

CHAPTER 1

Airdrop Support on the Battlefield

INTRODUCTION

Combat units carry only the supplies and equipment they will need until they can be resupplied. Airdrop planning and coordination must be continuous so that supplies and equipment are available for the supported units. Equally important is the distribution system. It must allow the timely delivery of the supplies and equipment. When possible, supplies and equipment are delivered directly to the using unit or close-by to save the units' time. As a primary field service (Table 1-1, page 1-1), airdrop provides a vital link in the distribution system. Therefore, field service and transportation planners must plan carefully for airdrop. Airdrop resupply operations can be used to extend all lines of communication. They are extremely important during the early stages of hostilities. Ground lines of communication and forward supply points will be priority threat targets at this time. Later, airdrop will become more important as the combat intensity increases and the depth of the battlefield extends. Airdrop resupply adds flexibility to the distribution system. It allows the combat commander to take the initiative while reducing the impact of overextending his supply lines. The force structure required to support airdrop resupply operations is highly specialized. It should be in place and ready to support this critical field service when hostilities first erupt.

TENETS OF AIRLAND BATTLE AND SUSTAINMENT IMPERATIVES

The basic tenets of AirLand Battle are initiative, agility, depth, and synchronization. Airdrop supports these tenets. It allows the combat commander to fulfill his duties while minimizing his concern about supply support or overextension of the logistic trail. It also allows the commander to place forces in greater depth and to maneuver them more effectively. The sustainment imperatives outlined in FMs 100-5 and 100-10 are anticipation, integration, continuity, responsiveness, and improvisation. Airdrop supports these imperatives by providing the supply and distribution systems the flexibility to change with the tactical situation.

Table 1-1.
Primary and secondary field services

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● PRIMARY <li style="padding-left: 20px;">Airdrop <li style="padding-left: 20px;">Mortuary affairs (graves registration) ● SECONDARY <li style="padding-left: 20px;">Clothing exchange and bath <li style="padding-left: 20px;">Laundry and reimpregnation <li style="padding-left: 20px;">Bread baking <li style="padding-left: 20px;">Light textile and clothing renovation <li style="padding-left: 20px;">Salvage |
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JOINT OPERATIONS

As a rule, the airdrop of supplies and equipment is a joint Army and Air Force effort. The Army owns the supplies and equipment to be rigged for airdrop and the special rigging equipment (parachutes, platforms, and containers). All supplies and equipment to be airdropped are rigged according to joint service manuals (Army FMs and Air Force TOs). Once the supplies and equipment are rigged for airdrop, they are moved to the departure airfield aboard Army transportation. They are then placed in a temporary holding location run by the Air Force or transloaded onto Air Force K-loaders which are used to load cargo aircraft. Loading the rigged loads aboard Air Force aircraft is an Air Force responsibility; however, Army personnel routinely assist the Air Force. The Air Force requires a specially trained crew for each type of airdrop mission being flown. Several types of Army-owned aircraft can be used for airdrop missions. However, their range and carrying capacity severely limit their use.

COMBINED OPERATIONS

Headquarters commands at echelons above corps may be combined commands (a mixture of US and allied forces). At corps and below, command organizations are usually national. Airdrop resupply is normally a national responsibility with each country having its own airdrop capability, if required. However, the doctrine set forth in this manual can be modified to fit the needs of a combined command.

THREAT

The threat's ability to disrupt ground lines of communication during the initial stages of hostilities is a strong concern of logistics planners. The threat may use personnel agents, unconventional warfare, or conventional forces to disrupt the land lines of communications. Supplies stored in forward locations are also likely targets. Capture or destruction of these supplies could severely strain the distribution system. Threat tactical doctrine emphasizes deep attacks using high speed and continuous momentum. These attacks could result in some units being temporarily separated from their supply lines. These cases show the need for having a responsive airdrop resupply system in place at the beginning of hostilities. Although airdrop support units operate primarily from the corps rear area and the

communications zone, they must still protect themselves from direct and indirect threat actions. FM 10-400 addresses airdrop support unit defensive procedures, both active and passive.

BATTLEFIELD ENVIRONMENT

Army forces could become engaged in various combat scenarios. The geographical area could range from a tropical environment to one of extreme cold. Troops could be sent to a region with no preexisting US presence or to one with a well-developed support structure already functioning. Troops supported could be heavy forces, light divisions, or special operating forces such as a ranger regiment or special forces group. Overcoming the enemy's air defense will be critical to airdrop operations. Low-threat areas are characterized by small arms and lightweight, optically-aimed weapons. Medium-threat areas are characterized by weapons larger than .51 caliber and man-portable, shoulder-fired weapons. High-threat areas have such sophisticated air defenses that penetration is impossible unless suitable countermeasures and tactics are used. The airdrop support doctrine in this manual concentrates primarily on the developed theater. It can, however, be applied to any situation. Chapter 8 presents other battlefield concerns.