



The Joint Logistics Enterprise Enables Operation United Assistance

■ By Capt. Ross M. Hertlein

U.S. service members board a C-130 Hercules aircraft Oct. 22, 2014, in Dakar, Senegal, to travel to Liberia to support Operation United Assistance. (Photo by Maj. Dale Greer)



Front

FEATURES

Using the joint logistics enterprise, AFRICOM and USARAF etched their place in history by being part of the largest U.S. response to an international public health crisis, combating the spread of Ebola in Liberia.

As part of Operation Unified Assistance (OUA), the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) and U.S. Army Africa (USARAF) provided logistics, training, and engineering support for the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID's) mission to combat the Ebola virus disease outbreak in West Africa. Establishing OUA required the rapid reaction of the Department of Defense (DOD) with its unique military skills and capabilities.

Integral to this effort was "setting the theater," a fundamental mission of Army service component commands (ASCCs). The ASCCs provide the DOD with the ability to confront a range of contingencies worldwide in support of U.S. government policy. The joint logistics enterprise (JLEnt) gave USARAF the muscle it needed to set the theater and accomplish the mission in West Africa.

Logistics Challenges

AFRICOM's area of responsibility encompasses 54 countries. The U.N. has classified 33 of these, including Liberia, as the "least developed in the world." With numerous governance challenges, harsh weather, limited infrastructure over a significant land mass, and no permanently assigned or stationed U.S. logistics forces, rapid action in Africa is extremely complex.

USARAF's lack of logistics enablers requires it to constantly request support to accomplish complex joint and ASCC missions across the continent. Using the request for forces process, USARAF obtains JLEnt forces to fill immediate requirements for logistics personnel in Africa.

It is essential for the theater opening force to have easy access to logistics enablers early in the operation to set the conditions to support follow-on forces. In USARAF's case, this was only available through the JLEnt. A web of relationships among global logistics providers, supporting and supported organizations and units, and other entities connects the JLEnt. The key DOD organizations

in the JLEnt include the services, combatant commands, the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA), and the U.S. Transportation Command (TRANSCOM).

USARAF led the way in establishing the joint logistics footprint in Liberia with the USARAF G-4, who was also the Joint Forces Command (JFC) J-4, and 7 personnel from his directorate. Because of the global reach of organizations such as DLA, the JFC immediately began supply procurement in support of USAID's mission. By employing TRANSCOM's Joint Task Force-Port Opening (JTF-PO), the JFC rapidly opened aerial logistics nodes in Liberia and Senegal in order to receive vital equipment, supplies, and enablers.

JLEnt's Support

The JLEnt's ability to move supplies worldwide was demonstrated in Liberia at the end of September, and by Oct. 20, 2014, the USARAF G-4 Mobility Division had requested, tracked, and received 136 strategic-lift flights within the joint operations area. Additionally, DLA and the 598th Transportation Brigade from the Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command had arranged for the transport of 690 20-foot-equivalent containers by sea.

Without these requests and timely arrival of the JTF-PO, the cargo could not have been delivered in Liberia. Without this joint capability on ground, the JFC would not have been able to accomplish any of the achievements it made in the first 40 days.

By early November, TRANSCOM had two Military Sealift Command vessels moving to Liberia with more than 1,500 additional pieces of cargo. TRANSCOM, the Army Materiel Command, DLA, JTF-PO, the 123rd Contingency Response Group, and a range of other joint logistics partners proved to be the critical force multipliers during OUA that bridged gaps between immediate requirements and available forces.



Airmen with Joint Task Force–Port Opening unload medical supplies Nov. 16, 2014, at Roberts International Airport in Liberia. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Gustavo Gonzalez)

Commercial Partners

Commercial partners also played a vital role in virtually all aspects of the JLEnt. Leveraging the capabilities of commercial partners through contracts provided an alternative to the military options.

Contracts enabled construction, storage, and distribution operations and compensated for the initial lack of subordinate units. The JFC used local area knowledge from the U.S. Embassy to procure needed common supplies and services from the Liberian economy.

As of Oct. 31, 2014, the JFC operational contract support team had executed 96 contract actions in support of OUA that were valued at more than \$61 million. The DLA Joint Contingency Acquisition Support Office team, the Logistics Civil Augmentation Program, and the contracting specialists from the 414th Contracting Support Brigade were responsible for those contract actions.

Mission Success

Despite challenges, USARAF made an impact on containing the Ebola ep-

idemic by using the JLEnt to support OUA. For more than 40 days, the G–4 simultaneously executed ASCC and JFC roles during 24/7 operations across Senegal, Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Liberia.

From the USARAF G–4’s perspective, the availability of personnel was the foremost challenge of OUA. Only the additional personnel provided by the JLEnt made success possible.

In a little over a month, the JFC established two mobile laboratories and the 25-bed Monrovia medical unit and laid the foundations for building, managing, and sustaining Ebola treatment units. The JFC also established life support areas, opened aerial and sea ports of debarkation, and emplaced the framework necessary to sustain the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault)—all without assigned subordinate forces.

The volume of supplies required during humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations can overload existing distribution networks. Logistics support is central to these

operations, and OUA was no exception. Without strong and efficient mission command at the onset, such as that provided by the JFC and the JLEnt, networks will clog and responsiveness will suffer.

The JLEnt’s forces and abilities, as leveraged during OUA, are the fulcrum upon which success balanced. Future missions of this nature will occur and will test not only the JLEnt but also other ASCC’s logistics planning and execution abilities worldwide. However, with trained personnel and a modernized force, the DOD will succeed in complex, ambiguous environments.

Capt. Ross M. Hertlein is the surface transportation officer for the G–4 Mobility Division, U.S. Army Africa (USARAF). During Operation United Assistance, he served as the senior mobility officer for Joint Forces Command–United Assistance while deployed to Liberia. He is a graduate of the Transportation Officer Basic Course and the Combined Logistics Captains Career Course.