USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

THE FUTURE OF AIRBORNE FORCES IN THE OBJECTIVE FORCE

by

LTC David A. McBride
US Army

Colonel David L. Connors
U.S. Air Force
Project Advisor

U.S. Army War College
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

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ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: LTC David A. McBride

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This paper will examine United States Army airborne forces as they relate to the Objective Force. It will address the need for the United States to retain a strategic airborne force for forcible entry operations and will explain why this force should remain a consolidated airborne division and not some distributed capability scattered across the Army at the Unit of Employment level. As part of this discussion, the paper will address facilities, training, command and control, and modernization issues.

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> "It is visualized that the role of this type of unit will be to parachute to seize a vitally important area, primarily an airfield, upon which additional troops will later be landed by transport airplane."[1]
>
> —MG R.M. Beck, Jr
> Deputy CSA in memo to Chief of Infantry, dated 1939

Since General Eric Shinseki announced in October 1999 at the Association of the United States Army Annual Convention that the Army was going to initiate a process of transformation, the US Army has made great progress. The Army has purposefully and steadily worked for over three years developing the concepts, doctrine, organizational structures, and other myriad of details necessary to flesh out this grand vision and overcome the institutional inertia so common in every bureaucracy. The Army Training and Doctrine Command published The Unit of Action for the Objective Force in late 2002.[2] This document paints a compelling picture of how the Army intends to fight at what we currently know as brigade level and below. TRADOC has also mentioned in a somewhat more vague fashion the idea of "Units of Employment". These structures would serve as the higher headquarters of the Unit of Action and would replace what we currently know as division and corps. As the Army presses on with the transformation process and works through the issues associated with rethinking how we are organized and how we will fight at each echelon, now is the time to make individual arguments for force structure.

This paper will address the issue of forcible entry as it pertains to maintaining sufficient capability within the United States Army to execute tasks directed by the Commander in Chief in the execution of our nation's National Security Strategy and National Military Strategy. It will address why we need to maintain this capability and by what means we will use to conduct these types of operations. It will address the force structure necessary to conduct forcible entry operations and what these units must do to modernize and keep pace with the rapid process we are making with our Stryker Brigade Combat Teams (SBCT) and subsequent Objective Force. It is my belief that the United States Army must retain an airborne division to accomplish the principle task of conducting operational and strategic forcible entry.

At the 2002 Association of the United States Army Convention, TRADOC displayed a computer animation of the fictitious "Battle of Takkbu", set in the year 2016.[3] This simulation is designed to illustrate the concepts, equipment types, and doctrine which have so far been produced through the collective efforts of the US Army. In this fictitious first battle involving the

use of the Objective Force, elements of a Unit of Action (roughly a brigade sized force) capture key enemy positions in and around the town of "Takkbu". In the video, the narrator emphasizes the importance of strategic reach and responsiveness. Units are shown arriving into a theater unopposed and moving rapidly into combat. The units arrive in theater using two methods of transportation, shallow draft catamarans and C17 aircraft. In both cases, no enemy force is on hand to deny use of the airfield or to stop the friendly unit as it disembarks from the vessels. This somewhat optimistic animation glosses over the reality of the more likely scenario, which would be that the enemy commander would attempt to deny access of US forces into the theater. US history is replete with examples of situations where our forces were not granted permissive entry into a theater. Throughout the Twentieth Century, Army and Marine Corps units stormed beaches, dropped out of the sky, and otherwise had to fight their way into the battlefield. When the situation allowed, as in Desert Storm, we were fortunate to have an ally, such as Saudi Arabia, who granted us access to a theater. In these cases, American and coalition forces were able to cross a line of departure and initiate combat operations. As this nation continues to pull forces back to the continental United States and then rely more and more on power projection, it is critical that we maintain a robust capability to conduct forcible entry operations. We should not count on luck or our allies to give us the ability to build up combat power unopposed in a theater.

FORCIBLE ENTRY

Where does the requirement come from to be able to conduct forcible entry operations? United States Army Field Manual 1 lists "Conduct Forcible Entry Operations" as one of six Army Mission Essential Tasks.[4] As this list is an operational expression of the Army's core competencies, it would appear that the Army's leadership has made some attempt to limit these six tasks to those which lie at the very root of army war-fighting capabilities and requirements. Interestingly enough, the subsequent METL task on this list is "dominate land operations." Clearly, it would be difficult to dominate land operations if we lack the capability to force our way into the region.

FM 3.0 is also very specific about the forcible entry requirement. "Army forces make it possible for JFCs to seize areas previously denied by the enemy force. Army forces can strike contested areas from the air, land, and sea. They can establish and secure lodgments for projecting follow-on forces and sustaining the joint force. The airborne and air assault capabilities of Army forces allow JFCs to seize airfields or other important facilities."[5] This more

recent publication makes the case for retaining a great deal of flexibility; referencing forcible entry operations from the air, land, and sea.

Since neither FM 1 nor FM 3.0 have been rewritten since General Shinseki's efforts to transform our Army, perhaps we should look elsewhere to see if we will still need to be able to force our way into a theater. In the US Army White Paper – "Concepts for the Objective Force", is very specific about retaining the capability. "In the face of enemy anti-access measures, the Objective Force will retain the ability to conduct forcible entry operations. Forcible entry will occur from both strategic and operational distances. Upon insertion of platforms, either in the assault or immediately following, Objective Force units translate the strategic or operational initiative gained into tactical advantage with offensive operations against key enemy capabilities or vulnerabilities."[6]

So exactly how will the Unit of Action arrive into the Joint Area of Operation? This is a part of the new doctrine that's still a little vague. The draft TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-90, United States Army Objective Force Operational and Organization Plan for Maneuver Unit of Action describes it in this manner: "The Unit of Action arrives in the Joint Area of Operations by insertion into small airfields or other landing sites that are not easily predictable by the enemy to overcome his access denial strategy."[7] This statement appears to conflict with the White Paper; there is a big difference between unopposed entry and forcible entry. The lead force must be prepared to fight its way into the area of operations if the enemy has, in fact, been successful at predicting which airfield or other landing site has been chosen by the friendly commander. Interestingly enough, TP 525-66 Objective Force Capabilities contradicts this notion altogether: "When required, the UE conducts CONUS-based forcible entry operations (mounted and dismounted) using strategic and theater assets (air and sea lift, precision fires, C4ISR, and other enablers) during any phase of the joint campaign. UE can also conduct forcible entry from forward operating bases deploying to operational distances using its organic power projection capabilities, supplemented by joint lift and enablers."[8] This certainly implies that each "division" retains the capability to conduct forcible entry operations. Presently, only two out of the eighteen divisions in the US Army force structure (82nd Airborne and 101st Air Assault) are capable of conducting forcible entry operations. Of these two divisions, only the paratroopers of the 82nd Airborne Division can conduct a strategic forcible entry into a landlocked area.[9]

The reference in the White Paper to operational and strategic distances is key. Traditionally, forcible entry has been conducted through one of three methodologies: amphibious, helicopter-borne air assault, or airborne. Largely speaking, the United States

Army has not conducted a stand alone amphibious operation since the Second World War. The United States Marine Corps is the only service that has retained the equipment, tactics, techniques, and procedures to conduct an amphibious assault into an opposed shore, port, or beachhead. This type of assault, given the present type of shipping, may be executed from a tactical, operational, or strategic distance. This is not to say that the United States Army could not execute one; it merely concedes that the Marine Corps will more than likely retain amphibious assault as a unique capability into the foreseeable future. This leaves air assault and airborne forcible entry options to the US Army.

The biggest limiting factor in conducting air assaults is the operating range of our current inventory of helicopters. This range may extend up to 150 kilometers without refueling[10]. Ranges of this nature generally fit into the tactical arena, although terms such as tactical are more a matter of scope, not distance. Some may argue that an air assault such as conducted by the 101st Airborne Division during Desert Storm was operational in terms of its impact on the overall operation. Regardless, it would be a real stretch to claim that an air assault force could conduct an operation of strategic reach. This generally implies that the distances are from outside of a theater into a given theater. This is not to imply that air assault forces will have no place in the Objective Force[11]. Air assault forces will more than likely remain in the force structure to give the JFC added flexibility.

Having generally narrowed the forcible entry options from the many (amphibious, air assault, and airborne) down to just airborne, it is important to spell out exactly what is meant by the term airborne operation and to discuss why this twentieth century medium has applicability in the Interim and Objective Force.

WHY AIRBORNE?

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Large-scale airborne operations trace their roots to the Second World War. Several armies, to include the Russians, Americans, and Germans had experimented to varying degrees with the idea of vertical envelopment in the years leading up to World War Two. It was the Germans who pushed the idea most aggressively. The leader of German airborne forces, General Karl Student, convinced the German High Command that the strategically important island of Crete could be captured entirely through the use of airborne forces. Hitler agreed and in May, 1941, thirteen thousand paratroopers conducted the largest airborne operation to date; jumping onto the island's three airfields. Subsequent mountain troops air landed at the airfields and assisted the German paratroopers in the capture of the island.

Losses were exceptionally high, with 5140 out of 13,000 paratroopers either killed or wounded in action.[12] Additionally, and of significant impact on the impending Operation Barbarossa, was the loss of over 350 German aircraft in the victory over British forces on Crete. Hitler was distressed over these high losses and declared that the days of large-scale airborne operations had passed. The allies drew the opposite conclusion: "the outside world, not privy to Germany's appalling losses on Crete, was stunned by this lightening-like airborne victory".[13] In the U.S. Army eyes, Crete, more than any other single factor,"proved" that airborne forces were here to stay" and "led Marshall to initiate plans to field a substantial number of American airborne forces."[14] For the remainder of the war, these two opposing views dictated the destiny of the antagonist's airborne forces. German airborne forces were never again employed in a parachute assault role. These well-trained and elite forces were employed as light infantry for the remainder of the war. The American paratroopers, along with their British counterparts, continued to rapidly expand in numbers. By the end of the war, the United States alone had fielded over five airborne divisions and conducted numerous combat parachute assaults in both the Pacific and European Theaters of Operation.

AIRFIELD SEIZURE

The large-scale and historically celebrated airborne battles of World War Two, with division-sized operations occurring on a fairly regular basis in the European Theater of Operations are more than likely a thing of the past. This certainly does not mean that airborne forces are no longer required in the force structure. "The strategic mobility of airborne forces permits rapid employment to meet contingence across the operational continuum anywhere in the world. Airborne forces provide a means by which a commander can decisively influence operations."[15] The most recent combat parachute jumps, such as the ranger and airborne battalions supporting Operation Urgent Fury in Grenada in 1983, Just Cause in Panama in 1989, or the ranger battalion parachute jump into Afghanistan in 2002 have been much more focused and limited operations. Generally speaking, the role of the airborne force has been to conduct an airfield seizure operation with the purpose of establishing a lodgment for follow-on forces.[16] These operations are normally conducted with anywhere from one to three infantry battalions under the direct control of an airborne brigade headquarters. The number of assault battalions is clearly a function of the size and composition of enemy forces on the ground and on the size of the objective required to be cleared. In many situations, such as in the complex urban terrain surrounding a major international airfield, the number of assault battalions increases due to the number of buildings, hangers, and other structures which must be cleared.

Additional forces must be allocated to isolate routes into the airhead line, to provide for a reserve, and to assault any other specific targets identified by the airborne commander. In addition to infantry forces, organic airborne artillery, air defense, military police, medical service corps, signal, and other forces are given specific tasks to support the establishment of a lodgment. Due to the importance of opening the airfield's runways for use by fixed wing aircraft, the engineer element deserves special mention. Airborne engineers are organized and equipped with a Light Airfield Repair Platoon (LARP) that has the capability to conduct hasty repairs on damaged runways. All of these forces are specifically equipped, organized, and trained to conduct these specific types of operations. In fact, the airfield seizure mission is the 82nd Airborne Division's number one mission focus.[17] As stated previously, in this type of operation, the stated purpose of the operation is to conduct a parachute assault to seize an airfield facility, eliminate all local enemy resistance, repair or otherwise open up the runway to receive arriving aircraft, and then receive follow-on forces.[18] These follow-on forces may be additional airborne forces under the command of the initial airborne commander or they may be non-airborne forces, arriving with whatever mix of forces is necessary for follow-on missions. The flow of forces into the theater by the Combatant or JTF Commander allows for great flexibility once the initial airhead becomes a lodgment (the airhead becomes a lodgment upon receipt of the first air-landed aircraft).

MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE '02

The United States Army has recognized the fact that Stryker Brigade Combat Teams lack the ability to conduct forcible entry operations. During Millennium Challenge '02, the 2nd Brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division was tasked to conduct an airfield seizure into Bicycle Lake Army Airfield at the National Training Center in July 2002. 1st Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, with the Regimental Commander and his Brigade Assault Command Post serving as Airborne Commander conducted a C130 night combat equipment mass tactical airborne operation to seize the airfield. The following morning, once enemy resistance was eliminated and the airfield was returned to useable condition, United States Air Force C17 Globemaster aircraft landed on the dirt airstrip. Stryker Combat Vehicles from the 1st Brigade of the 2nd Infantry Division conducted a combat offload and initiated combat operations against the opposing force after conducting a forward passage of lines with airborne forces on the ground.[19] This highly publicized operation showcased the interoperability requirements associated with conducting a forcible entry operation. In order to successfully execute follow-on missions on the ground, the arriving SBCT elements required access to critical information from the airborne

unit, particularly information on enemy and friendly disposition. This information must be relayed through the JTF headquarters and to the unit either prior to its departure from its forward operating base or enroute to the objective area. Interoperability considerations will be addressed later in this paper.

WHY AN AIRBORNE DIVISION?

As previously mentioned, the Stryker Brigade Combat Team and the subsequent Objective Force Unit of Action lack the ability to conduct forcible entry operations and seize a foothold on an enemy shore or airfield. If one accepts the notion that the United States Army will continue to require the capability to conduct forcible entry operations using airborne forces, then the question becomes: how best to organize these airborne forces? What size force is required? How will they be commanded and controlled? Is this best left in a centralized formation, such as an airborne division, or is it best to distribute these forces? Once the forcible entry mission is compete, what role will the airborne force play? Is it capable of fighting alongside the more robust Interim or Objective Force unit?

There are several ways the Army can organize airborne forces to enable units such as the 1st Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division to successfully execute entry missions in a non-permissive environment. One such solution is for airborne troops to be organic to the SBCT or to the Unit of Action in the Objective Force. This would give tremendous flexibility to the SBCT commander and would ensure unity of command from initial entry through passage of the air-land medium forces (Stryker or Future Combat System vehicles). This force could be company or battalion sized and would give limited airborne forced entry capability to seize small objectives in support of the ground maneuver plan. Having a “light” force organic to the brigade would also give the commander capabilities to conduct dismounted operations in urban terrain or in other complex terrain. It would also provide a force that could be used in an air assault mode to seize key terrain in support of mounted maneuver forces.

Another force structure option would be to consolidate an airborne force within each of the Divisions or the Unit of Employment of the Objective Force. This force could be an airborne battalion or possibly even a brigade. This would give the division commander much greater capability to conduct entry operations without relying on an outside headquarters such as the 82nd Airborne Division. Again, as in the previous example, it would give the division level commander much greater flexibility in dealing with complex terrain with organic forces.

The drawback to the idea of distributing airborne forces across each of the Units of Action or Units of Employment is that the airfield seizure mission is a highly specialized task that

requires unique outload deployment facilities, a close lash up to the United States Air Force, and experienced and well resourced command and control. Each of these three areas will be addressed in detail in later paragraphs. In addition to the three areas just mentioned, the unique individual and collective training requirements for an airborne task force would be particularly difficult to address in a decentralized fashion.

Unique facilities

The 82nd Airborne Division enjoys the finest airborne related facilities in the world; the cumulative result of fifty years of experience in training and deploying airborne forces. The United States Army and Air Force at Fort Bragg and Pope Air Force Base have expended a vast amount of resources in the past decade modernizing and building unique facilities that allow the airborne commander to train and deploy.[20] Fort Bragg's recently constructed Parachute Rigging Facility and Heavy Drop Rigging Facility are the largest and most modern facilities of their kind in the world.[21] While other facilities in the nation offer similar function, none can match the Fort Bragg facilities in terms of scale and capability. Only the Fort Bragg facilities can support multiple battalion heavy drop rigging capabilities in an eighteen hour timeline. To replicate this capability with distributed airborne forces would require an exponential increase in both spending for the new facilities and in manning the parachute rigger units that comprise the backbone of the 82nd Airborne Division's strategic deployability. The Army and Air Force has enjoyed a unique relationship via the co-joined installations of Fort Bragg and Pope Air Force Base. Nowhere is this "jointness" more evident than in the recently completed $120 million Outload Support Facility at Green Ramp on Pope Air Force Base. This one of a kind facility gives the United States Army the ability to load a brigade's worth of paratroopers, heavy drop platforms, and air land vehicles in a compressed timeline.[22] Unlike the situation the 82nd Airborne Division encountered as recently as 1989, when, due to an ice storm, paratroopers were forced to rig their equipment under the wings of C141 aircraft, this state of the art facility is all-weather capable. Again, this facility's capabilities and capacity are not replicated anywhere else in the world. In addition to deployment outload capabilities, Fort Bragg also has the finest airborne training facilities in the world. The post has seven major drop zones and the recently completed Holland Drop Zone Airfield Seizure Complex. This facility is unique because it enables battalion and brigade sized forces to conduct an airfield seizure on a facility that closely resembles a real international or major military airport/airfield.[23] This unique training complex contains control tower and terminal facilities, troop barracks, hangers, and all of the other structures that might be found on a modern international airport or military air base. Each of

the nine airborne infantry battalions at Fort Bragg are able to rehearse, train, and receive evaluation at this facility on a regular basis. If these airborne infantry battalions were assigned across the Army to each of the Units of Employment, training of the sort described above would require the distributed airborne forces to deploy to Fort Bragg in order to achieve the level of realism that is found on this airfield seizure facility.

Interoperability with the USAF

Fort Bragg and Pope Air Force Base have benefited from fifty years of collective experience training and the joint deployment of airborne forces. This mutual relationship has been built upon hundreds of airborne operations executed each year. In addition to the training and deployment facilities, the command relationship that has been built between the 18th Airborne Corps/82nd Airborne Division and the 43rd Airlift Wing is unique. Commanders from both services have literally grown up professionally together, frequently serving multiple assignments learning the intricacies of executing these complex missions. Leaders from both services, from Wing/Division level, all the way down to rifle platoon leaders and pilots from individual aircraft routinely plan, rehearse, execute, and AAR missions on a regular basis. This close relationship and mission focus is as much about physical proximity as it is about depth of experience. Were the US Army to allocate airborne units to each of the Objective Force Units of Action or Employment, this close relationship, and the resulting expertise, would be virtually impossible to achieve.

Experienced C2

The requirement to conduct a forcible entry airborne operation into contested enemy airspace requires an exceptionally experienced and well-trained organization. Although the commander of the ground force, normally referred to as the airborne commander, is normally the battalion or brigade commander, depending on the size of the force deploying, it requires additional command and control to execute the operation. In the 82nd Airborne Division, the division staff is extremely involved in the planning and execution of each airfield seizure operation. The short fused nature of these operations normally requires an extremely close working relationship between the various headquarters, with parallel planning occurring from corps/division down to company level. Division and brigade staffs frequently execute the airfield seizure mission, usually at least once every four to six weeks. As a result, the experience base of the collective staffs, the standardization which is possible with nine similar battalions under one division headquarters, and the close working relationship with the USAF are maintained at

an exceptionally high level. With this level of training, it is possible to execute the entire planning process from alert to wheels up of the first battalion task force in eighteen hours.[24]

Planning is only the first step in the process. Command and Control of an airborne task force is not limited to the unit (Battalion or Brigade) conducting the mission. The division headquarters plays a vital part in every successful operation. Specially trained and equipped US Army communications personnel and equipment are required in each aircraft of the formation to ensure that key leaders can receive updates and stay involved with the key decisions being made as the task force traverses the globe heading for the objective area.[25] A command and control aircraft, referred to as the Joint Airborne Command and Control Command Post (JACC/CP) deploys ahead of the task force, carrying member of the division staff and a general officer, usually the ADC(O).[26] These critical personnel, who represent the JTC Commander, provide the necessary expertise and leadership to ensure that the airborne taskforce is integrated into the JTF scheme of maneuver for the forced entry operation. Functions of the JACC/CP may include pre-assault fires, collection and dissemination of joint intelligence products to the airborne commander, and the final "Go/NoGo" brief that occurs twenty minutes prior to the execution of the parachute assault. As with the previous examples, this is a highly trained and experienced staff that executes this function literally dozens of times each year. Given the complexity and specialized nature of this mission, it would be very unlikely that a similar level of proficiency could be expected if each of the Units of Employment would be required to conduct the command and control functions of a forcible entry parachute assault with organic airborne forces.

Individual Training

The individual training requirements of the paratroopers and jumpmasters are much more efficient to achieve and sustain in an airborne division. Traditionally, the Non Commission Officers of the division serve multiple assignments in the division and ensure standards are achieved in each of the various duty positions. It is not uncommon to find sergeant majors who have served the majority of their careers in the 82nd Airborne Division. This continuity ensures that junior enlisted men and officers have the opportunity to learn from their more experienced NCOs and officers.

Fort Bragg runs one of two Jumpmaster Schools in the US Army. This school provides the majority of jumpmasters for the division. Standardization and new equipment issues are fairly easy to address at monthly command and staff or training meetings across the division. Were the Army to distribute airborne forces across the force, individual training concerns could

be addressed without too much difficulty, but certainly lend themselves to a consolidation of airborne units at a single location.

Collective Training

Maintaining collective skills at the battalion and brigade level is a cumbersome task for the United States Air Force to support. Limited airframes and increasing OPTEMPO on strategic airlift assets requires the efficient employment of these assets in the training environment. Since all nine of the 82nd Airborne Division's infantry battalions are co-located at Fort Bragg, the USAF is able to support the division in an extraordinarily efficient manner. Once a month, a "large package" of airframes (hence the name: large package week), sufficient to drop an infantry battalion of paratroopers, plus multiple heavy drop platforms, arrives at Pope Air Force Base. This large package week is the result of an inter-service agreement between the Army and the Air Force, and further displays the unique relationship between the two services for this type of operation. During the course of the large package week, six of the nine airborne infantry battalions are able to conduct a battalion sized mass tactical airborne operation onto one of the drop zones on Fort Bragg. This monthly large package week forms the basis of the number one collective training event for the division and ensures that the Division Ready Brigade is always ready to execute an airfield seizure to standard. One of the limiting factors in the scale of the Army's airborne capability has been the decline in the number of available airframes.[27] With the ongoing retirement of the C141 fleet and the fielding of C17s to take their place, the overall capability to conduct mass tactical airborne operations has decreased. This decrease in capability has driven the USAF to improve the efficiency with which it provides aircraft to the Army for these missions. Were airborne battalions to be scattered around the country, employed at the Unit of Employment level, the ability to maintain the same level of training as is enjoyed today would be exceptionally more difficult, if not impossible.

Another key advantage of having airborne battalions consolidated in one location is the ability for the most senior leaders to interact with subordinate leaders on a regular basis. It is not uncommon for the Division Commander to jump with numerous battalions during each Large Package Week. His participation in training events enables the battalion and brigade commanders to exercise the same command and control lash up as would be executed in combat. It also provides an ideal source of feedback and mentoring to subordinate commanders. My personal experience as a battalion commander attests to this. The Division Commander or one of the Assistant Division Commanders jumped with my battalion nearly every time the battalion executed its airfield seizure mission. This sort of mentoring by an

extremely experienced airborne leader would be nearly impossible to replicate were the airborne force to be distributed.

TRANSFORMATION OF THE AIRBORNE FORCE

The airborne brigade and battalions must be modernized and equipped as closely as possible to the Objective Force Unit of Action in order to fight alongside them on the battlefield. These airborne forces must have the same degree of situational awareness, ability to achieve effects, and command and control as the Objective Force. Units must be able to adjust their plans enroute to the drop zone, achieve decisive results immediately upon hitting the drop zone, and then be able to coordinate their efforts with the arriving unit of action in order to conduct passage on lines and possibly fight by their side. Although, the US Army has no intention of heavy dropping the Stryker Combat Vehicle or the Future Combat System, the airborne task force commander must make do with lighter and fully modernized systems.[28]

Command and Control

During the preparation phase of Millennium Challenge '02, the 2nd Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division was issued and trained on the command and control systems currently being validated by the Stryker Brigade Combat Team at Fort Lewis. This suite of systems was inserted into the National Training Center "battlefield" with the airborne brigade task force and ensured that the initial entry force was able to maintain close contact with the Joint Task Force Commander and the follow-on air land SBCT force during the critical entry phase of the battle.[29] As these systems continue through the acquisition process and are fielded to the Interim Force, similar systems must be fielded to the airborne forces that will precede them onto the battlefield. Since the C2 version of the Stryker Combat Vehicle will not be issued to the airborne force, the system must be installed on HMMWVs and hardened to survive the parachute insertion onto the battlefield.

Another essential system that has demonstrated its utility during MC02 was the Enroute Mission Planning and Rehearsal System (EMPRS). The Army Chief of Staff stated that the Objective Force must be capable of en route mission planning and rehearsal.[30] EMPRS, proven by the airborne during previous Advanced Warfighting Experiments, is just the tool to assist with command and control throughout the deployment process.[31] Using this system, commanders may fine tune, rehearse, and communicate the plan while the airborne task force is in the air en route to the objective. Given the fact that the task force may be in the air for as long as twenty

hours, commanders must have a flexible tool which allows for adjustments to the plan based upon the receipt of additional intelligence or other key factors.[32]

Land Warrior

The US Army Land Warrior System has provided light, ranger, and airborne forces unique capabilities that will enable them to achieve a much higher level of efficiency and effectiveness on future battlefields. This system allows the dismounted force to achieve a level of situational awareness and interoperability that has been impossible to achieve with traditional equipment. The heart of the system is the man-portable computer and the integrated helmet mounted communications system. Each operator has a heads-up display which shows friendly and enemy dispositions, and to view data from the computer. The integrated GPS and communications system allows leaders to track every man on the battlefield. Pull down menus on the computer screen allow leaders to digitally call for fire, send reports, and transmit digital images from the optics and thermal site on the M4 modular weapons system.[33] In tests at the Joint Readiness Center in September 2001, paratroopers from the 325th AIR experienced significantly fewer casualties, assembled more rapidly on the drop zone, and inflicted more casualties on the enemy than those units without the system. Exercise director LTG Randall Rigby stated: "The Land Warrior attack proved the Army will be more lethal, situationally aware and survivable as it heads into the 21st Century."[34]

Clearly, Land Warrior is the type of system which potentially gives light infantry units some of the capabilities which the Army Chief of Staff envisions for the Objective Force. Equipping Objective Force airborne units with the latest generation of Land Warrior will allow much greater interoperability with their Objective Force comrades.

LOSAT

As mentioned previously, restrictions on size and weight of the Stryker Combat Vehicle and the Future Combat System will prohibit the fielding of these systems to the airborne force. To make up for the lack of firepower during the crucial moments immediately following the airfield seizure, the Army will have to aggressively pursue the fielding of lightweight and lethal systems such as the Line-of-Site Anti-Tank (LOSAT). This HMMWV mounted system has the capability of defeating any armor system in the world through the use of kinetic energy missiles. This system, which is being fielded to the 82nd Airborne Division this year, is exactly the sort of transitional system that pushes the paratrooper's capability forward into the new century.[35] Other lightweight and extremely lethal system, such as the Javelin Anti-tank system (which replaced its antiquated cousin the M47 Dragon in the late nineties) will continue to provide the

light fighter with devastating firepower in a small enough package to be dropped onto the battlefield via parachute. Modernization of the airborne force will be essential to keeping up with the Objective Force units.

RECOMMENDATION

The United States Army has brilliantly grabbed the bull by the horns and is tackling the issues associated with transformation. Creating lighter, more lethal, and more deployable forces is exactly what this nation needs to do in order to rapidly and decisively defeat adversaries anywhere on the globe. It is extremely important as we flesh out the details of this Interim Force and develop the concepts for the Objective Force that we don't forget the lessons of history. We must retain a robust capability to conduct forcible entry operations from operational and strategic distances. For the foreseeable future, airborne forces and their associated air-droppable equipment are the best solution to the problem. Because of the exhaustive nature of equipping, manning, training, deploying, and employing these airborne forces, the best course of action to retain our strategic forcible entry capability is through the use of an airborne division. This airborne division must be fully modernized and made to be completely interoperable with our Interim Forces. Advances in lethality, C4ISR, firepower, and every other operating system must be made available to this airborne force. Systems such as Land Warrior and the Enroute Mission Planning and Rehearsal System are perfect examples of cutting edge technology that enable the airborne commander to be interoperable with Interim Force commanders. Even though equipping airborne forces with the Stryker Combat Vehicle may not be efficient in terms of airdropability, the Army is fielding systems such as the LOSAT to give the airborne commander the firepower he needs to accomplish his mission on the ground. Once on the ground, the airborne force is a key force multiplier for the Interim Force Commander. Light and fully modernized airborne forces can fight alongside the Interim Force and be his principle tool for eliminating enemy forces in urban, jungle, mountainous, or other complex terrain. Although it may be tempting to distribute these wonderfully talented and capable troopers to each of the Units of Employment in the Objective Force, the complexity of their forced entry mission, the necessary experience of each staff from battalion through division, and the efficiencies gained from centrally locating all of our airborne forces requires that the United States Army retain an airborne division in the force structure. There will always be a place on the battlefield for a well-trained paratrooper.

WORD COUNT = 6,216

ENDNOTES

[1] Gerard M. Devlin, Paratrooper (NY: St Martins Press, 1979), 35.

[2] Department of the Army, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-90, "US Army Operational and Organizational Plan for Maneuver Unit of Action," (draft) (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, 20 July 2002), p54.

[3] Department of the Army, TRADOC CD ROM "The Army Objective Force – The Era of the Objective Force…Realizing the Vision," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, October 2002)

[4] Department of the Army, Field Manual 1-0, The Army, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, 14 June 2001), 15. Army METL tasks are: shape the security environment, respond promptly to crisis, mobilize the Army, conduct forcible entry operations, dominate land operations, and provide support to civil authorities

[5] Department of the Army, Field Manual 3.0, Operations, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army,14 June 2001), paragraph 1-5.

[6] Eric Shinseki, Concepts for the Objective Force United States Army White Paper (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army), 38.

[7] Department of the Army, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-90, US Army Operational and Organizational Plan for Maneuver Unit of Action, (draft) (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, 20 July 2002), p54.

[8] Department of the Army, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-66, Objective Force Capabilities (Final Draft – Coordination), (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, p 6.

[9] Sara Wood, "Paratroopers Jump into Army Experiment," http://www.jfcom.mil/newslink/storyacrchive/2002/no073102.htm , accessed 12 Nov 2002. This quotation is from Major General John R. Vines, then Commanding General of the 82nd Airborne Division. Note the reference to strategic forcible entry, not the tactical sort of forcible entry that could be executed by air assault forces from units such as the 101st (Airborne) Air Assault Division.

[10] Department of the Army, Field Manual 71-100-3, Air Assault Division Operations, (Washington, D.C.: US Department of the Army, 29 October 1996), p 3.

[11] This paper is not attempting to address roles and missions of all "special purpose units." Special purpose units are generally the ranger, airborne, and air assault units that are currently in the force structure. I am sure there will be a role for air assault capable units and aviation units that can support these units.

[12] Devlin, 102.

[13] Clay Blair, Ridgeway's Paratroopers. (NY: Doubleday & Co, 1985), p29.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Department of the Army, Field Manual 90-26 Airborne Operations, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, December 1990), paragraph 1-6.

[16] Department of the Army, 82nd Airborne Division Airfield Seizure Standard Operating Procedure, dated 1 June 2001, p 67.

[17] Major General John R. Vines, FY2002 Annual Training Guidance, dated 21 September 2001.

[18] 82nd Airborne Division Airfield Seizure Standard Operating Procedure, p. XX.

[19] Sara Wood, "Paratroopers Jump into Army Experiment," http://www.jfcom.mil/newslink/storyacrchive/2002/no073102.htm , accessed 12 Nov 2002.

[20] Tommie Brown brownt@bragg.army.mil. "Outload Deployment Facilities Information." Electronic mail message to David McBride David.McBride@carlisle.army.mil xx February 2003.

[21] Home of the only division sized airborne force in the United States Army, Fort Bragg's parachute facilities are, by design, larger and more capable than any other western facilities. In addition to modern rigging facilities for the personnel and cargo parachutes, the Fort Bragg facility is also completely climate controlled, which facilitates the speedy drying of several hundred wet parachutes and the safe storage of many thousands of packed parachutes.

[22] The 82nd Airborne uses a compressed timeline (N-Hour) or an extended (X-Hour) timeline based upon operational requirements. The N-Hour timeline can put the lead battalion wheels up in eighteen hours (N+18). The remainder of the brigade could follow by N+24, based upon aircraft availability.

[23] This information comes from several briefings I received from the 82nd Airborne Division Staff during the planning and construction of the Holland Drop Zone Airfield Seizure complex.

[24] This is probably one of the most distinctive and recognizable standards of the 82nd Airborne Division. Each infantry battalion is routinely tested on this standard in Emergency Deployment Readiness Exercises conducted by the various higher headquarters. The standard originates in the 82nd Airborne Division Readiness Standard Operating Procedure (RSOP), but may also be found published in annual and quarterly training guidance from company all the way through division level.

[25] The enroute communications package consists of both TACSAT (tactical satellite) and SECOMP (Secure Enroute Communications Package) radios, installed by the Enroute Communications Platoon of the 82nd Signal Battalion.

[26] The JACC/CP (Joint Airborne Communications Center/Command Post) is a modular system that s installed in a C130 aircraft. This aircraft takes off prior to the launch of the airborne task force and accompanies the airborne task force as it flies towards its objective. It provides a linkage from the Joint Task Force Commander to the airborne commander on the lead aircraft.

[27] From the time of my arrival to Fort Bragg in 1995 to my departure in 2002, the number of available C141 aircraft declined from over 250 down to less than 100. The corresponding increase in available C17s was from zero to approximately 75. This excludes C130s, which generally are useful for tactical, not strategic airborne operations. It is also important to realize that a C141 holds twenty more combat loaded jumpers than a C17.

[28] Carl Pignato [Carl.Pignato@Benning.Army.Mil], "FW: Stryker Question," electronic mail message to LTC David McBride [David.McBride@Carlisle.Army.Mil], 17 December 2002.

[29] This information was obtained through direct observation of the 1st Battalion, 325 Airborne Infantry Regiment as it prepared for MC02 in June 2002. Discussions with the battalion and brigade commanders and staffs indicated that the preparations were successful and enabled the airborne team to interact with the SBCT throughout the operation.

[30] Shinseki, p 386.

[31] "Experimental System Provides Real-Time In-Flight Data." http://www.almc.army.mil/alog/issues/JanFeb01/News.htm. Accessed 5 Nov 2002. The 3rd Battalion, 325th AIR validated the EMPRS system during the AWE in Sept 2001 at the Joint Readiness Training Center.

[32] "Operations in Asia", http://www.dtic.mil/armylink/news/Oct1997/r19971004_armyactivities.html, accessed 5 November 2002. During CENTRAZBAT '97, the 3rd Battalion, 504th PIR conducted the longest strategic airborne operation in history, deploying from Fort Bragg, NC to Sayram, Kazakhstan. This flight lasted nineteen hours and required three en flight refuelings.

[33] "Land Warrior Coming to a Grunt Near You," http://www.defenselink.mil/news.May2001/n05092001_200105094.html. accessed on 3 Jan 03. I have worked with the Land Warrior system since the mid-nineties, participating in testing at the Ranger Training Brigade in 1993-94 and observing the first operation test with the 325th AIR in 2000-2001. This is truly a transformational system which has improved dramatically with each version of the system. First unit fielded is scheduled to be the 75th Ranger Regiment in 2004.

[34] "Land Warrior Night Live-Fire Sheds Light on Future," Army Link News, http:///dtic.mil/armylinks/news/Sep2000/a20000918mout.html. accessed 3 Jan 2003.

[35] "LOSAT," LOSAT: Lockheed Martin – Missiles and Fire Control, http://www.missilesandfirecontrol.com/our_products/antiarmor/LOSAT/oroduct-LOSAT.html. Accessed 3 Jan 2003. I attending the formal presentation of the first LOSAT system to the 82nd Airborne Division at the 2002 AUSA Convention in Washington, DC.

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