

Parachute Rigging in Afghanistan

by Chief Warrant Officer (W-3) Jeffery S. Page, USAR

With the poor infrastructure, unimproved roads, and numerous remote unit locations in Afghanistan, aerial delivery is a vital asset in resupplying our Soldiers. The first airdrops began on 8 October 2001 as humanitarian aid for Afghan civilians. As the war completes its eighth year, aerial delivery is more vital than ever.



Above: Containerized delivery system bundles are dropped in Afghanistan using the low-cost, low-velocity parachute system. Below: Army riggers prepare bottled water for airdrop in Afghanistan. Since 2001, the airdrop of supplies has been essential to resupplying units in remote locations inaccessible by truck.



The airdrop process usually begins with the customer who, after determining an aerial delivery requirement, submits a logistics support request. The movement control team processes the request and submits an intratheater airlift request.

Once the request is approved, the parachute riggers configure the requested supplies on a “skid board,” a 1-inch thick piece of plywood that is either 48 by 48 inches, 48 by 72 inches, or 48 by 96 inches in size. The size of the skid board is determined by the type of supply to be dropped. Holes are drilled in the plywood as appropriate, and cardboard honeycomb (energy-dissipating material) is glued to the top. An A-22 container is placed on top of the cardboard honeycomb, and the supplies are then configured on the containerized delivery system (CDS) bundle. The supplies are strapped in, the skid board is tied to the bundle, and the parachute is placed on top, completing a CDS bundle weighing between 500 and 2,200 pounds.

Next, the bundles must go through a joint airdrop inspection, which is conducted by qualified parachuteriggers and Air Force personnel. After passing the inspection, the bundles are transported to the aircraft and loaded. The parachute riggers and Air Force personnel inspect the bundles again when they inspect the configuration of the aircraft load. At this point, the parachute rigger’s job is complete.

The requirement for aerial delivery support in Afghanistan has increased yearly, giving each rotation of parachute riggers the opportunity to outperform the previous rotation. In 2008, the total weight of all CDS bundles almost tripled the 2007 total, increasing from more than 3 million pounds to nearly 9 million pounds. With a success rate of more than 98 percent, the parachute riggers lived up to their motto, “I will be sure always.”

In 2009, the 25 parachute riggers of the 11th Quartermaster Detachment (who were replaced by the 612th Quartermaster Detachment in mid-June) and 8 riggers from the 824th Quartermaster Detachment set the pace for CDS resupply to our Soldiers in the fight. During the first 6 months of 2009, the units rigged and airdropped nearly 6 million pounds of supplies, including food, water, ammunition, clothing, building materials, and humanitarian supplies. On top of the impressive CDS totals, the Soldiers rigged 675 low-cost, low-altitude bundles totaling more than 400,000 pounds and provided support for numerous sling-load operations. In addition to their heavy workload for supporting Army units, the parachute riggers of the 612th and 824th were able to provide airdrop support to the Marines when host-nation trucks were unable to get them supplies on time.

The month of June 2009 saw a significant rise in aerial delivery totals, with 1,358 bundles totaling nearly 2 million pounds. The riggers of the 11th Quartermaster Detachment began the operations for June and were replaced in the middle of the month by the 612th. This transition was transparent to customers in the field as deliveries continued without interruption. The two units' combined total for June was nearly 1.5 million pounds. The 8 parachute riggers of the 824th contributed an impressive 472,150 pounds to the month's total.



Containerized delivery system (CDS) bundles are loaded onto a C-130 or C-17 aircraft, where riggers will jointly inspect the bundles with Air Force personnel before handing over the airdrop mission.



The riggers exceeded June's total in July by rigging more than 1,400 bundles totaling 1,995,005 pounds. The 612th Quartermaster Detachment rigged 1.1 million pounds, and the 824th rigged 872,000 pounds. In August, the 2-million-pound mark was passed. The 612th, assisted by the 647th Quartermaster Detachment, rigged 1,008 bundles totaling 1,153,560 pounds, while the 824th rigged 587 bundles weighing a total of 885,460 pounds.

The bar was raised again in September, as riggers shattered the August record by rigging and airdropping over 2.23 million pounds of supplies. The 612th, assisted again by the 647th, rigged 1,008 bundles totaling 1,153,560 pounds. The 824th nearly reached the 1-million-pound mark, preparing 642 bundles weighing a total of 955,040 pounds.

The yearly record set in 2008—nearly 9 million pounds airdropped—was broken by the middle of August, with a total of nearly 10 million pounds airdropped by the end of the month. The performance of all of the parachute riggers deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom set the standards for others to follow. They, along with the Air Mobility Division of the Air Force, provided the warfighter with the necessary supplies to accomplish their mission.

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