

Devil Brigade Conducts Emergency Deployment Readiness Exercise

By Maj. Rich Foote

December 10, 2018

NATIONAL TRAINING CENTER, California – Members of the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division participated in an Emergency Deployment Readiness Exercise at the National Training Center on Fort Irwin, California Nov. 30 - Dec. 4.

The EDRE is an exercise designed to test a unit's ability to alert, recall and deploy under emergency conditions. The Army routinely conducts deployment readiness exercises to assess their ability to provide the National Command Authority with Army ground forces with no notice or short notice.

"Alert, Marshall, Deploy - these aren't just words, they represent a mindset and a way of life for every Paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne Division," stated Col. Tobin Magsig, 1st Brigade Combat Team Commander.

Successful execution of the EDRE takes a total team effort. It exercises the unit and all the associated installation support agencies and processes, building readiness from Fort Bragg, North Carolina to whatever destination is required – in this case, the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California.

"This was a great opportunity for our brigade combat team to showcase our abilities to respond to our Nation's call and conduct a no-notice alert and deployment," said Command Sgt. Maj. Brian Otero, the senior enlisted Paratrooper of the 1st Brigade Combat Team.

"Our organization has a unique capability and mission, these types of exercises allow us the opportunity to sharpen our abilities as well as work alongside our sister services."

Upon receiving the official notification of the mission from the 82nd Airborne Division Headquarters, the Brigade started two parallel sequences to deploy personnel to their destination. Once the clock started, one team had 18 hours to complete its pre-mission processes, the other had 96.

The Advance Party, or ADVON, strictly followed the 18-hour sequence. This team of personnel went ahead of the main body in order to set conditions for the primary mission. In this case, 190 paratroopers were responsible for preparing vehicles, setting up communications capabilities and establishing relationships for the coming operation.

In a real-world event, the ADVON would be responsible for such actions as making initial contacts with host-location representatives, determining operational objectives, establishing communications channels and preparing for the arrival of the bulk of the unit.

As with any major operation, the process unfolds in phases. While the exercise lasted only about 96 hours on the ground, preparations were being made for several days before the arrival of the main force.

This EDRE was a joint operation, as Air Force C-130 and C-17 aircraft were employed to deliver more than 800 paratroopers from Fort Bragg, North Carolina to Fort Irwin, California. The C-130s left Fort Bragg one day ahead of the C-17s, as they had to stop at Fort Campbell, Kentucky for refueling prior to the final mission. This kind of cooperation is common in major military operations and is critical to the overall success of our forces.

"This was a great operation that showcased the readiness of the entire joint team," said Magsig. "We can't do what we do as an Airborne Division without the professional Airmen of the 18th Air Force."

The ADVON spent the day of the JFE preparing their vehicles and equipment for entry into the training area, where they pre-positioned themselves near the drop zone. Brigade and battalion communications platforms and command post equipment were set up to provide immediate command and control capability upon landing of the paratroopers and their command teams.

As Friday night turned into Saturday morning, the Air Force aircraft delivered the main body of 1st BCT to the drop zone, conducting a mass tactical airdrop of personnel and equipment into the training area. Following a precise schedule given by the weather section of the 82nd Airborne Division, which outlined an exact timeline during which conditions would be favorable for a jump, 11 of the 12 aircraft were able to unload their paratroopers, with only one aircraft unable to complete the airborne operation.

A well-prepared unit always has a secondary course of action. The six C-130 aircraft, one still holding personnel, were directed to perform an air-land operation, touching down at the nearby airfield in Victorville, to offload personnel and any remaining equipment. Once the offload was complete and the final 59 personnel were on board vehicles headed toward NTC, Operation Devil Blitz was fully underway.

"This EDRE provided an incredible opportunity for the Brigade to plan, resource and execute a no-notice JFE, across three different Intermediate Staging Bases in 96 hours," explained Maj. Adam McCombs, the 1st BCT operations officer.

At sunrise on Saturday, paratroopers began the first stages of the operations. Individual units within the battalion task force approached their pre-determined assembly areas where they accounted for personnel and equipment, then set out to their initial objectives. The Assault Command Post and Brigade Tactical Operations Center were established and manned, and the critical command and control steps were in place. Commanders and staffs worked quickly and methodically to establish their units and began taking control of the area of operations.

The next 96 hours were designed to challenge every paratrooper, at every level, across the spectrum of capabilities within the 1st BCT. Communications, mission planning, staff coordination, command and control, small unit tactics and split-second decision-making were continuously tested, allowing the unit to exercise their skills through a variety of objectives.

“It is operations like Devil Blitz that truly are the best way to develop our current and future leaders,” stated Otero. “Gone are the days of Leader Professional Development in a classroom with a projector and a block of instruction. The best way to truly develop our leaders is to prepare them for their real-world mission by conducting realistic operations, allowing them the opportunity to learn in a ‘hands-on’ environment.”

Enemy engagements, small- and large-unit movements, command post relocations and unexpected mission changes were sprinkled throughout the exercise, requiring flexibility and adaptability from every member of the BCT.

The primary objective of the task force was to seize and secure a large town which was serving as an enemy stronghold. This final 36-hour mission forced the brigade to plan and coordinate multiple movements to, and then through, the town, holding key terrain to maintain the area against counterattack.

“The staff produced three operations orders for the four-day exercise, to include the JFE, an attack on an objective and a defense of that objective,” McCombs added. “Overall, it was a valuable experience for everyone involved.”

The rigorous and thorough training plans which the paratroopers developed at Fort Bragg prepared them for this challenge. Employing individual and group skills, they were able to maneuver across the town, gain a foothold before nightfall, maintain their positions overnight and post a successful defense against the enemy counterattack, which launched just past sunrise on the fourth day of operations.

“I am constantly impressed with the quality of our leaders in the BCT,” said Otero. “Their ability to maintain a constant level of readiness and prepare their paratroopers for real-world missions while balancing numerous competing requirements is impressive.”

As with any exercise, the point is not only to employ the skills and tactics learned in training but then review the results of those efforts in an After Action Review with the exercise evaluators who have followed you throughout the training event. Upon the order of ‘Change of Mission,’ key leaders sat down with evaluators to review the actions taken during the drill, learning the best practices to maintain and areas in which the unit could improve.

“This operation tested the mettle of our entire Brigade. We were up against a credible near-peer adversary. We knew it will be tough, but we were ready. I am confident in our ability to jump, fight, and win tonight,” stated Magsig upon completion of the exercise.

1BCT leaders proudly summed up the results of the week-long mission.

"In the end, this was a big team effort, from the installation, the Air Force, the XVIII Airborne Corps, and the Division - we all came together to provide this exquisite capability for our Nation," said Magsig.

Otero lauded the professionalism and performance at every level of Operation Devil Blitz.

"While it can be somewhat challenging and demanding on our paratroopers and leaders to participate in numerous exercises and operations, the end result is a more prepared and well-developed leader who can face tomorrow's challenges because of tough, realistic training today. We will be a better organization, Division, and Army as a result of this operation."

The 1st Brigade Combat Team, the "Devils in Baggy Pants," works hard to maintain the ability to answer the call of the Nation, to respond to any situation, anywhere, faster than any other unit in the Army. The team takes great pride in being able to deploy quickly to represent the 82nd Airborne Division and to be known as one of the most reliable forces in the world.