



Maj. Joey L. Errington, center right, executive officer of the 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, responds to a question from a congressional staff member in May in the Rayburn House Office Building. Errington and five other Soldiers from the brigade were on Capitol Hill to share their experiences with Congress as members of the Army's first regionally aligned brigade. (Photo by Maj. Martin L. O'Donnell, Army News Service)

# 162<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade NCOs Behind Success of Army's First Regionally Aligned Force Unit in Africa

*Pablo Villa — NCO Journal*

**W**hen six Soldiers from the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division visited Washington, D.C., in late May, they offered Congress insight into one of the Army's newest strategies from the Soldiers charged with employing it.

During their meeting in the nation's capital, congressional staff members got to hear in more detail about the regionally aligned forces, or RAF, mission, a strategy initiated by the Army in 2010 to strengthen existing allied and partner relationships. The 2nd BCT,

based at Fort Riley, Kan., is the Army's first RAF unit and was aligned with U.S. Army Africa Command, in which it worked behind the scenes with partner nations while deployed.

In the same vein, the NCOs of the 162nd Infantry Brigade at Fort Polk, La., have worked tirelessly in the background to ensure Soldiers that are part of the RAF mission to Africa — and the other five geographic combatant commands — know all they need to know about a foreign country before they set foot in it.

The African continent has received special emphasis from the 162nd's Regionally Aligned Forces-Training Teams, or RAF-TTs, as it is viewed as the area with the most potential for volatile situations.

"Right now, that's the focus," said Sgt. 1st Class Andrew Baxter, one of four lead instructors for the 162nd's AFRICOM RAF-TT. "That's where we want to get our fingers in the most and support. That's where we see the need. In [U.S. Southern Command], a lot of those countries are a little more advanced and don't need as much support. Africa, because of colonialism, they're a little more behind. Certain areas are hotbeds."

### **The RAF's Footprint in Africa**

The regionally aligned forces project was borne out of the 2010 U.S. National Security Strategy. A regional alignment flags Army units of various sizes to provide support to partner nations. The support is offered in the hope that any given nation's defense forces can handle security issues without involving U.S. forces.

The opening stages of the RAF plan rolled out during the past two years, with the 1st Infantry Division's 2nd BCT taking the lead as the first RAF unit to deploy, heading to Africa in spring 2013. The 2nd BCT conducted more than 160 missions during its deployment, highlighted by the establishment of the East Africa Response Force, which is based in Djibouti and works to secure the U.S. embassy in South Sudan.

"Through the conduct of over 160 missions in 30 countries over the past year, we were able to develop the capabilities of our African military partners, empowering them to strengthen and better secure their borders," said Col. Jeffery D. Broadwater, commander of the 2nd BCT, during his meetings with congressional staff. "More importantly, we developed relationships as representatives of the United States who promoted our nation's interests and ethics."

The 2nd BCT concluded its deployment in June 2014 before transferring its RAF duties to the "Big Red One's" 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team.

Before the 4th BCT's Soldiers shipped out, much like their 2nd BCT counterparts, they spent time with the NCOs of the 162nd Infantry Brigade to learn about the areas to which they are deploying.

"The idea is that they're trained on Africa," said Sgt. 1st Class Mitchell Petry, another of the 162nd's AFRICOM RAF-TT instructors. "Whether it be culturally, geopolitically, the conflicts in the region that they are potentially deploying to, they're given that taste of the African continent and their culture, because it's vastly different from Iraq and Afghanistan. Especially in today's Army and today's world where we've spent so many years dealing with Iraq and Afghanistan, a lot of these Soldiers need to learn to downshift and switch gears and focus on a completely different culture."

### **Training Up**

The 162nd is already battle-tested in providing instruction to foreign forces. The unit spent more than a decade training combat advisors and working with their security forces counterparts in Iraq and Afghanistan as those countries prepared to take over the job of protecting their own lands. As such, it was a natural fit for the 162nd to evolve into instructors of the Regionally Aligned Forces-Training Team.

When the Army began discussions about the RAF concept, Africa quickly became a focus.

"When we started putting our footprint in the Middle East, it's kind of like plugging water as far as terrorism goes," Baxter said. "You block it in one area, and it's gonna overrun into somewhere else. So you start to see common threats that are starting to spill into Africa and work their way down. You're starting to see extremist organizations start to filter their way from Egypt all the way down into the southern part of Africa.

"Potentially, you can have a situation where you have another country that doesn't have a lot of money, a lot of funding. A lot of foreign aid comes in from countries that we're not in collaboration with, and they start pushing their agenda in those countries. When the infrastructure is really low, and a lot of money starts coming in, a lot of people start leaning that way to survive."

When the 2nd BCT was tasked, unit leaders realized they weren't knowledgeable about the culture, customs and conflicts of African countries.

"They were one of the first ones to reach out and say, 'We need this training. We know that we don't have this experience or this knowledge yet. So, who can give it to us?'" Petry said. "And the 162nd said, 'Yeah, we've got you.'"

The curriculums that the 162nd's RAF-TT instructors develop to teach deploying units are largely based on their research of a given country. Instructors receive help from personnel at the U.S. Army Military Intelligence Center of Excellence of Fort Huachuca, Ariz., as well as the NATO School Oberammergau in Germany. But developing a class and its delivery is largely up to instructors. Petry said the challenge to do this seemed immense at first. But RAF-TT instructors have gradually eased into the role.

"Initially when the section first stood up, it was pretty challenging, because we were starting from square one with most of our curriculum," Petry said. "But it helps that the NCOs in our section are assigned to specific regions. We don't all focus on the entire continent of Africa. I'm northwest Africa. There are NCOs that focus on the countries in south, eastern and central Africa. It's a lot of research reading about the countries. We've had the opportunity to look at the embassies' mission strategic resource plan. It's what their goals are for that country and what they want

to accomplish in the next year and near future. So we know how the State Department is looking at it, too.

“It’s a lot of research. I’ve probably read about 50 to 60 books about the countries. As far as curriculum goes, it’s gotten pretty intensive at times. But we’re far enough along that, when a country does come up that we haven’t had a lot of dealing with, it takes some research, but at the same time, the curriculum and tailoring it to that country, is not that hard anymore.”

## Behind the Success

Broadwater, the 2nd BCT commander who briefed Congress, said one of the highlights of the unit’s deployment was the leader-development missions its junior leaders were able to partake in.

Those opportunities are afforded because the 2nd BCT — and all other RAF units — do not have to deviate from their primary mission attaining current knowledge about the areas they are working in, Petry said.

“This unit has NCOs and officers from across the Army with widely varying experiences,” Petry said. “At the same time, they have a great amount of knowledge on the most recent activities, missions, stuff that has shaped doctrine or has continued to shape doctrine in-country. The 162nd has the ability to train these units as our sole mission focus. If we were to give this mission to a brigade who already has or already is a fully deployable unit that’s told, ‘You’re going to X country on this date and time. Train up. Go,’ in my eyes, it would be very difficult to train for their primary mission and to conduct this mission.

“Our primary focus is training these Soldiers who are going to their combatant command or their area of responsibility to do partner-nation training events. So having that as our primary mission, our sole purpose in life is to make sure that the Soldiers deploying forward have the most current training, the most current knowledge. It’s a lot easier for us to be the ones to conduct that as opposed to a brigade who already has a primary mission. To give them a mission like this, as large as this, as their second/alternate primary, it would be extremely difficult.”

The 2nd BCT has also benefited from working with foreign soldiers who are as dedicated to their military as U.S. forces are.

“Most people serving in the military, especially on the African continent, are very well educated,” Petry said. “They are very proud of their nation, very proud of their cause, very proud of their service. They are there to learn just like us. We have an all-volunteer service. So when you raise your hand to join the military, you do it because you want to, because you’re proud of it, because you want to do something for your family for your country. And in a lot of ways, these countries that we’re going to train with are the exact same way. In a lot of cases, they’re well beyond square one. We’re simply going to exchange ideas. It’s, ‘Here’s our thoughts on it; what are your thoughts on it?’ And it becomes building that doctrine, those TTPs for both militaries at the same time.”

And while RAF missions and training continue moving forward, the work of the 2nd BCT has provided a primer for the Army, Petry said.

“The way it’s looking, the regionally aligned force is the way the Army is going to begin looking at things on the world stage,” he said. “There’s going to be units assigned to a specific geographic combatant command, and when it comes down to something actually happening, something needing to be dealt with, or being asked for assistance, that regionally aligned force for that area is going to be the first one that’s tasked. That’s not to say there won’t be other units that are needed. But that regionally aligned force is going to be the first one told, ‘Let’s go. You guys have already been living and breathing this for the past year, two years or whatever it may be.’

“We have an important mission,” Petry said. “I think we’re in a very good position to provide the training and to take the extra stress off these units who have to actually go and conduct these missions. They don’t have to worry about doing all the training for them at the same time, when they can contact the 162nd and say, ‘We have this mission going in this country, can you support?’ And we have that entire package ready to go and say, ‘Yes. When do you want it?’” ■



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