



Petroleum supply specialists from the 46th Aviation Support Battalion distribution company conduct refueling operations on an OH-58 Kiowa helicopter at the rapid refuel point. (Photo by Capt. Cain Claxton)

The Modern Aviation Support Battalion

The Army's newest aviation support battalion provides air and ground sustainment for the 16th Combat Aviation Brigade.

■ By Maj. DeAndre L. Garner

A combat aviation brigade (CAB) cannot maintain initiative and provide lethal fire support without a responsive aviation support battalion (ASB). The 46th ASB is the newest aviation support battalion activated as part of the 16th CAB at Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM), Wash.

The 16th CAB—the largest CAB in the Army—is the only aviation asset and one of seven brigades in the Stryker-heavy 7th Infantry Di-

vision. Other brigade combat teams receive logistics support from their assigned brigade support battalions (BSBs), but the CAB receives both air and ground sustainment from the ASB.

The 46th ASB activated in October 2011 at JBLM. Before the 46th ASB's activation, the 16th CAB had no organic ASB. At the time of the activation ceremony on Aug. 1, 2011, the unit had only four assigned personnel: the battalion commander,

command sergeant major, executive officer, and personnel officer. Within a year, the 46th ASB grew to 650 Soldiers and four companies, making it the largest battalion in the brigade. The 46th ASB is responsible for a variety of sustainment operations on behalf of I Corps and the 16th CAB in garrison. On order, the 46th ASB also deploys and provides sustainment support to the 16th CAB during unified land operations.

The ASB versus the BSB

The ASB shares few similarities with the more commonly known BSB. While both battalions have the primary mission of sustaining a brigade, BSBs support ground maneuver brigade combat teams and ASBs support aviation brigades; consequently, a division has several BSBs but only one ASB.

The ASB consists of a headquarters support company (HSC), distribution company, aviation support company, and network support company. The BSB is larger since it has—in addition to its headquarters, distribution, maintenance, and medical companies—up to four forward support companies that support specific battalions within the brigade.

The forward support companies in the aviation brigade are organic to the flight battalions and do not organize under the ASB commander. The ASB does not have a medical company; it has a medical section within the HSC. The aviation brigade's signal support is under the ASB, but signal unit support in the ground brigade combat team is in the special troops battalion, not the BSB.

Because of its focus on ground combat platforms, the BSB has a more robust direct support maintenance capability in its field maintenance company; the ASB performs limited direct support ground maintenance since the main combat platform in the aviation brigade is the helicopter. The ASB's aviation support company fills this direct support role for the CAB airframes but evacuates field-level ground maintenance to the HSC. Both the ASB and BSB receive area support from a sustainment brigade.

Headquarters Support Company

The HSC, nicknamed the Spartan company, is the principal element for sustainment in the ASB. The battalion command group, primary staff sections, and support operations section reside in the HSC. In addition, the HSC provides medical treatment, food service, and ground maintenance support for the battalion and brigade.

The food service section can provide 1,600 meals daily using its two containerized kitchens. It also manages and operates the brigade dining facility in garrison. The medical section provides level 1 care to CAB Soldiers and conducts flight physical examinations for aviators to ensure they stay healthy and qualified to fly.

The maintenance section is the largest and busiest of the company operations. This section provides field-level maintenance for the battalion and the brigade headquarters company and direct support ground maintenance to the flight units in the brigade. The maintenance section completes job orders for armaments and communications and electronics equipment as well as automotive repairs beyond the unit capability and vehicle recovery operations.

Distribution Company

The mission of the distribution company, also known as Apollo, is to provide logistics support and distribution of all classes of supply except for class VIII (medical supplies). The unit has a retail fuel support capacity of 105,000 gallons per day and is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the rapid refuel point at Gray Army Airfield. The distribution company operates the supply support activity, which maintains an authorized stockage list of 1,185 lines, processes 5,000 requisition and receipt transactions weekly, and issues supplies for the brigade.

The distribution company has the tactical water purification system and the lightweight water purification system that provide the CAB with 40,000 gallons of purified water daily. With its authorized number of medium tactical vehicles, heavy expanded-mobility tactical trucks, load-handling systems, and flatbed trailers, the distribution company can move the entire battalion into an area of operations.

Aviation Support Company

The aviation support company,

called the Brave Eagles, provides the aviation intermediate maintenance capability for the brigade. The largest of the four ASB companies, the aviation support company performs sustainment aviation maintenance on all radios, countermeasure devices, and night-vision devices in the brigade's aircraft.

It performs scheduled, unscheduled, and phased maintenance on all aircraft in the brigade and provides maintenance support teams for support and technical assistance.

With its multiple fabrication and repair shops, the company performs intermediate-level maintenance on components, subsystems, and airframes and completes some depot-level aviation maintenance for the CAB.

The aviation support company distinguished itself by performing the first phased maintenance operation on a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter by an all-military team at JBLM. This unit also performs the very important downed-aircraft recovery team (DART) mission for the brigade. It played a pivotal role during an accident in December 2011 by quickly recovering two downed aircraft and all sensitive items.

Network Support Company

The network support company, known as the Centurions, is responsible for providing tactical communications to the CAB commander and brigade headquarters, allowing him to exercise command and control of his battalions. The company's mission is to direct, manage, install, operate, and maintain the Warfighter Information Network-Tactical and tactical radio communications system infrastructure in support of the aviation brigade's mission.

Although it is the smallest company, the network support company can quickly set up its joint network node, command post nodes, and high-capacity line of sight shelters and deploy its retransmission teams throughout the brigade's area of operations, enabling the brigade to have communications within hours.

Called Into Action

Soon after activation, the 46th ASB was called into action to execute one of its mission-essential task list requirements for one of its sister units. In December 2011, two OH-58 Kiowa helicopters and their crews were lost in a serious accident. The 46th ASB's aviation support company launched the DART, several medium tactical vehicles, flatbed trailers, and SCAMPs [self-propelled cranes for aircraft maintenance and positioning] to the site.

The aviation support company recovered the aircraft pieces and sensitive items and brought them to a facility on JBLM to enable a team to

complete an investigation. The HSC supplied food and fuel for the DART and a security force that remained on the site for the two-day operation. Working even through the night, the DART recovered more than \$12 million worth of aviation sensitive items spread over a 1-kilometer area.

Rehearsal Participation

In February 2012, as the 4th Attack Reconnaissance Squadron, 6th Cavalry Regiment, was tasked to assist a Stryker brigade exercise at Yakima Training Center, Wash., the 46th ASB received the mission to establish a forward arming and refueling point (FARP) to support the mission.

Soldiers from both the aviation support company and the distribution company put together a package of aircraft refueling equipment and vehicles, forklifts, and safety equipment and executed rehearsals at JBLM's Gray Army Airfield. Lt. Col. Mark Sisco, 46th ASB commander, provided surveillance and guidance during the rehearsals since this would be the first time for many of the ASB Soldiers to function around aircraft in operation.

Lt. Col. Sisco stressed safety to the team and leaders because of the inherent dangers and risk involved with approaching helicopters for refueling and loading live ammunition into the weapons systems.

"Continuity and consistently standardized training for all fuel specialists are critical for our 92Fs [petroleum supply specialists] given the diverse, dangerous, and complex refuel requirements for the brigade's fleet of aircraft. It's graduate level work," said Sisco.

Confident in the team after numerous rehearsals, Sisco launched the FARP team on the 3-hour convoy from JBLM to Yakima. Over the course of the exercise, the 46th ASB FARP pushed 1,600 gallons of fuel, 2,500 rounds of .50-caliber ammunition, and 67 2.75-inch rockets without accident or injury. A maintenance team from the HSC provided ground maintenance support to the operation. The 46th ASB continually proved its multifunctional logistics capability.

Battalion Training

As it is with any unit, the 46th ASB Soldiers needed to train and demonstrate proficiency in warrior tasks. The battalion staff planned and resourced a battalion-level lane training exercise to accomplish that goal.

In April 2012, Operation Bellator Stakes took shape in a small training area at JBLM. Noncommissioned officers (NCOs) from each of the four companies set up numerous training lanes, including land navigation, first



Sgt. Crystal Rocha, Spc. Anna Rodriguez, and Pfc. Thomas Shrew, water treatment specialists from the 46th Aviation Support Battalion distribution company, solve a problem with a lightweight water purification system during new equipment training. (Photo by Maj. DeAndre L. Garner)

aid, convoy operations involving improvised explosive device (IED) recognition, mounted and dismounted patrolling, combatives, and chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high-yield explosives training.

The event accomplished several objectives by allowing Soldiers to train and move in a tactical environment and be evaluated by their own NCOs, allowing the battalion command sergeant major to assess the NCOs on how they train their Soldiers and providing the battalion commander with the chance to assess the efficacy of the battalion's weekly warrior time training sessions.

The event was such a success across the brigade and installation that the 46th ASB received the mission from the brigade headquarters to conduct the lane training event for the brigade's 2012 NCO and Soldier of the Year competitions and, soon after that, the I Corps NCO and Soldier of the Year event.

In June and July 2012, the four ASB companies each planned and conducted field training exercises to train mission-essential task list tasks, practice basic field craft, and conduct assembly area operations in preparation for its first battalion field training exercise at Yakima Training Center in October 2012.

The 10-day exercise was a unique opportunity for the ASB to step away from its various missions and integrate all the units in establishing a support operation. The ASB commander trained his battalion while providing support to the flight units conducting gunnery rotations.

The distribution and aviation support companies established a FARP, the network support company established retransmission capability, and the HSC performed field feeding operations in a tactical assembly area. Each company participated in small-arms ranges and a counter-IED training lane.

The battalion staff set up a fully functioning tactical operations center and monitored all support missions, unit training, and movement in and



Lt. Col. Mark Sisco, 46th Aviation Support Battalion commander, provides guidance to a Soldier during a field training exercise. (Photo by Capt. Cain Claxton)

out of the assembly area. Most importantly, the 46th ASB showed the brigade commander that it was fully capable of moving anywhere to sustain the brigade.

The Aviation Refuel Operation

The 46th ASB provides oversight for several garrison operations originating from the brigade commander's initiatives. As the summer of 2012 approached, the CAB commander tasked the ASB with establishing an aviation refuel operation at Gray Army Airfield. Until that time, only civilian contractors provided fuel to the aviation units at JBLM.

In June 2012, the distribution company's fuel and water platoon developed a training curriculum for fuel personnel and a site layout for aircraft approach, parking, fuel pads, and heavy expanded-mobility tactical truck tanker aviation refueling systems. The platoon also established a military-operated risk reduction program for the CAB aircraft and other aviation units at JBLM.

Since the operation began, Soldiers have pushed more than 515,900 gallons of aviation fuel. HSC food service personnel have been managing a refurbished dining facility. Medical personnel from the HSC took control of a medical treatment facil-

ity and created an aviation resource clinic that provides routine care and flight physical support to all Soldiers in the brigade area. The supply platoon of the distribution company operates the brigade's supply support activity, and the ASB commander manages the aviation life support equipment shop for the CAB.

The next phase in the battalion's growth is to prepare for deployment to a contingency area in support of unified land operations. The commander emphasizes capturing lessons learned through after action reviews and applying them to standard operating procedures. The pace of taskings and missions does not slow down for the 46th ASB; it continues to prove that it is definitely "First in Support" for the 16th CAB.

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