different commands. Because of this lack of continuity, battalion leaders must work diligently with deployed leaders, FRGs, and rear detachment commanders.

One of the keys to success is the relationship the battalion staff has with the rear detachments and the forward deployed units. The battalion staff and the rear detachments schedule periodic teleconferences with all deployed units. These teleconferences allow the command team to identify issues early, before they grow into significant problems that will affect unit readiness.

Some of the topics discussed during teleconferences are property book issues, rest and relaxation issues, emergency leave, and future assignments of unit leaders and Soldiers. Many times the battalion staff has invited FRG leaders to discuss FRG topics.

Family Readiness

The FRGs within the 593d STB, for both deployed and garrison units, are very active. The FRGs have planned many events, including a Halloween costume fun run, a harvest festival, a barracks Super Bowl party, an Easter egg hunt, intramural sporting event tailgates, overnight spouse team-building events, and summer picnics on American Lake.

The FRGs not only plan social events but also focus on training family members and providing them with resources and life skills that will increase the readiness of the families. The STB incorporated its Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers representatives into FRG functions to ensure all Soldiers participate in social events. The aim for these events is to build cohesion, open lines of communication with the FRGs and unit leaders, develop relationships that are long lasting, and simply have fun, all of which directly support the battalion commander's leadership philosophy.

The brigade's family readiness support adviser works diligently with FRG leaders and unit commanders to create an enjoyable atmosphere. The STB's FRG functions are supported by partnerships with local organizations. Some of these relationships have been built through the JBLM Community Connector Program, which encourages city officials and business leaders to embrace Soldiers and their families, especially during deployments.

Partnering organizations, such as the Captain Meriwether Lewis Chapter of the Association of the United States Army, the Puget Sound United Service Organization, and the West Olympia Rotary Club, add resources to the events to make them possible. These groups have supported Soldiers by coordinating care packages for deployed units, donating Thanksgiving turkeys, and playing the bagpipes during welcome home celebrations.

Morale, Welfare, and Recreation

The 593d STB is not all work and no play. The unit participates in all JBLM intramural sporting events, including flag football, basketball, bowling, swimming, golf, and volleyball. The 593d STB's HHC won the JBLM Commander's Cup for the Tacoma Narrows 7.2-Mile Run. These sporting events build team cohesion, improve fitness, and keep Soldiers occupied with productive activities during off-duty hours. Winning competitions builds the Soldiers' morale and reinforces their decision to reenlist. In fact, after winning the JBLM Commander's Cup, the 593d STB met its reenlistment mission in just 2 months, the fastest within the brigade and among the fastest on JBLM.

Redeployments

It is always great to see Soldiers return home. All 593d STB units have returned home without a loss of life or injury; however, several Soldiers have received the Combat Action Badge from these deployments. Units

also return home with some lingering issues that require time and resources to resolve. The battalion is very active in identifying high-risk Soldiers and has put systems in place to assist the Soldiers and their families and ensure the commanders have the proper tools to assist their Soldiers as well.

The 593d STB makes good use of its military family life consultant (MFLC) and the battalion chaplain. The battalion conducts a welcome home ceremony for every unit, regardless of size, at any time, day or night—even on Christmas Day. Before the unit conducts these redeployment ceremonies, the MFLC and battalion chaplain give reintegration briefings to the Soldiers and their family members. The intent is to let them know that the battalion cares and that help is readily available if needed.

The 593d STB has had Soldiers deployed for nearly 4 consecutive years, maintained a garrison support mission, and participated in joint and coalition exercises. The battalion staff and unit commanders work very hard to accomplish their missions and are committed to training their Soldiers technically and tactically so that they have a successful deployment. The battalion's leaders try to identify issues before they cause frustration, maintain a realistic and deliberate training plan, and keep lines of communication open with the FRGs, rear detachments, and deployed commanders.

The key to keeping up with training and maintaining this operating tempo is to successfully use all resources available within the battalion, brigade staffs, and the installation. The result is not only having a successful mission but, more importantly, having all Soldiers return home safely with an appreciation of their accomplishments and the sacrifices made by their family members.

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