

April 1994


Soldiers

Bringing Relief to Bosnia

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New Budget,
New Directions
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A man in military camouflage and a red cap is working on parachute suspension lines. He is wearing a watch on his left wrist and is focused on his task. The background is dark and indistinct.

At bases in Germany and Italy, Army parachute riggers put together the humanitarian aid bundles that help feed the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Spec. David Soper, assigned to the 24th Quartermaster Detachment in Italy, makes sure the suspension lines in a parachute are not tangled.

Rigger-ous Mission



(Above) PFC Paul Blache, 44th Signal Bn. (left) and Spec. William McClelland, 3rd Bn., 325th ABCT, put the finishing touches on bundles rigged with humanitarian aid for airdrop over Bosnia. **(Right)** Spec. Corey Ellis cuts some honeycomb while Spec. John Rodman assists.



Rigger-ous Mission

Story and Photos by SSgt. Douglas Ide

SSGT. Thomas Ogden has been dreaming about food for the past 13 months. He hasn't been eating it, though. He's been packing it.

Ogden and his fellow riggers from the 5th Quartermaster Detachment, based in Kaiserslautern, Germany, are beginning their third consecutive temporary duty assignment at Rhein Main Air Base in Frankfurt. The soldiers are rigging humanitarian bundles that are dropped over Bosnia-Herzegovina in support of Operation Provide Promise.

"When we first came here in February 1993, we had a little pool on how long we were going to be here," said Ogden. "I was sure we would be out of here by the Fourth of July. Needless to say, I lost that pool."

The soldiers initially deployed for two to three weeks, and were then extended twice in two- to three-week increments, said Ogden. "Then they said, 'Alright, let's just put them on for 179 days.'" That was more than a year ago.

Now, some 13 months and more than 25,000 loads later, the riggers are be-

ginning yet another 179-day rotation, with no end in sight.

The riggers deployed to Rhein Main breathing fire, ready to pack container delivery system, or CDS, bundles at a frenetic pace for a few weeks, then return home to "K-Town" and their families and friends. They set up shop in an aircraft hangar "borrowed" from the Air Force's Aerial Delivery Support Branch at Rhein Main. Though their new digs were much smaller than they would have liked, and much more cramped than they were used to, the riggers were soon pushing out the humanitarian bundles smoothly and efficiently.

"We thought we did an outstanding job the first night we were here," said Ogden. "We did 90 bundles in nine hours. We were yelling 'HOO-AH,' going back at 0430, patting each other on the back."

But the mission lasted well past those first weeks, slipping into months. In December 1993, the mission load more than doubled as the United States dedicated more aircraft to the airdrops.

"Secretary of State Warren Christopher said that the U.S. would double its efforts in support of Bosnia," said Capt. John Tokar, commander of the 5th QM Det. "That meant that twice the number of airplanes were going to be dropping aid. In addition to that, they figured out how to put more bundles on a single plane. So double the airplanes meant more than double the workload for us."

It also meant that the riggers

needed more room; the hangar was already bulging at the rivets. But with more aircraft at the base, the Air Force was reluctant to free up any more space at all, much less hangars, for the riggers.

So the 5th QM's operations officer, CWO 3 Ken Studer, came up with the idea of using German fest tents, and pressed base officials for some space in which to set them up. "We convinced them that we could not expand the rigging mission in the hangar where we were before," said Studer.

The increased workload also demanded a longer work week. After having settled into a five-day schedule, the soldiers were now being asked to work every day, 10 to 11 hours per day. A group of 59 augmentees from 15 other European-based U.S. units didn't lessen the load much, it simply helped keep the 5th QM from feeling swamped.

As the excitement of the first day receded, then vanished, packing and rigging 90 bundles in a day was no longer such a big deal. "Today, we did 116 be-



fore lunch," said Ogden matter-of-factly. "We've got it down to a science."

"The troops have responded pretty well," said Tokar. "To be here that long, and then have all this heaped on them, you'd expect to see some impact on morale. We've had a few problems, but overall, the soldiers are really doing well."

Another potential problem came from an unexpected direction: west. Kaiserslautern, home to the soldiers' families and friends, is only an hour and a half away on the autobahn. Being that close to home can be as much a hindrance as a boon, said Tokar.

"Whether you're an hour and a half away from home or a thousand miles away, it might as well be the same if you don't get time off to see your family," said Tokar. "Just because we're so close doesn't mean we have it easy. In some ways it actually makes it a little tougher."

The soldiers must also fulfill requirements usually associated with being at their home station. "If we were deployed to Zagreb, Croatia, or Sarajevo,

Bosnia, we would be exempt from external responsibilities like CTT, PT tests and everything," said Tokar. "Because we're so close, we still have to keep up."

Their primary concern, though, is the 210 humanitarian bundles — each weighing about 1,500 pounds — they pack and rig each day. "That's almost 160 tons of support per day," said Tokar, almost surprised, after punching a few buttons on his calculator.

That support includes food, medical and "winterization" bundles rigged using the container delivery system and the Tri-Wall Aerial Distribution system, or TRIAD. The TRIAD system, developed by four members of the Air Force's 7th Special Operations Squadron, enables the aerial delivery of aid to urban areas [see accompanying story]. The unit keeps a three-day supply of rigging and aid materials at Rhein Main. They are resupplied from a warehouse in Kaiserslautern.

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Triad Distribution System

OPERATION Provide Promise has seen the advent of the Humanitarian Daily Ration and the Tri-Wall Aerial Distribution System, two new ways to help feed hungry inhabitants of war-torn countries.

TRIADS was first used to drop humanitarian food supplies into Bosnia on March 20, 1993. It was developed so that rations could be delivered into urban areas that convoys couldn't reach, and where container delivery system drops were too dangerous.

The TRIAD system involves packing HDRs and MREs into cardboard boxes, which open after leaving the aircraft. The boxes' contents scatter and fall to the ground individually, instead of in one large container. Tests have shown that enough of the meals survive the drop to make TRIADS a viable delivery system.

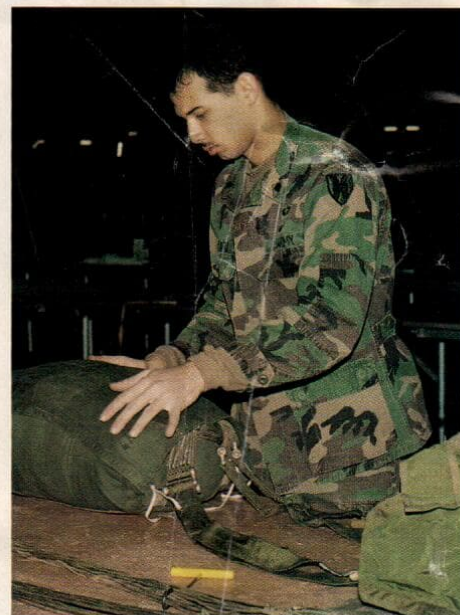
"With a high-velocity container delivery system bundle, you've got 1,500 pounds falling at 50 to 60 miles per hour. That would not only kill a person, but that would destroy a house or a car," said Capt. John Tokar, 5th Quartermaster Detachment commander. "The humanitarian daily rations fall at a much slower rate because they're kind of flat ... and it's a small package. They say it wouldn't kill you, that it's comparable to being hit by a softball."

The HDRs were created specifically for use in relief situations such as those under way in Bosnia-Herzegovina. From the outside, each HDR looks exactly like a brown, plastic MRE packet. But the new ration is specifically designed to feed a "moderately malnourished" person for a day, according to the Joint Information Bureau at Rhein Main Air Base in Frankfurt, Germany. An MRE packet is designed as one meal.

There are six different HDR menus, 12 to a box, each with a caloric content between 1,900 and 2,000. The shelf life for an HDR is estimated at 18 months to two years.

The rations are not designed as a long-term food solution, but rather as emergency sustenance until traditional feeding measures can be established.

HDRs were dropped for the first time Nov. 22, 1993, via TRIADS. — SSgt. Douglas Ide



Spec. Jose Astacio, from the 5th QM Det., rigs parachutes at Rhein Main Air Base for an upcoming personnel jump.

France. Ten soldiers from each nation work side by side with the American riggers. Though the relationship is "working pretty well," according to 2nd Lt. Maria Juarez, 5th QM executive officer, it wasn't always so.

"In the beginning it was tough to manage," said Tokar. "It was like three different operations. Germans wanted to work on German bundles, French on French bundles, and so on. Now it's integrated. Everybody works on everybody's bundles until everybody is done."

At the moment, it doesn't look like anyone will be done anytime soon. The Provide Promise airlift/airdrop is already the longest such relief operation in history, surpassing even the famed Berlin Airlift, said Capt. Andy White, Joint Task Force Provide Promise public affairs officer. And as the need continues in Bosnia-Herzegovina and coalition governments pledge ever more assistance, the end does not seem imminent.

"I fully intend to PCS out of here," said Ogden with a broad smile. "And I don't leave for another year." □

