

The Challenges of Supporting a Theater Sustainment Command

The 1st Theater Sustainment Command's special troops battalion provides logistics and administrative support through split-based operations in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility.

■ By Maj. Jerry D. Moize

The 1st Theater Sustainment Command (TSC) special troops battalion (STB) is a dynamic organization that executes its challenging mission through adeptness and flexibility. As with every STB, its mission is to provide administrative and logistics support to its parent staff.

Because of the 1st TSC's geographic separation from the area of responsibility (AOR) that it supports, its STB engages in split-based operations, which bring unique challenges requiring multifaceted solutions. As the focus of overseas contingency operations has shifted in the past few years, the STB has likewise shifted its operations and posture, with readiness being the only constant.

The 1st TSC's STB Challenges

Meeting all of the organizational requirements in any higher-level headquarters can be challenging, but the STB and the TSC must meet these while operating out of multiple geographic locations simultaneously.

The 1st TSC, headquartered at Fort Bragg, N.C., is tasked with providing all sustainment for the U.S. Central Command AOR and maintains a command and staff presence in logistics operations in Kuwait and in combat operations in Afghanistan.

The 1st TSC's STB mission is to deploy and provide logistics and administrative support for the



A special troops battalion supply sergeant inventories chemical protective equipment that had been turned in by a redeploying unit at Camp Victory, Iraq. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Daniel Yarnall)

1st TSC staff. In many ways, this means doing what all battalions do: process awards and evaluations, oversee the command supply discipline program, provide maintenance support, and coordinate training, schools, force protection, and force projection.

However, since the 1st TSC, a subordinate command of U.S. Army Central, permanently supports the U.S. Central Command

AOR, it must provide this support to multiple locations and fulfill the ongoing requirement of rotating Soldiers into and out of theater.

An STB completes all of the requirements of a deploying unit—orders, medical screenings, theater-specific equipping, and legal and administrative actions—on a continual basis. Most of these functions are performed through the normal staff sections, but a few

deployment-specific tasks are conducted by the STB's deployment cell. These tasks include coordinating with the point of destination, scheduling and tracking Soldier movement to the aerial ports of embarkation and debarkation, coordinating strategic movement, setting up consolidated medical and administrative reviews, and prescreening and tracking pending redeployments.

The deployment cell provides the battalion staff with flexibility and continuity. The primary staff sections are given the freedom to focus on day-to-day operations and organizational tasks, while the deployment cell executes the continual no-fail mission of getting deploying Soldiers out the door and tracking them.

These missions across the globe present three major challenges to the TSC and specifically to the STB: a wide variety of manning positions, time and space separation, and mission command. To overcome and accomplish its mission, the STB leverages technology, the "pass-back" model, and responsibility sharing and partnership with the TSC staff.

Using Technology

Combat operations have necessitated the STB's presence in multiple geographic locations. This is a temporary state, which in theory precludes any special manning to accommodate the requirements. The challenge, however, is to synchronize and control the same number of people over multiple locations to complete the mission.

The biggest leveraging tool is technology. Portals, whether they are run by the section, unit, or Army, allow multiple parties to access, share, and transmit information as if they were in the same building.

Video teleconferences, which the STB uses both in formal meetings and at the staff level, allow for staff collaboration to meet the com-

mander's intent and ensure adequate support of the organization's needs. The ability of all parties to communicate and stay connected with their counterparts significantly helps to bridge the gap of physical separation. As an added benefit, when the staff at all locations is properly synchronized, it gains an extra seven to eight hours to get a head start on issues or to close them out.

The Pass-Back Approach

The pass-back approach enables all parties to use their strengths and maintain the highest efficiency. The intent is that as many actions and requirements as possible are passed from the forward locations of Kuwait and Afghanistan to the main headquarters at Fort Bragg.

This method has two main benefits: The staff at forward locations can handle a higher volume and be more responsive, and the STB has the ability to "triage" requirements and send those that are not as time-sensitive back to Fort Bragg. This in turn lessens the requirement for as many personnel forward.

By requiring fewer staff members forward, the pass-back method also allows for a greater concentration of expertise at the main headquarters, enabling better mentorship, cross-training, and grooming of Soldiers. It better prepares Soldiers to perform their missions when they deploy forward and gives them a greater capability to work the more difficult tasks as they are passed back.

Partnerships

Lastly, the STB staff partners with its higher headquarters and subordinate units. At times, their responsibilities overlap to facilitate split-based operations and achieve the mission of taking care of Soldiers.

Because of the thin spread of personnel, the forward-deployed battalion staff may be called on

to conduct company-level tasks in Kuwait or Afghanistan. Likewise, similar skill sets in the TSC staff may be used to assist in battalion-level actions when needed.

This combination of echelons is neither intentional nor habitual, but as a partnership at all levels, it has proved extremely helpful in pulling the organization through operational shifts when personnel or specific skill sets were most limited.

The focus of the STB is in a state of change. At its inception back in 2007, the war in Iraq was the focus. The TSC's personnel were deployed heavily into Kuwait in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. As Operation New Dawn ended, the TSC shifted direction, energy, and personnel immediately to Afghanistan, where it has the monumental task of not only sustaining the fight but also retrograding \$48 billion worth of equipment from the battlefield. The retrograde has become the 1st TSC's priority. However, as that conflict comes to a close, the TSC and its STB must be ready to pivot, deploy, and support elsewhere.

Few things are certain in today's operational environment. As long as there are Soldiers on the ground, there will be logistics and administrative requirements. As long as the TSC operates across the globe, in one way or another, the STB will continue to do so as well.

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