

Army unit augments Air Force to boost troop support

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12/9/2008 - **SOUTHWEST ASIA (AFNS)** -- As U.S. forces prepare to ramp up the operations tempo in Operation Enduring Freedom, a new unit here is helping prepare cargo to airdrop to the troops on the ground.

The Army's 824th Riggers unit, a reserve unit based out of Ft. Bragg, N.C., began operations to support Air Force airdrops Dec. 3.

"We are here to rig life-sustaining food, water, fuel, ammunition and any other life support systems needed for airdrop in the theater of operations for the warfighter," said Army CW4 Henry Tyndall, 824th Riggers Det. 7 commander. "Our main expectation is to provide excellent support to troops in both OIF and OEF."

With a crew of eight, the riggers build container delivery systems. Once a container is built, it is placed on top of hand-made padding constructed from energy dissipating material -- a thick cardboard-like substance. After a CDS is loaded it is rigged for airdrop with either a high or low-altitude parachute depending on the mission. Air Force and Army personnel together will then conduct two joint inspections -- first upon delivery of the materials and again when the plane is loaded.

By making this a joint effort it allows the C-17 Globemaster IIIs to fully utilize their airdrop capabilities, he said.

"By the Army and Air Force working together on this, it helps maximize the potential in the airlift support we can provide to the troops on ground," Chief Tyndall said.

The unit recently completed their first order, which consisted of 28,000 pounds of bottled water to be airdropped in Afghanistan.

The 824th Riggers are committed to prepare 40 bundles for airdrop per week. The unit hopes to assume a larger role in the near future.

By January, the 824th Riggers plan to increase capabilities to three airdrops per week, said Chief Tyndall.

With only eight people, working out the logistics and setting up a work area while rigging cargo for airdrop is proving to be very challenging, he said. But the Air Force is making the unit's transition much smoother.

"The Air Force is being very helpful," Chief Tyndall said. "Right now the Air Force is furnishing 95 percent of our equipment."

Since the current facility's size prevents them from packing their own parachutes, the riggers must order them pre-packed from their home unit.

"We can make do with this facility until we can get a larger one, but the storage area right now is a major issue," he said.

Soon, the 379th Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron will build a second level for storage allowing the riggers to have more floor space.



Tech. Sgt. Keith Hackney and Army Sgt. Joshua Sheptock perform a joint inspection Dec. 6 at an air base in Southwest Asia to ensure a container delivery system was rigged correctly so it can be used to drop supplies in the area of responsibility. Sergeant Hackney is a C-17 Globemaster III joint airdrop inspector and is assigned to the 816th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron. Sergeant Sheptock is a parachute rigger assigned to the 824th Riggers. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Darnell T. Cannady)

"We're going to have a break area, office area and a place for our expendable goods once we're fully set up," said Army Sgt. Karol Koval, 824th Riggers airdrop specialist.

The 824th Riggers has set up an assembly line to expedite the work, but will rely on individual strengths to get them down the long road ahead.

"Everyone has special talents," Sergeant Koval said. "Somebody may be quicker on one section of the rigging procedure and we'll incorporate that into what we do, but no one is going to be doing the same job the entire time they are here. We're going to rotate them around so they can become fully versed in the entire rigging procedure.

"It's going to be total chaos at times," Sergeant Koval said. "When we have our down time we'll make sure everything is ready for the next mission; we'll make sure we take a breather if there's extra time. We'll put in whatever time it takes to complete the mission."

No matter how hard the day gets, they'll always keep in mind that somewhere out there troops down range will continue to reap the benefits of the riggers' hard work.

"A day of labor to me is good," he said. "You get in there and get the job done and it gives you a sense of accomplishment.

"A successful mission for us is a successful mission for the troops on the ground because they're getting the supplies they need to get the job done," he said. "In places like Afghanistan they could be several miles from a road and an airdrop may be the only means available to resupply them."

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