ASAALT LNO Provides Downrange Support to PEOs in Kuwait

Ben Ennis

Kuwait, an important partner in helping the United States protect its interests in Southwest Asia per the National Security Strategy, is a U.S. Army logistics base. It is the primary staging area to deploy military equipment to Iraq and Afghanistan. The U.S. Army Forces Central Command (ARCENT), the Army component of the U.S. Central Command, maintains a forward presence in Kuwait.

Workers clean M2 Bradley Fighting Vehicles at the 2nd Battalion, 401st AFSB wash rack, at Camp Arifjan. While in Kuwait, Stewart often worked with AMC AFSBs regarding country clearances to Afghanistan and Iraq. (Photo by Jim Hinnant, 401st AFSB.)

Kuwait is a U.S. Army logistics base and serves as the gateway between the United States and the central front to Afghanistan and Iraq. Here, Soldiers await their bus to the air strip at the theater gateway in Kuwait. In FY08, the gateway processed more than 700,000 troops and civilians moving in and out of Iraq and Afghanistan. (Photo by Fred Baker, Office of the Secretary of Defense Public Affairs.)

According to ARCENT's mission statement, it provides support and services to Army force commands in theater, as well as directs Army support to other services. ARCENT also supports force rotations; conducts reception, staging, and onward movement; and provides theater sustainment and other support as required to forces in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Horn of Africa. Serving in a variety of positions, Soldiers, Army civilians and contractors, and local and third country nationals react to the constantly evolving conditions on the ground to keep the gateway between the United States and the central front to Afghanistan and Iraq running smoothly.

To help support the program executive office (PEO) personnel rotating into theater, the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics, and Technology (ASAALT) sends military personnel on temporary assignment to Kuwait to function as ASAALT liaison officers (LNOs). These ASAALT LNOs provide key coordination support to PEO personnel; ARCENT leadership; and ASAALT's Materiel Enterprise partner, the U.S. Army Materiel Command (AMC).

Firsthand Account

One Army officer, LTC Maurice Stewart, shared his experience working downrange with the ARCENT Coalition Forces Land Component Command and Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) 101 as the Deputy ASAALT LNO. Stewart quickly realized that, regardless of what military position you are assigned to at ASAALT, you must always be ready to deploy and perform.

ASAALT LNOs provide key coordination support to PEO personnel; ARCENT leadership; and ASAALT's Materiel Enterprise partner, AMC.

When Stewart deployed, he was working for Army Acquisition Executive (AAE) Dean G. Popps. "Being Mr. Popps' Executive Officer [XO] did not exempt me from being deployed," Stewart said. "From the date I was notified that I would deploy downrange to serve as the Deputy ASAALT LNO, I had 3 weeks to complete all the pre-deployment requirements and training. If you've ever deployed individually, that's not a lot of time, especially if you're processing through the CONUS Replacement Center [CRC] at Fort Benning, GA. So while working at ASAALT, you must always be prepared to be deployed in support of *OEF/OIF* [*Operations Enduring* and *Iraqi Freedom*]. Because I was the XO to the AAE, all the pre-deployment requirements and training were accomplished on my own time, which was late at night and on weekends."

Stewart commended the CRC for the predeployment training it provided him. "Training at CRC was great because, after working at the Pentagon for 17 months, it was good to go through the

're-greening' or 'Soldierization process' CRC provided," he said. "The training at CRC consisted of culture awareness training; infantry-level tactics; survival, evasion, resistance, and escape training; and survivability training. The CRC staff does a good job with preparing you for theater deployments."

PEO Support in Theater

According to Stewart, the PEOs downrange are doing a tremendous job supporting the warfighter. While downrange himself, he had specific interaction with program managers (PMs) for PEO Soldier, PEO Enterprise Information Systems, and PEO Ground Combat Systems. Before going downrange, Stewart had often heard about the great job our PEOs are doing to support the Soldiers; this became even more evident once he was on the ground. Stewart advised that everyone associated with the PEOs is working 7 days a week supporting the warfighter. "In spite of the difficult conditions, such as weather and terrain, it is amazing how much equipment the PEOs have fielded to the Soldiers," Stewart commented. The role of the ASAALT LNO is also made easier due to support from the PEOs. "The PEO folks are excited about supporting the mission," Stewart advised.

> Everyone associated with the PEOs is working 7 days a week supporting the warfighter.

Stewart thinks that, overall, Soldiers are pleased with the equipment they are issued. He noted that the biggest difficulty was equipment accountability. To address this challenge, the Army is improving and implementing its processes to ensure all PEO representatives will use the correct procedures before fielding equipment downrange. Stewart emphasized that the equipment accountability issue has been fixed through the use of Property Book Unit Supply Enhanced (PBUSE). "The equipment has to be in PBUSE before taking it downrange or putting it in the hands of Soldiers," he added.

Stewart advised of the processes performed by and relationship among the PEOs, PMs, and LNOS. "PMs level O-6 and below check in with the ASAALT LNO to advise of their intent and what they plan to do," he said. The LNO then takes that information and informs the ARCENT leadership. According to Stewart, when time permits, all PMs check in with the C4 to brief him on their mission in theater.

Stewart briefly discussed his interaction with one of ASAALT's key materiel enterprise partners—AMC. He worked with AMC personnel on a daily basis and was collocated with them. Stewart was involved primarily with Joint PEO Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) Vehicles. "We had to answer many questions dealing with MRAP and fielding body armor," Stewart explained. "Also, we interacted with AMC Army Field Support Brigades [AFSBs] often. AFSBs approve the country clearances to Afghanistan and Iraq, and I worked with them to get these country clearances for our acquisition folks. The AFSBs do this work in addition to their regular jobs, so it can be challenging to coordinate a country clearance."

Additional LNO Challenges

When questioned about the greening stage that ASAALT LNOs usually experience once on the ground, Stewart cited his previous work at the Pentagon for enabling him to bypass this. "For me, the greening stage was not necessary because I took advantage of my relationships and contacts in the Pentagon," Stewart said. Once in theater, he was ready to perform his mission immediately.

Stewart cited the fact that LNOs always need to know if something in the pipeline is coming as another potential challenge. Again, he credits his work at the Pentagon for giving him an advantage because of his relationships with Department of the Army System Coordinators established

According to Stewart, ARCENT does a great job providing social events for Soldiers. Here, John Cho, cast member of "Star Trek," signs autographs for U.S. service members at the Star Trek world premiere at Camp Arifjan. (U.S. Army photo by SSG Anthony Taylor, 20th Public Affairs Detachment.)

The Army is improving and implementing its processes to ensure all PEO representatives will use the correct procedures before fielding equipment downrange.

while working there. Because of those relationships, personnel in theater knew who they were communicating with in the Pentagon when they needed to obtain information pertaining to equipment or to address specific requirements that needed to be coordinated through the Pentagon.

Advantages

Stewart praised the efforts of the staff with which he worked. Despite the staff's small size, it provided excellent support to leadership. "Prior to arriving at ARCENT to serve as the Deputy ASAALT LNO, I had no job expectations," he said. "I wanted to do the best job I knew how and provide excellent support to the ARCENT and CJTF 101 leadership. Under the leadership of COL Michael Zarbo, the primary ASAALT staff consisted of three officers maximum. With a staff that small, we provided acquisition support to *OEF/OIF*."

According to Stewart, ARCENT does a great job providing food, social events, and choices of various fast food restaurants. "The best chow you could ever get is provided," Stewart said, adding that Soldiers can get most of the foods that they eat at home in theater. Camp Arifjan, an Army installation in Kuwait, has fast food restaurants such as Pizza Hut, Hardees's, Subway, and Burger King, just to name a few, as well as military dining facilities that serve Soldiers daily. "I never heard a Soldier say they had lousy chow," Stewart said.

Stewart concluded by saying that he is proud to be a part of the acquisition community and truly appreciated being given the opportunity to serve as the Deputy ASAALT LNO in Kuwait. He noted that PEOs and PMs have a tough job supporting the warfighter. However, under strenuous conditions, they are finding innovative ways to get the job done properly.

BEN ENNIS is the Strategic Communications Chief at the U.S. Army Acquisition Support Center. He holds a B.S. in business from the University of Colorado and an M.B.A. in marketing from Atlanta University. Ennis is a former Army Reserve Advertising Chief and has attended numerous military schools, including the Command and General Staff College and Defense Information School.

Stewart praised the military dining facilities in Kuwait and advised that Soldiers can get most of the foods that they eat at home in the Kuwait theater. Here, SGT Ronald J. Strowder (left) and his twin brother SGT Donald J. Strowder talk and share their first meal together in more than a year at a dining facility in Kuwait. (Photo by U.S. Navy PO3 Jorge Saucedo, Media Transition Team-Kuwait.)