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AIRBORNE OPERATIONS RETURN TO FORT HOOD

FORT HOOD, Texas – STAND UP!, HOOK UP!, these were the words that more than 20 personnel heard as they rushed to exit a perfectly good airplane on the first airborne operation conducted here in more than ten years and the first such operation for a sustainment brigade.

“We put on a demonstration for a new capability that is offered and available to all commanders regardless of command size,” said Chief Warrant Officer Frank Badalucco, an airdrop systems technician with the 4th Sustainment Brigade.

During the transformation of units into modular brigades, the Army decided to deploy an airdrop technician in all sustainment brigades to increase the capability by having another means to deliver supplies, adding another dimension to the logistical field, airborne re-supply.

“In Afghanistan, it is hard to supply units by convoy because the mountainous terrain is hard to overcome, so theater transitioned to supply by airdrop,” said Badalucco.

This mode of delivering supplies can save lives, he stated, “by transitioning over to airdrop supply, [sustainment brigades] can reduced the number of convoys that are needed to push supplies to units, leading to reduced Improvised Explosive Device attacks, simply by reducing the number of convoys on the ground.”

This capability allows units on rotation, to either Afghanistan or Iraq, to train locally and become familiar with the procedures to request airborne supply.

“This operation is paving the way for our Soldiers and our future airborne operations,” said Capt. Reginald Williams, commander of B Troop 38/CAV (LRS) (ABN).

“We are interested in any airborne capability that this post has to offer because it will help us facilitate our mission; it is also a great opportunity to conduct dual training with other [service organizations],” said Williams.

“We appreciated the National Guard, Reservists, and the 4th and 15th SB’s coming out here and paving the way for us, showing the world and Fort Hood, that [units] can conduct not only payload airborne operations, but also drop personnel on the drop zone,” he said.

The Army is currently working on several new prototypes of parachutes that are more accurate and cheaper to replace, increasing the cost effectiveness of this type of supply, stated Badalucco.

“This concept is new to non-airborne units,” said Badalucco, “as a collective effort from the senior airdrop system technician under the 18th Airborne Corps, to our technicians here at Fort Hood, we have a lot of support to make sure this is useable by all commanders.”

“Collectively, the 4th and the 15th Sustainment Brigades are paving the way for other sustainment brigades across the Army on how to institute this type of re-supply in their area of operations,” said Badalucco.

“It’s exciting to open up a new drop zone; [our unit] is definitely looking to a new drop zone since we have limited training areas right now,” said Sgt. Mark A. Powers, a reservist and member of the 345th Tactical Psychological Operations Company (Airborne) out of Dallas, Texas.

“This new drop zone will definitely be good for field exercises for us, because of the larger area to conduction training operations,” said Powers.

It has been a long time since anybody jumped on Fort Hood,” said Sgt. Richard N. Ferrell a member of the Texas National Guard and the 294th Quartermaster Company (Airborne) out of Camp Mabry near Austin, Texas, “we are here to show what the airborne Quartermaster Corps can do as parachute riggers, we don’t just pack parachutes but can deliver anything to a theater near you.”

“Today, [riggers] are only doing certain aspects of the job; static line parachute openings and door bundles,” said Ferrell, “but we have the capability to support free-fall and payload operations.”

“We can perform this capability for any unit that has a requirement to air-deliver a payload, be it personnel or supply,” said Ferrell, “the world is our drop zone, tell us when and where, with units providing the what, we will get it there.”

“This operation is a win-win situation for Fort Hood, because a local air wing from Dyess Air Force base, needs to meet requirements for dropping personnel and supplies, can come here instead of flying to Fort

Bragg, in the end, this means that airborne re-supply will be cost effective in the long run for a lot of units,” said Badalucco.

“This successful operation opens up a whole new training opportunity,” said Ferrell, “not only for active duty, but for National Guard and Reserves as well.”

Those interested in airborne re-supply operations should contact their local sustainment brigade for more information.

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