

# AIRBORNE DIVISION

The airborne division is organized to deploy rapidly anywhere in the world. It is the only US division with a rapid, strategic, combined arms, opposed-entry capability. It is likely to be the initial force deployed for CONOPS. It is ideally suited to seize, secure, and repair airfields that provide an airhead for follow-on forces and to delay, disrupt, and reduce enemy forces.

The airborne division is organized in much the same way as the infantry division; however, each of its units is organized only with the equipment needed to conduct airborne assaults or airland operations. If the airborne division is to conduct sustained combat operations, it normally must be reinforced with additional medium artillery, air defense protection, and transportation.

The airborne division achieves surprise by its timely arrival on or near the battlefield. The USAF provides airlift, CAS, and aerial resupply for the airborne division. In-flight refueling capability allows the airborne force to deploy anywhere in the world without the need for staging bases close to the objective area.

## DEPLOYMENT

Airdrop operations are desirable for psychological impact or for rapid insertion of combat forces in areas where airfield capability is limited.

Because the airborne division is tailored for airdrop operations, it can be employed more rapidly than other US divisions. Most equipment is air-transportable and air-droppable. All personnel are trained for airborne operations.

The range of aircraft and the AWADS provide the USAF with the capability to accurately deliver the airborne division into virtually any objective area under almost any weather condition, with high winds and thunderstorms being the only exceptions. More combat power can be delivered by airdrop in a shorter amount of time than by any other method of insertion.

## BATTLEFIELD OPERATING SYSTEMS

As with other combat units, employment of the airborne division is a function of the applicable BOS. The following discussion focuses on the BOS used by the division while planning tactical operations.

**Intelligence.** These considerations apply:

- The commander must consider the type, number, and location of enemy air defense weapons, observation systems, and warning systems.
- Tactical air reconnaissance and aerial and satellite photographs offset the lack of terrain reconnaissance prior to an airborne operation.
- USAF CCTs and the division's long-range surveillance detachment (LRSD) are inserted early to provide HUMINT and to set up DZ control measures for the airborne assault.

## FM 17-18

- Once deployed, the division is supported by an MI battalion, which provides—
  - Signal intelligence.
  - EW.
  - Interrogation of EPW.
  - Ground surveillance.
  - Counterintelligence.

**Maneuver.** These considerations apply:

- After initial drop, the airborne force is predominantly dismounted.
- The airborne force must capitalize on surprise. OPSEC is vital to success. A force can maintain deception by masking operations as rehearsal deployments.
- Forces must fit the task. The airborne brigade TF can be part of an airborne assault by a larger unit, or it can constitute the initial assault force, preparing the way for deployment of a follow-on force.
- Rapid seizure of objectives is critical to success; speed and surprise are often more critical than numbers of troops and equipment.
- The unit conducting the airborne assault must prevent enemy direct and observed indirect fire on the airfield to ensure the safety of follow-on reinforcement forces. Air-landed elements can only be committed when these conditions are met.

**Fire Support.** These considerations may apply:

- The airborne division's organic FS is provided by the towed 105-mm howitzer. A battery usually supports a brigade.
- Airborne assault forces rely on USAF, USMC, and USN air assets and NGF, if available.
- Airborne units initially rely on CAS until division and corps artillery can support them.

**Mobility and Survivability.** These considerations may apply:

- The airborne division is supported by an organic engineer battalion, often augmented by one or more equipment companies and engineer battalions from the corps engineer brigade.
- The nature of airborne operations requires engineers to fight as infantry more often than in other operations.
- A primary mobility mission for engineers in support of airborne operations is airfield clearance and repair.
- Countermobility efforts are vital to the survival and success of an airborne force inside the airhead. Obstacles are created or reinforced to secure the airhead and to isolate it from reinforcing enemy forces.
- Survivability and fighting positions prepared from local materials are normal in airborne operations.
- The airborne division engineer unit has limited earthmoving equipment. Priority in preparing protective positions is normally given to key systems (including antiarmor), C2 facilities, and vital supplies. Corps airborne engineers have a more robust earthmoving capability.

**Air Defense.** These considerations may apply:

- An ADA battery usually supports a brigade.
- The airborne division is supported by an air defense battalion, such as a SHORAD. The battalion provides defense against low-altitude hostile aircraft and has tactical display alerting radar (TDAR) to generate early warning information.
- Primary antiaircraft weapons are the Stinger and the Avenger systems. The Vulcan may be used to provide ground fire when not required in the air defense role.

**Combat Service Support.** These considerations may apply:

- Logistical assets are organized into DISCOM BSA. Each team is tailored to meet the needs of the supported force and is organized around a forward support maintenance company and a forward medical company.
- Logistical assets are deployed in echelons along with the deploying airborne force. These include—
  - Assault echelon. This is all or a portion of the FAST as determined by the commander's concept of the operation. It is normally attached to the deploying brigade and is part of the assaulting unit.
  - Follow-on echelon. Most of the DISCOM enters the AO in the follow-on echelon, normally via airland operations deployment.
  - Rear echelon. CSS assets in this echelon remain at the departure airfield or ISB. They are elements not immediately required in the airhead.
- Transportation is severely limited in airborne units. Aerial resupply methods via airdrop or slingload are maximized.

**Command and Control.** These considerations may apply:

- Unity of command is vital and takes precedence over other C2 considerations. Both air and ground units must be under one overall commander. The senior officer in the landing area commands the airhead until the arrival of the ground force commander. Establishment of the shortest possible chain of command is critical to success.
- Airborne divisions must execute missions rapidly. Contingency plans are formulated and continuously updated based on the most current intelligence. Advanced planning can allow more rapid decision making and timely commitment of forces.
- Effective communications plans are critical for success in the airborne assault phase. Leaders carry their own radios in any airborne assault until the tactical situation stabilizes and allows for radiotelephone operators.
- Rehearsals are vital to success. Every paratrooper must fully understand the plan and the commander's intent. Briefbacks at all levels are essential in airborne operations.
- Commanders must be flexible. They must anticipate operating with fewer resources than planned due to casualties and damaged or destroyed equipment.
- Liaisons are required continuously with other JTFs.

## CAPABILITIES

The capabilities of the airborne division enable it to—

- Conduct opposed-entry operations.
- Conduct combat operations against light enemy forces day or night, under all climatic conditions, and on any terrain.
- Conduct operations in BUAs.
- Conduct air assaults within the limits of organic aviation assets.
- Conduct combined arms combat parachute assaults to seize and secure vital objectives behind enemy lines and link up with other supporting forces.
- Capture one or more intermediate staging bases or forward operating bases for ground and air operations.
- Seize an advance base to further enhance deployment of forces or to deny use of the base by the enemy.
- Reinforce units beyond the immediate reach of land forces.
- Reinforce threatened areas or flanks.
- Exploit the effects of nuclear or chemical weapons.
- Rescue US nationals from dangerous situations.
- Deny the enemy key terrain or routes.
- Serve as a strategic or theater reserve.
- Conduct large-scale tactical raids.
- Provide a show of force.
- Conduct economy-of-force operations to free heavier, more tactically mobile units for other assignments.
- Execute various missions in operations other than war.

## LIMITATIONS

Limitations in employing the airborne division include the following:

- Airborne forces must rely on USAF tactical or strategic airlift for initial entry into battle, making them vulnerable to enemy attack while en route to the DZ. Although the USAF can conduct limited airdrops without air superiority, large operations require neutralization or suppression of enemy air defenses.
- Once on the ground, the airborne force has limited tactical mobility. Only light armor units and antitank units deployed with the force have significant mobility assets. Otherwise, the airborne force's mobility depends on the number and types of vehicles and helicopters that can be brought into the objective area to move dismounted soldiers.

- The division has limited FA and ADA support until additional assets can be introduced into the objective area. Additional target acquisition assets are needed to provide accurate and timely targeting information.
- Evacuation of casualties from the airhead is difficult. Until evacuation means are available, the division must provide its own medical care.