



*Capt. Shawn Palmer, a biochemist with the 1st Area Medical Laboratory from Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, breaks down a biological safety level three glove box at the Ebola testing lab in Zwedru, Liberia. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Terrance D. Rhodes)*

# 101st Sustainment Brigade Supports Operation United Assistance

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## FEATURES

Task Force Lifeliner provided logistics support to Operation United Assistance, which helped to stop the spread of Ebola in Liberia.

In early 2014, the Ebola virus disease began to spread throughout West Africa, particularly affecting Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. By August 2014, the epidemic had spread so fast that the U.N. declared it to be a global health crisis that could result in a threat to international peace and security. On Sept. 16, 2014, President Barack Obama announced the deployment of military forces to West Africa as part of a global response effort.

The 101st Sustainment Brigade at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, received a warning order to deploy to Liberia in support of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) efforts to contain the spread of Ebola. This mission, Operation United Assistance (OUA), marked the first time U.S. military forces had deployed with a primary mission of force health protection during foreign humanitarian assistance operations.

Less than 30 days after receiving the order, elements of the 101st Sustainment Brigade, Task Force (TF) Lifeliner, along with additional units, deployed to Liberia to conduct joint reception, staging, onward movement, and integration.

This article examines the efforts of TF Lifeliner during OUA as the lead U.S. logistics organization in West Africa. TF Lifeliner experienced challenges and successes during this rapidly evolving mission. Specifically, this article describes training and execution that were critical to mission success and provides recommendations to bridge gaps for future military logistics responses to foreign humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (FHA/DR) missions.

### Changing the Training Focus

The first challenge in preparing for OUA was changing the operational mindset within the brigade. For months, TF Lifeliner had focused and trained for a scheduled deployment to Afghanistan in 2015 in support of the Resolute Support mission. Instead, and with less than a month's notice, the 101st Sustain-

ment Brigade was called to support Ebola response operations in Liberia and Senegal.

In addition to supporting humanitarian assistance efforts, the troops deploying to West Africa would have to develop a new theater of operations—something that had not been done since the first deployments in support of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

In Afghanistan and Iraq, the theaters of operation and support systems had matured for 13 years, so later deployments required significantly fewer resources in terms of building logistics and distribution capabilities. In West Africa, TF Lifeliner would build these systems and capabilities from scratch.

### Mission Planning

Mission planning began on Sept. 22, 2014. Daily meetings dealt with personnel challenges, medical readiness, and understanding the deployed environment. This included deciding whether to establish the TF Lifeliner headquarters in Liberia or Senegal, determining which seaport was best suited for operations, and obtaining imagery from the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency on the key terrain and transportation infrastructure in Liberia and Senegal.

The task force also established communication with the brigade's parent headquarters, the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), which later became the Joint Forces Command–United Assistance (JFC–UA). It also contacted strategic partners, including the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), U.S. Army Africa (USARAF), USAID, and the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA).

Even with the significantly compressed timeline, predeployment requirements were more stringent than with previous deployments. For example, medical readiness, both in terms of force health protection and personnel medical screening, was the emphasis because the mission involved a global health crisis. In this context, medical readiness required

training and establishing safety procedures for all deploying personnel. Learning how to don medical biohazard suits, conduct decontamination procedures, and prepare for emergency medical evacuations were all unique to this mission.

For personnel medical screenings, AFRICOM established more stringent predeployment medical requirements than that of the U.S. Central Command because of the lack of level-three military medical care in theater. These requirements disqualified otherwise deployable Soldiers as they went through the Soldier readiness processing site. This affected the brigade's ability to contribute the number of Soldiers required to deploy and the composition of rear-detachment personnel.

Faced with an uncertain operational environment, the brigade conducted significant research on West African states—particularly Liberia and Senegal—and the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) with which it would interact. The brigade determined potential threats and force protection concerns beyond Ebola. The brigade staff also analyzed the infrastructure of Liberia and Senegal, including the road networks, communications infrastructure, and the host nation's ability to support contracting requirements.

### **Strategic Enablers and Early Deployment**

TF Lifeline relied on multiple strategic enablers in order to develop mission capabilities in the austere operational environment in which it supported USAID's mission in conjunction with JFC-UA. These strategic enablers included DLA, the U.S. Transportation Command, the Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command, AFRICOM, USARAF, and the Army Materiel Command.

Once established in theater, these organizations were great resources for reach back capabilities. The same organizations that pushed the units into the theater and supported them

throughout provided guidance and assistance for the redeployment.

To take full advantage of these units and partner organizations, the JFC-UA headquarters and TF Lifeline sent liaison officers (LNOs) to USARAF's planning cell in Italy immediately after receiving the warning order. Sending a team early proved extremely beneficial to the planning phase of operations. It facilitated development of the request for forces, provided situational awareness, and laid the foundation for early operation order development. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, sending the advance planning team forward allowed the JFC-UA to develop relationships with key strategic partners, especially USARAF leaders.

Still, the 101st Sustainment Brigade had no LNO forward in Liberia, which limited planners at Fort Campbell in several important ways. The request for forces was developed to support an uncertain requirement with possible regional expansion of the mission. The brigade did not understand the full capabilities of its strategic partners, particularly DLA, until it arrived in Liberia. It would have been valuable to have someone forward as soon as possible.

Although DLA and USARAF were on the ground before the brigade arrived, it would have been helpful to include them in the brigade planning phase at the earliest opportunity. More effective communication among assets on the ground in Liberia and the brigade's planning teams in Italy and the continental United States would have provided a more complete operational picture. This might have better shaped strategic and tactical responsibilities, determined mission requirements for personnel and equipment, and developed a cohesive task list for an effective relief-in-place process.

Other unique aspects of OUA were the fiscal and contracting requirements. The mission came on the cusp of a new fiscal year. Congress had not yet approved a budget, which limited predeployment operations and maintenance (OMA) expenditures.

Additionally, the division and brigade staffs were required to become familiar with the use of overseas humanitarian, disaster, and civic aid (OHDACA) funds.

Title 10 of the U.S. Code states that OHDACA funds are authorized "for humanitarian assistance ... for the purpose of providing transportation of humanitarian relief and for other humanitarian purposes worldwide." Per Department of Defense (DOD) guidance, OHDACA was the sole source of funding authorized during OUA.

Planners unaccustomed to using funds other than OMA had to learn quickly when it was appropriate to exercise OMA or OHDACA for predeployment preparation expenses, how OHDACA would apply in theater, and how to request OHDACA funds through the joint requirements review board.

TF Lifeline immediately established a team (contingency contracting, financial operations, and legal oversight) to monitor all contracting and fiscal needs within the brigade to ensure OHDACA funds were used appropriately.

Because of the high-profile nature of this deployment, the brigade leaders and staff understood that there would be significant public scrutiny of the operation, including potential audits of all OUA expenses. This meant that the contracting and fiscal piece had to be done right the first time with meticulous record keeping.

### **Organization and Mission**

At the peak of the deployment, TF Lifeline had 16 units comprising more than 750 personnel. The brigade was made up of two organic battalions (the 101st Special Troops Battalion [STB] and the 129th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion [CSSB]), one attached battalion (the 53rd Movement Control Battalion), and six administratively controlled company-sized units. The bulk of the force was headquartered in Liberia, while an additional forward logistics element provided mission command for the intermediate





*Sgt. Anton Novosselov and Pfc. Nathan Watson with the 372nd Inland Cargo Transfer Company, 129th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 101st Sustainment Brigade, prepare to attach a load to a CH-47 Chinook helicopter for movement by sling load to a mobile medical lab in Liberia, Nov. 3, 2014, during Operation United Assistance. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Mary Mittlesteadt)*

staging base in Dakar, Senegal.

TF Lifeliner performed three over-arching missions during OUA:

- Supporting USAID in sustaining and distributing personal protective equipment and supplies to 13 Ebola treatment units (ETUs), seven medical mobile laboratories, DOD Ebola training teams, and the Monrovia medical unit.
- Providing sustainment support for the JFC-UA, consisting of more than 2,900 military and DOD civilians located in two countries, five task force locations, seven military labs, and the Monrovia medical unit.
- Providing mission command for the intermediate staging base located in Dakar, Senegal, to provide the JFC-UA a forward location to receive bulk shipments of materiel from strategic enablers supporting the Ebola response and transload

them onto C-130 aircraft for further movement into Liberia and other Ebola-infected areas.

### Mission Execution

The concept of support was developed to ensure it could be transitioned to the World Food Programme with minimal friction by not using assets unique to the DOD, such as rotary air support for sling loading supplies to remote locations.

TF Lifeliner's support operations officer and the JFC-UA J-4 orchestrated the support to the Ebola treatment units, medical mobile laboratories, and the Monrovia medical unit. This support included the delivery of classes I (subsistence), III (petroleum, oils, and lubricants), IV (construction materials), VII (major end items), VIII (medical supplies), and IX (repair parts).

During the deployment, TF Lifeliner supplied 134 customers, re-

ceiving and issuing more than 1.1 million gallons of fuel and 300 tons of subsistence, processing over 300 transportation movement releases and 1,300 flights that delivered more than 3,500 tons of materiel.

### Transportation Support

Upon arrival, the 53rd Movement Control Battalion (MCB) established the foundation for transportation management in theater. The MCB was instrumental in developing a successful relief in place/transfer of authority with the departing joint task force—port opening from whom it assumed control of the aerial port of debarkation and the role of senior airfield authority.

As the senior airfield authority, the 53rd MCB commander coordinated with Roberts International Airport's managers, ensuring its continued safe and efficient use as an airfield and coordinating multiple runway repairs,



adjustments to air traffic control procedures, and the airport's expanded mission requirements.

The battalion also oversaw the development and implementation of the JFC-UA's joint reception, staging, onward movement, and integration and redeployment process, leveraging capabilities across the JFC to ensure proper personnel accountability, passenger flow, and customs inspection. The 53rd MCB effectively enabled the JFC-UA to support USAID and NGO efforts to combat the Ebola outbreak.

### **Contracting Support**

Two developments were critical to accomplishing these missions: an effective contracting and fiscal process and good relations with local leaders. Before the brigade arrived in Liberia, no land was available for operations. Surveys of appropriate sites and land lease agreements were coordinated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and staff judge advocates. Once the contracting and fiscal processes were established, TF Lifeliner entered into contracts for housing, warehousing, transportation services, and bottled and bulk water.

Initially, DLA had a contract with a local company to provide flatbed trucks to move supplies in theater. The brigade took over management of the contract in November 2014 and eventually, renegotiated terms for a new contract with better rates and terms. The company provided 20 trucks a day and had a surge capability of up to 50 trucks. This was a tremendous asset for the mission since these drivers were local, understood the terrain, and could go virtually anywhere in Liberia. TF Lifeliner conducted 93 military convoys and contracted 260 local civilian convoys during OUA.

DLA Energy negotiated a contract to provide jet A-1 and diesel fuel for the JFC-UA. DLA purchased 30 3,000-gallon fuel tanks to support the ETUs. Once the tanks were in place at the ETUs, Total delivered fuel directly to the ETUs and to the JFC camps. TF Lifeliner assumed

management of the contract for bulk and retail fuel operations.

DLA also contracted to run a class I warehouse in Monrovia for storing all rations, fresh fruits and vegetables, and bottled water. The brigade's class I section managed the JFC's class I stock by coordinating with DLA, USARAF, and the 21st Theater Sustainment Command. These partners worked jointly on inbound sea and air movements and the distribution of \$12 million worth of class I across Liberia and Senegal.

They established a class I ordering cycle that resulted in predictable, sustainable, and timely delivery of rations. Operational rations were also stored in a warehouse managed by 129th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion in Buchanan for delivery to units as needed.

### **Supply Support Activity**

Early in the deployment process USARAF decided to build a supply support activity (SSA) from scratch to support JFC-UA's units based on an equipment density analysis conducted by the Army Materiel Command. The 227th Quartermaster Company, 129th CSSB, established the SSA, which was operational less than 30 days after arrival. Initially, the quartermaster company set up the SSA in a warehouse at Buchanan. The Standard Army Retail Supply System and a very small aperture terminal were shipped from Italy. Once the system was operational, the SSA processed all supplies to bring them to record.

The authorized stockage list comprised 2,700 lines worth \$12 million. Over time, the footprint of JFC-UA shrunk as the mission decreased. The SSA was moved from the Buchanan warehouse to a large area maintenance shelter tent at the aerial port of debarkation. This move facilitated the downsizing and then closure of the SSA as the 227th Quartermaster Company retrograded all parts back to Germany via opportune air platforms.

### **Mail Operations**

Since this was a new theater, mail

operations had to be established. This started with a request through the U.S. Embassy to the governments of Liberia and Senegal to allow mail to be brought in country. It took approximately 45 days from when TF Lifeliner began the process to when the first mail shipment arrived.

The mail room personnel were delayed in arriving to theater because of a lengthy approval process for a request for forces. To bridge the gap, the 101st STB, which had oversight of mail operations, used Soldiers from the brigade headquarters who were ammunition handlers cross-trained in mail operations to set up and man a military mail terminal until relieved by a platoon from the 18th Human Resources Company from Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The military mail terminal received, distributed, and processed more than 280,000 pounds of incoming mail and 10,000 pounds of outgoing mail.

### **Finance Operations**

Finance operations, like mail operations, had to be established from the ground up. The 101st STB oversaw this mission. In order to accomplish this, TF Lifeliner Soldiers traveled to Germany to be validated by a financial management support unit (FMSU) to certify funds. The finance Soldiers of C Company, 101st Financial Management Support Unit (C/101st FMSU), were trained and certified in critical areas in order to comply with Army, DOD, and federal policies, laws, and regulations for disbursement, cash-holding restrictions, and the conduct of international treasury services.

This training taught them how to work with authorities to disburse funds in support of contracting efforts. It also enabled C/101st FMSU to assume overall pecuniary liability for the security and accountability of public funds, negotiable instruments, and pay vouchers.

C/101st FMSU disbursed more than \$360,000 in casual pay to 2,427 service members, paid \$381,000 in cash to vendors and disbursed \$2.2



million in electronic funds transfers for a total of nearly \$2.4 million in financial management support.

### Administrative Requirements

None of these missions would have been possible without the support of the governments and local leaders in Liberia and Senegal. Soon after arriving, the TF Lifeliner commander scheduled a senior leader engagement with the superintendent (governor) of Grand Bassa County. Because these leaders established a relationship, TF Lifeliner was able to facilitate operations without obstacles within Grand Bassa County. This relationship made it easier to gain access to coastal waters and rivers for water purification and set up a staging area near the Port of Buchanan for wash rack and port operations. It also included forming close ties with local law enforcement in order to support force protection efforts. During all operations, it was key for TF Lifeliner to ensure local leaders were informed of military operations. Exercising a diplomatic approach proved to be a force multiplier.

Inside the brigade, it was essential to practice mission command and for all staff sections to operate outside of their comfort zones. For example, the force protection cell staff worked closely together to develop an installation security plan. The S-2 took the lead in managing force protection, coordinating with a civil affairs team, and obtaining local and national health statistics on Ebola.

Because all personnel returning from Liberia had to participate in a 21-day quarantine to ensure they did not show symptoms of Ebola, the S-1 was required to review exceptions to the quarantine policy for personnel taking emergency leave. The S-1 implemented unique emergency leave requirements that addressed self-monitoring for Ebola symptoms in coordination with the DOD, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and state health officials.

The S-6 determined a way to give TF Lifeliner the ability to conduct mission command via secure and nonsecure voice and data systems despite having limited infrastructure and resources to do so. Traditional

deployments afford units multiple means of communication redundancy within the Signal network architecture, such as fiber optic cable, satellite, and line-of-site, none of which were all available in Liberia.

### Redeployment

Shortly after the arrival of U.S. forces in Liberia, the daily number of confirmed cases of Ebola began to drop. As these rates continued to improve, and as more international support flowed into West Africa, the need for U.S. military logistics began to decline. As a result, redeployment planning began several months earlier than expected.

Over several months the task force planned and rehearsed multiple redeployment courses of action, branch plans, and sequels. Originally, smaller units were scheduled to replace the OUA units and planners prepared for a possible expanded Ebola response requiring an intratheater deployment to Sierra Leone or Guinea. However, the decision to end the mission in West Africa was made in February, triggering theater



*Soldiers scrub and clean a vehicle Jan. 23, 2015, at the U.S. Department of Agriculture inspection point, Camp Buchanan, Liberia. (Photo by Spc. Caitlyn Byrne)*



closing operations while leaving a minimal residual force.

The critical tasks in closing the OUA theater were planning for installation closure, establishing wash rack and port operations, and arranging for the redeployment of personnel to controlled monitoring areas (CMAs) where redeploying personnel would remain for 21 days.

## Installation Closure

Installation closure was not as straight forward as in other deployments largely because each installation was governed by different lease agreements or by an international agreement with the host nation. For example, the TF Lifeliner headquarters at Logistics Support Area Buchanan was a contracted land lease agreement with a private company. Specific requirements, such as an environmental survey ensuring no oil spills or damage to the property, had to be fulfilled before departure.

In contrast, the use of Roberts International Airport as the aerial port of debarkation was permitted under a diplomatic agreement between the United States and the government of Liberia. Essentially, this agreement allowed the U.S. to use Liberian government and public property in any way to accommodate U.S. training and storage needs. Although not formally required to survey this land or even make repairs, TF Lifeliner exercised caution and formalized the clearing process to ensure there were no outstanding liabilities on the part of the United States.

Installation closure also required the proper disposal of excess property. Anything that was not to redeploy with the brigade was determined to be foreign excess personal property (FEPP) or foreign excess real property (FERP). All units in theater had to identify which property should be deemed excess and submit a list of that property through the JFC-UA J-4 to AFRICOM and the Office of the Secretary of Defense for approval for the FEPP or FERP process.

Once approved, TF Lifeliner coor-

inated with the JFC-UA J-4, USAID, the embassy's chief of mission, and the governments of Liberia and Senegal to determine which government agencies or NGOs should receive the FEPP and FERP properties. This process is cumbersome, requires significant coordination among multiple partners at various levels, and can be confusing for those unfamiliar with theater closure.

## Wash Rack and Seaport Operations

The wash rack and seaport operations also required significant planning. First, the task force had to secure a proper space close enough to the port to conduct wash rack operations. Second, it had to synchronize the redeployment tasks and timing of all units in theater against a projected glide path.

This meant that all TF Lifeliner units, the division headquarters, the engineer brigade, the medical task force from the 86th Combat Support Hospital, and the aviation battalion all had to have adequate space and time to wash their rolling stock, non-rolling stock, and aircraft.

Because of the strong relationships that had been developed with local leaders, including personnel at the National Port Authority, securing an appropriate space close to the port for wash rack operations was not an issue. Ultimately, TF Lifeliner had 24 days to wash equipment from the time the leaders issued the redeployment order to the arrival of a Military Sealift Command vessel. After washing the equipment, the task force loaded 977 pieces of rolling stock and containers over a six-day period.

## CMA

Because of the 21 days of quarantine at the CMA, all personnel stationed in Liberia had an extended redeployment process to ensure DOD policy was followed. The CMAs were located at seven different military installations. The number of personnel that could return from theater at a given time was limited and depended on how much

space was available at the CMA sites.

Since the personnel at the CMA could not interact with others, it was necessary to stagger flights to each location to allow the 21-day clock to run and make room for the next group. Personnel redeployment required significantly more planning and coordination than usual.

OUA was an unmitigated success thanks to early efforts of dedicated health care professionals, NGOs, USAID, and later, all elements of JFC-UA. Members of TF Lifeliner are proud to have served as the lead logistics organization in these efforts.

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