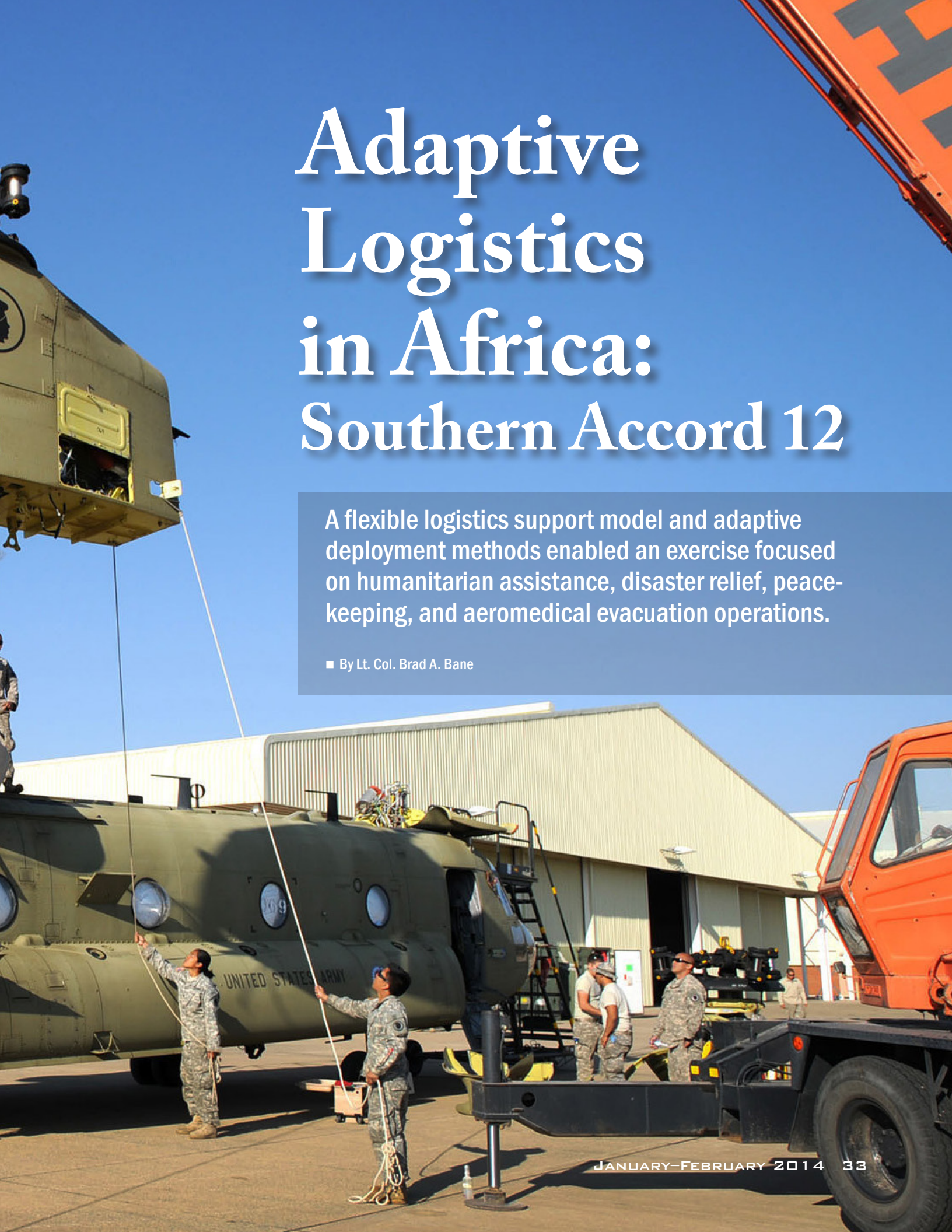
Soldiers assemble a Chinook helicopter that was disassembled in Hawaii and transported to Botswana in support of Exercise Southern Accord 2012. (Photo by Sgt. James D. Sims)

Adaptive Logistics in Africa: Southern Accord 12

A flexible logistics support model and adaptive deployment methods enabled an exercise focused on humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, peacekeeping, and aeromedical evacuation operations.

■ By Lt. Col. Brad A. Bane



Military deployments to Africa are similar to deployments to Afghanistan. In both cases, movements and secondary sustainment are challenging because of geography, immature transportation corridors, limited transportation hubs, and reliance on host-nation transportation capabilities.

U.S. Army Africa (USARAF) habitually conducts deployments to Africa in support of various training exercises. These deployments are often complex and difficult to support. Compounding the problems are frequent exercise location changes and short deployment windows for the exercises. Supporting these exercises requires flexibility in following deployment timelines and in selecting ports of debarkation. It also requires the use of local logistics resources and a variety of contracts.

Exercise Southern Accord 2012 (SA12) held at Thebephatshwa Airbase, Botswana, was a prime example of why the U.S. military should consider more adaptive and flexible models of logistics support when deploying to Africa and other areas with similar operational environments. SA12 was a combined exercise with the Botswana Defense Force focusing on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations, peacekeeping operations, and aeromedical evacuation.

The exercise included more than 700 U.S. forces and roughly the same number of Botswana Defense Force personnel. The U.S. Army National Guard sent the most participants; National Guard Soldiers deployed to Botswana from 19 different locations in the continental United States (CONUS) and six different locations in Europe.

SA12 required airlift and sealift cargo from CONUS and Europe. In order to complete the total movement of forces and sustainment by the required delivery date, it was necessary to plan ahead and be adaptive in the methods and means of the deployment.

SPOD and APOD Selection

Selecting a sea port of debarkation (SPOD) and aerial port of debarkation (APOD) was paramount to the success of SA12. USARAF planners requested Durban, South Africa, as the SPOD for the exercise, and the government of South Africa approved the selection. Planners chose Durban over other options because of its established customs clearance procedures and simple inland transport routing.

Challenges associated with using Durban as the SPOD included moving and clearing customs through two different countries (South Africa and Botswana). In order to facilitate the movement, local companies with expertise in this area were required.

Planners were challenged when selecting the APOD for the exercise. The largest airport in the vicinity of Thebephatshwa Airbase (the exercise area) was Gaborone International Airport. However, Gaborone International was unavailable because of

Soldiers of the Hawaii National Guard's B Company, 1-171st Aviation Regiment, place the aft transmission on one of four Chinooks that they had disassembled and transported to Botswana in support of Southern Accord 2012. (Photo by Sgt. James D. Sims)

diplomatic concerns. This presented challenges for a variety of reasons. The foremost concern was the capabilities of the airfield at Thebephatshwa.

Gaborone International Airport was the APOD of choice for all of the Air Mobility Command's (AMC's) commercial charter passenger carriers. The deployment plan entailed the use of these carriers because of the wide dispersion of deploying forces. It also entailed the use of consolidation points for passenger movements from CONUS.

The APOD at Thebephatshwa did not seem suitable for civilian-type passenger aircraft and also had a questionable runway length for the C–5 Galaxy aircraft (or equivalent), which was needed for deploying four CH–47 Chinook helicopters from Hawaii to Thebephatshwa. In order to make this APOD a viable option, detailed coordination was required among USARAF, AMC, and other organizations for air movement requirements.

Sealift Operations

Planning for sealift and inland transportation into Botswana was laborious. Two contracting options were available for moving cargo from Durban to Thebephatshwa.

The first option was the Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command's (SDDC's) Universal Service Contract (USC). This contract allows for inland movement of cargo and customs facilitation for a surface movement that requires a portion of the trip to be by sea.

In order to use USC for this purpose, established inland rates must exist from the SPOD to the final destination. In this instance, rates did not exist under USC and would need to be established for door-to-door movement to Thebephatshwa.

The second option available was the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) Surface Distribution Network (ASDN) contract. This contract is an "indefinite delivery, indefinite quantity" contract established for inland distribution throughout Africa. The contract includes ground movement, materials-handling equipment, small distribution point activities, and customs facilitation.

As the planning cycle matured, it became evident that rates were not going to be established for the inland movement and customs facilitation under the USC. Therefore, the USARAF G–4 decided to use SDDC's USC contract for sealift only and the ASDN contract for customs facilitation, inland movement, and materials-handling equipment at the exercise site. Having both contracts available ensured flexibility in the deployment plan and also negated the use of a one-time-only contract for inland movement. This decreased contractual processing time and ensured a more adaptive plan.

Sealift cargo originated from five different locations in Europe, the Middle East, and CONUS. The cargo for the exercise arrived on five different vessels into Durban. This made customs clearance and onward movement more complex, but through the use of the ASDN contract and local contractors, the movement was seamless.

Before the vessels arrived, the local contractor ensured preclearance of most cargo into South Africa. This guaranteed that all cargo began onward movement to Botswana less than a week after arrival. In total, more than 75 pieces of cargo were cleared and transported through South Africa to Botswana before the required delivery date. Only one container was frustrated; the cause was inadequate veterinarian certification.

The timely delivery of the cargo was possible only through use of a local contractor familiar with over-the-border transportation of cargo through South Africa.

Air Movement Operations

Air movement of passengers and equipment for the exercise was equally complex. The air movement requirement was executed using a combination of U.S. Air Force assets, AMC contracted cargo and passenger assets, and the U.S. Transportation Command (TRANSCOM) commercial ticket program.

Eleven sorties were used to move all air movement requirements. Included in these sorties were two commercial charters to move main-body passengers, two C–17 Globemaster aircraft missions, one C–130 Hercules aircraft sortie, three Antonov An–124 aircraft missions, and three TRANSCOM World Wide Express small commercial cargo missions. To make air movements occur by the required delivery date, detailed coordination was required by USARAF mobility planners with AMC, the supported units, and select contracted carriers.

Commercial Charter Air Movements

Passenger movement was primarily accomplished through commercial charters from centralized hubs in CONUS. Consolidation points were selected through coordination with the supported units and AMC. Charters were scheduled to comply with Joint Operational Planning and Execution System (JOPES) requirements and booked through AMC.

When AMC solicited passenger aircraft, none of the commercial charter vendors agreed to provide service into Thebephatshwa because of unclear capabilities at the airfield. Carriers had concerns about tower procedures, communications, and inbound clearance. The airfield also did not have adequate ground support equipment required for passenger download, so carriers asked to fly into Gaborone International Airport, which was unavailable because of diplomatic concerns. This problem was time-consuming, but planners developed a viable solution three weeks before execution.

USARAF mobility planners facilitated the use of Thebephatshwa by getting the carriers in contact with the airfield's command and control personnel. Through discussions between the carriers and Thebephatshwa airfield managers, inbound clearance and general airfield communication procedures were established to enable the use of Thebephatshwa for

commercial charter aircraft.

This resulted in one AMC carrier accepting the missions to move passengers from CONUS-based consolidation points to Thebephatshwa. Only after the carrier was selected and the vendor had sent support personnel to the airfield was the ground support equipment shortfall identified.

To rectify this shortfall, a contracted solution was pursued. Rather than use a one-time-only contract, equipment was contracted through AMC's standing contract with the supporting carrier. This was a much more responsive solution to the problem and ensured the carrier was comfortable with the support equipment used at the airfield.

Within two weeks of the selected carrier's reconnaissance of Thebephatshwa, the necessary support equipment was delivered from Johannesburg, South Africa, and the airfield was prepared to receive the commercial charters. Contracting these assets through normal contracting channels would have taken weeks and resulted in the Thebephatshwa airfield being deemed unusable for commercial charters.

Cargo and Equipment Air Movement

The movement of equipment from various locations in CONUS and Europe proved problematic and required innovative, flexible solutions. Foremost was the movement of four CH–47s from Hawaii to Botswana. The sourcing solution for movement of these assets was three An–124 aircraft.

The APOE was validated as Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, and the APOD was validated as Thebephatshwa. After validation, USARAF mobility planners and the deploying unit began coordinating with Hickam Field personnel on ramp space for breaking down the CH–47s for movement.

It became evident that Hickam Field had insufficient ramp space for this task because of a U.S. Pacific Command exercise. Even though the airfield was validated in JOPES, it was not approved by support personnel at Hickam. Other airfields in Hawaii needed to be explored. The only other two airfields on Oahu that could potentially support this size of aircraft were Kaneohe Bay, which was also unavailable, and Kalaeloa Airport.

Using Kalaeloa Airport for the movement of the Chinooks also presented challenges. This airfield was formerly used as a naval air station by the U.S. Navy and had a runway length that was less than the recommended takeoff length for an An–124. In order to use this airfield, clearance was required from airfield personnel, AMC, and the selected carrier.

The use of the An–124 aircraft was extremely beneficial for a lower priority exercise. Other AMC options considered for this movement were the C–17 and the C–5. These assets were not available. The An–124 proved to be very reliable for strategic lift during this exercise and never resulted in a delay during movement.

After a site reconnaissance by the carrier and discussion with airfield support personnel, it was determined that Kalaeloa could support the requirement. This was only approved after countless hours of dialog among the carrier, AMC, and civilian air support personnel at Kalaeloa. If Kalaeloa had not been approved, the only other viable option would have been to fly the Chinooks to the island of Hawaii and coordinate the use of Hilo Airport for their movement. This would have increased costs and potentially made the movement infeasible.

Other movement requirements included moving the 30th Heavy Brigade Combat Team headquarters through Pope Air Force Base and the USARAF Contingency Command Post (CCP) from Aviano, Italy. These missions were intended to be completed using one C–17. The C–17 flight plan moved cargo from Pope to Thebephatshwa and then to Aviano Air Force Base to pick up USARAF CCP personnel.

The initial leg of this mission was successful; however, after arriving in Botswana, the aircraft became not mission capable. This delayed the arrival of the CCP in Botswana for more than a week.

Eventually, another C–17 was sourced to fly the USARAF CCP from Aviano to Thebephatshwa. Exercise command and control personnel were flexible with the exercise training plan to adjust for the new arrival date of the USARAF CCP, so the late arrival had little impact on the overall success of the exercise.

The last strategic lift mission was in support of the U.S. Marine Corps, which supported the exercise with a rifle company. AFRICOM tasked its direct support C–130 to move the equipment and additional ammunition from Stuttgart, Germany, to Thebephatshwa. Again, this aircraft experienced maintenance problems and had to land and discharge its cargo in Camp Lemonier, Djibouti, before returning to Germany for maintenance.

With no replacement aircraft available, the World Wide Express contract was used to move the cargo from Camp Lemonier to Thebephatshwa. After going through the bidding process and arduous diplomatic clearance with Djibouti, the sortie successfully delivered the required cargo to Thebephatshwa with little impact to the mission.

Two other missions were scheduled through the World Wide Express contract to move dental equipment and additional class I (subsistence) to Thebephatshwa. This contract proved to be extremely effective and responsive throughout the exercise and provided another adaptive solution that ensured cargo and necessary equipment arrived on time.

Lessons Learned

SA12 proved to be a good case study in deployment by a variety of forces into an austere, immature operational environment. Many lessons can be learned from this deployment.

First and foremost, host-nation agreements and concurrence with surrounding countries are important. These agreements are always pivotal in the success of not only the

Marines from D Company, Anti-Terrorism Battalion, 4th Marine Division, exit a Hawaii Army National Guard CH-47F Chinook helicopter with Botswana Defense Force soldiers at Thebephatshwa Air Base in Botswana on Aug. 3, 2012, during Southern Accord 2012. (Photo by Sgt. Adam Fischman)

deployment but also subsequent logistics resupply. During SA12, the support provided by South Africa, local vendors, and logisticians greatly enhanced the U.S. forces' ability to execute the exercise. If South Africa had been uncooperative or if the local contractors had been incapable, the exercise would have been in jeopardy.

Second, contracting options are essential to responsiveness and flexibility. For the movement of surface cargo, having an alternate contracting option other than USC saved an immense amount of processing time for facilitating inland transportation and customs clearance. Having options also helped ensure local companies familiar with operating in the specific area of operations could provide reliable service.

Likewise, using contract air assets from civilian charters and other cargo movement carriers ensured that sourcing for smaller scale, lower priority exercises did not affect higher priority air movements. It also proved that commercial, contracted solutions for the movement of cargo are viable and sometimes more reliable. Using AMC's established contracts for ground support equipment at Thebephatshwa ensured the right support assets were on hand when the civilian charters landed.

The third lesson learned pertains to node selection. It is important that all options are explored and node selection is thoroughly researched before any operation or exercise. If this is done, alternatives will be available when problems with specific deployment nodes arise.

Last, it is important to consider the operational environment when planning deployment and execution timelines in austere, immature theaters. Planners must consider the countries' sociocultural norms at all times. When planning deployment timelines, it is important to plan for delays and inconsistencies in policies and procedures for each host country that supports the operation.

In the future, the need to deploy U.S. forces on small-scale missions in support of stability and support operations may increase. In order to deploy to austere, logistically immature areas, the need for logisticians to be flexible will be paramount. The days of infinite resources for U.S. military operations are over. To continue to support our national objectives, we must learn to deploy, fight, and win in these types of environments using a variety of assets. SA12 proved to be a good lesson on what it will take logistically to accomplish these objectives.

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