

Logistical Support to Task Force Viking:

Task Force Support in Northern Iraq



by Kenneth Finlayson

THE responsibility for the conduct of the campaign in northern Iraq in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM belonged to the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force–North (CJSOTF-N). Known as Task Force Viking, the mission of the CJSOTF was to leverage the support of the various Kurdish factions in order to disrupt the Iraqi Army arrayed along the northern political boundary known as the Green Line. In concert with the operations in the western desert and the support to the conventional

Map of Iraq depicting the political demarcation line known as the Green Line. The Green Line represents the ad hoc political boundary established between the traditional Kurdish strongholds and Saddam’s Iraq in the northeastern part of the country. Since 1991, the Kurds patrolled the Green Line which corresponded to the boundaries of the provinces the Iraqi army had left at the end of the Gulf War.



forces, the mission of TF Viking was a vital aspect of the Coalition Campaign Plan.

The core of TF Viking was 10th Special Forces Group, commanded by Colonel Charles T. Cleveland. The 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 10th SFG, the 3rd Battalion of the 3rd SFG, and the 10th Group Support Company formed the nucleus of the task force. Other units incorporated into the task force included the Joint Special Operations Air Detachment, North composed of the Air Force’s 352nd Special Operations Group; the 2nd Battalion, 14th Infantry of the 10th Mountain Division; D Company of the 96th Civil Affairs Battalion; the 404th Civil Affairs Battalion; Bravo Forward Support Company of the 528th Special Operations Support Battalion; B Company, 112th Special Operations Signal Battalion; and an element of the Joint Communications Support Element.

The size of the task force exceeded the capacity of the Group Support Company. COL Cleveland and his staff adopted an innovative solution to meet the vastly increased logistics requirements. They formed Task Force Support to encompass the support elements in the CJSOTF. Cleveland explained the rationale for TF Support. “We felt that we needed an ‘umbrella organization’ to handle the C² (command and control) functions and make stuff happen. We needed an organization to move, build, and tear things down for us.”

In late October 2002, COL Cleveland appointed Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth Hurst to be the TF Support commander. Major Gordon Barrett*, the 10th SFG Group Support Company commander, was Hurst’s executive



Task Force Viking Logo

*Pseudonyms have been used for all military personnel with a rank lower than lieutenant colonel.



Constanta Romania became the location of choice for the staging of TF Viking when Turkey was unavailable.

officer. Functionally, “we used the forward support battalion as a template,” Hurst related. “We established a support operations section, but we had difficulty filling both the CJSOTF J-4 (logistics) staff and the task force staff out of hide.”² As the personnel issues were resolved by moving personnel and adding augmentees from the Joint Manning Document, the staff focused on the single greatest unknown, the location of their final staging base for the move into Iraq.

CJSOTF-N was the supporting effort in the Coalition campaign plan for Iraq. The original plan called for TF Viking to move into northern Iraq from Turkey. When

Mikhail Kogalniceanu Airfield, Romania, location of the intermediate staging base for TF Viking.



Turkey balked at the transit of Coalition forces on 1 March 2003, the CJSOTF scrambled madly to find an alternate location for staging. Their solution was in Europe, where the 10th SFG routinely operates.

The European Command staff began to search for alternatives. Fortunately, Special Operations Command European Command had recently invested \$300,000 in an extensive survey of Constanta, Romania, to support a regional special operations forces training exercise. “We looked at a variety of locations in the region,” recalled COL Cleveland. “There had been a PDSS [pre-deployment site survey] at Constanta, Romania, and it became the choice.”³

Brigadier General Gary M. Jones, Special Operations Command European Command commander, contacted the Joint Chiefs of Staff to gain permission to approach his Romanian military contacts. When the Romanians responded positively, the European Command staff took over the negotiations. “[Romania] promised 250 percent support including force protection for U.S. forces. Constanta was a resort city on the Black Sea with plenty of empty hotels during the non-peak tourist season. The Romanian Air Force said that they would make an airfield available and arrange fuel,” remembered Jones. Since it had no forward basing site until January 2003, the 10th SFG lost its original position in the airflow queue. It was not until early February 2003 that the two Colorado-based battalions of the 10th SFG arrived in Constanta.

Mihail Kogalniceanu Airbase, near the resort town of Constanta, possessed the requisite capabilities to handle the aircraft and tonnage needed to support the task force. It created a 1,000-mile long Air Line of Communication, but choices were limited and time was rapidly slipping away. The decision to stage from Romania had repercussions up and down the logistics chain.

“We never anticipated going into Romania,” said Lieutenant Colonel Jobie Roach, the chief of plans for the J-4 of Special Operations Command, Central Command. “This meant we could not mass logistics into one area, but had to flow things in from various locations.”⁴ The uncertainty about Turkey reverberated throughout the logistics chain. “Higher headquarters were withholding forces and materials from the TPFDD [Time Phased Force Deployment Data] flow anticipating that Turkey would open up. We

The Movement Control Teams of the 528th were a key component of TF Support.



depended on the CENTCOM (Central Command) SOTSE (Special Operations Theater Support Element) to act as the ARSOF (Army special operations forces) logistics integrator with the theater components.”⁵

For TF Support, the move to Romania first meant establishing liaison with the Special Operations Theater Support Element at the main staging locations in Germany. Sergeant First Class Wilson Richmond* and Sergeant First Class Lincoln Belfair* were dispatched to Rhein Main Airbase in Frankfurt and European Command headquarters in Stuttgart, respectively. Other personnel deployed to Ramstein Air Base near Kaiserslautern. They played an increasingly important role by setting the priorities and facilitating the movement of materials forward as the campaign unfolded.⁶ The loss of the materials prepositioned months before in Turkey meant more materials had to flow through Germany en route to Romania.

Once the decision was made to stage into Iraq from Romania, the CJSOTF began the process of moving forward. In early February, B/528th Company commander Major Randall Griswold* dispatched a two-man movement control team to Fort Carson, Colorado, to assist the 10th SFG with its air movement to its intermediate staging base in Stuttgart.⁷

In the past, the 10th SFG had deployed a relatively small number of people and depended upon the installation movement control team for assistance, but the deployment of the 10th Group plus other units at Fort Carson exceeded the installation’s capabilities. First Lieutenant Carlton Howard*, a veteran of operations in Afghanistan, headed up the movement control team sent to help the 10th SFG deploy.⁸ Once the airflow was underway, Major Griswold dispatched another team to Germany to assist with the reception of the unit personnel and equipment. Stuttgart was intended to be an intermediate staging base until the political issues with Turkey were settled. Then everything would flow into the planned intermediate staging base at Diyarbakir Air Force Base, Turkey.⁹ When this did not resolve itself, Constanta became the final destination for the 10th SFG elements flowing through Stuttgart.

Bravo Forward Support Company helped set up the CJSOTF-North Operations Center at the Constanta airfield and established the power to run the myriad of lights, computers, and other electronic devices in the headquarters. The company’s mechanics worked long and hard to make sure that all the deploying vehicles were modified to carry the increased amounts of equipment, fuel, and weapons needed to operate independently in northern Iraq. As was typical for Bravo Forward Support Company soldiers, power generation expert Specialist Charles Olmstead* ended up helping prepare equipment pallets, set up heaters, and pitch tents. Olmstead noted, “I even helped some Croatian contract technicians set up the Titan system (radio frequency tagging system) used to track our pallets and containers of equipment.”¹⁰ State-side elements of TF Viking began flowing into Constanta beginning on 3 March.



The Joint Operations Center in Constanta was the nerve center for TF Viking’s forward deployment.

B Company, 112th Signal Battalion, established the primary communications support when the CJSOTF began operations in Constanta. Their TSC-85 systems went into operation to provide the satellite data downlink and switching networks that were the heart of the CJSOTF communications architecture.¹¹

More units arrived throughout the month of March to swell the ranks of the CJSOTF. The 404th Civil Affairs Battalion and A Company, 9th Psychological Operations Battalion arrived to join TF Viking in Romania. With negotiations with Turkey at an impasse, TF Viking chose a bold course to insert its elements on 21 March. This was the circuitous, two-day infiltration route that became known as the “Ugly Baby.” Nineteen Special Forces operational detachment alphas (ODAs) and four company-sized headquarters elements (ODBs) were inserted to link up with their Kurdish counterparts. An aircraft damaged during Ugly Baby caused the Turkish government to reconsider its ban on overflights and on 23 March, three MC-130s organic to the CJSOTF were granted permission to transit Turkish airspace and open the way for regular flights into northern Iraq.

With the CJSOTF now flowing directly into its operational area, TF Support was supporting from four distinct logistics nodes. The logistics chain began at Fort Carson,

The parachute insertion and resupply of the 173rd Airborne Brigade (-) tied up a significant portion of the C-17 airlift as TF Viking was getting its operations underway.





The future site of Camp Loki. The abandoned airfield soon became a thriving logistical base.

Colorado, and the task force had elements in Germany, Romania and at Bashur Airfield outside Irbil in Iraq. The demand for personnel and materials continued to increase. It was during the airflow immediately following Ugly Baby that the bulk of the Air Force aircraft for transport disappeared.

Recalcitrance hurt the insertion of TF Viking in its effort to support the Kurds, but it also eliminated staging the U.S. 4th Infantry Division from Turkey. In an effort to get the maximum number of combat soldiers on the ground in the early days of the campaign, the 173rd Airborne Brigade (-) was to parachute into Bashur Airfield. The drop occurred on 25 March, and sustaining the 173rd became a major requirement for TF Support. With eighty-nine sorties of C-17s diverted during the 96 hours of the of the 173rd's insertion, TF Viking was forced to reconfigure its loads for transport on the few MC-130s of the



Build-up of Camp Loki. At its peak, the camp supported over 5,000 special operations forces.



352nd.¹²

The six MC-130's of the 352nd Special Operations Group became the primary lifeline for TF Viking until the 26th.¹³ Once the jump was made, more C-17 aircraft became available. On the 29th, TF Support shifted twenty troops forward. Then the build-up at Bashur Airfield began in earnest.¹⁴

LTC Hurst said, "We lost a lot of aircraft when the 173rd mission came up. Sergeant First Class Wilson Richmond*, Sergeant First Class Lincoln Belfair*, and Major Curtis Layton* were physically grabbing aircraft crew chiefs to make sure our stuff got on the birds."¹⁵ Staff Sergeant Martin Dumont*, usually in charge of maintaining an ammunition dump, remembered that the airflow and the type of aircraft were constantly changing: "We would build a pallet for a C-17, and two hours later we would be told we were getting an MC-130 and we'd have to tear down the pallet and rebuild it [to fit the new aircraft]. You didn't know what bird [the equipment] was leaving on until it showed up."¹⁶

In the austere environment at Bashur, the forward elements of TF Support established Camp Loki (named for the mischievous Norse God) which ultimately supported over 5,000 Coalition forces of CJSOTF-N, who in turn were advising and assisting over 60,000 Kurds.¹⁷ Major Miles Carswell* selected the site lay-out plan for housing the troops and the non-commissioned officers and soldiers of the 528th and the 10th SFG translated the plan into reality. Major Timothy Wynegar*, the contracting officer, set-up the numerous contracts that provided vehicles and services to get the camp up and running.

TF Support was constantly juggling priorities to provide the right logistical support to sustain an ever-increasing population at Camp Loki and the proper mix of supplies for fifty-one ODAs operating along the Green Line. "This was not a well-developed area. We were constantly in communication with our elements in Germany and Romania telling them what was needed. Loads changed constantly, sometimes with the aircraft propellers turning," LTC Hurst commented on the build-up of forces at Camp Loki. "We went from 1,500 to 5,000 personnel in one week."¹⁸ The resourcefulness of the task force was again stretched tight when the city of Mosul

The TF Support operations refueled aircraft as required. Refueling a CH-47 helicopter of the 101st Airborne Division.



fell on 11 April.

The control of the traditionally Kurdish Democratic Party city of Mosul by the Kurdish forces from both the KDP and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan caused a very tense and volatile situation in the city ethnically divided between Kurds and Arabs. COL Cleveland recognized that the thinly dispersed Special Forces teams were not going to be sufficient to keep the peace and he requested additional forces be sent to the city. The first troops to arrive at Irbil were the Marines of the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) from the Iwo Jima Amphibious Ready Group. LTC Hurst now had a much more complicated support requirement.

"We were notified about 0800 that they would be coming in that day. We had no supply for them, no tents, food, or anything. They came right off the ships by helicopter that afternoon, about 300 of them. We had the tents and all ready for them when they came. The word to us was COL Cleveland needs these guys, and the Marine lieutenant colonel was very professional. He told us they could move that night, [they] just needed food and ammunition to supplement their basic load."¹⁹ After a quick resupply of these items, the first half of the MEU moved on to Mosul in helicopters. The remainder of the MEU, another 300 Marines, arrived that night in Marine aircraft.

"The plan was to bus them to Mosul. [MAJ] John Galoway* went into Irbil and got the KDP (Kurdish Democratic Party) leadership to get buses. Those guys were stopping buses in the street, pulling people off, and contracting the drivers right there. We got twenty-one buses and the 10th Mountain guys for security and moved the Marines down to Mosul."²⁰ The presence of the Marine forces proved to be key to controlling the city.

The mission to support the 26th MEU best illustrates how Task Force Support did the job of keeping CJSOTF-North supplied at all times. Expansion of a Special Forces group headquarters into a CJSOTF necessitated a support battalion-like structure in terms of grade and organization. The success of TF Support can be attributed to its functional design and, as always, to the dedicated effort and ingenuity of the ARSOF soldiers.

Endnotes

- 1 Colonel Charles T. Cleveland, 10th Special Forces Group, interview by Dr. Kenneth Finlayson and Lieutenant Colonel John Katz, 26 June 2003, Fort Carson CO, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 2 Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth Hurst, 10th Special Forces Group, with Task Force Support staff, interview by Dr. Kenneth Finlayson, Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Jones Jr., and Lieutenant Colonel John Katz, 25 June 2003, Fort Carson, CO, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 3 Cleveland interview.
- 4 Lieutenant Colonel Jobie Roach, Special Operations Command Central Command, interview by Dr. Kenneth Finlayson, 12 August 2003, Tampa, FL, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 5 Roach interview.
- 6 Hurst interview.
- 7 Major Randall Griswold*, Bravo Forward Support Company, 528th Special Operations Support Battalion, interview by A. Dwayne Aaron, 9 June 2003,



The ability of TF Support to maintain the flow of logistics was critical to the success of TF Viking in northern Iraq. Speaking here is General Charles R. Holland, former commander of USSOCOM.

Fort Bragg, NC, summary, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.

- 8 First Lieutenant Carlton Howard*, 528th Special Operations Support Battalion, interview by A. Dwayne Aaron, 18 June 2003, Fort Bragg, NC, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 9 Lieutenant Colonel Mark Edwards, Special Operations Support Command, interview by A. Dwayne Aaron, 5 June 2003, Fort Bragg, NC, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 10 Specialist Charles Olmstead*, Bravo Forward Support Company, 528th Special Operations Support Battalion, interview by A. Dwayne Aaron, 27 August 2003, Fort Bragg, NC, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 11 Captain Patrick Flood, "Special OPS Signal Bn Provides Special Support for Operation IRAQI FREEDOM," *Army Communicator*, Fall 2003, 19–23.
- 12 Colonel Charles T. Cleveland, U.S. Army Special Operations Command, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 20 August 2004, Fort Bragg, NC, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Colonel Charles T. Cleveland, U.S. Army Special Operations Command, interview by Dr. John Brener and Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 4 August 2003, Fort Bragg, NC, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 13 Cleveland interview, 26 June 2003.
- 14 Hurst interview.
- 15 Hurst interview.
- 16 Olmstead interview.
- 17 Cleveland interview, 26 June 2003.
- 18 Hurst interview.
- 19 Hurst interview.
- 20 Hurst interview.