



Joint Task Force-Bravo's 1st Battalion, 228th Aviation Regiment works with 7th Special Forces Group to train Salvadoran special forces members in paradrop operations, helocast, and fast rope insertion extraction system training in Ilopango, El Salvador, March 4-7, 2019. The training also provided an opportunity for U.S. Special Forces and aircrews to gain experience on the tasks and work in a joint environment with the host nation. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Destinee Sweeney)

Army Readiness

Joint Task Force-Bravo

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Joint Task Force-Bravo

Joint Task Force-Bravo (JTF-B) operates from the Honduran military installation Soto Cano Air Base, located in Comayagua, Honduras. The task force is comprised

of over 500 U.S. military personnel, and more than 500 U.S. and Honduran civilians serving in a joint force across multiple units (Department of Defense, 2019).

"A more lethal, resilient, and rapidly innovating Joint Force, combined with a robust constellation of allies and partners, will sustain American influence and ensure favorable balances of power that safeguard the free and open international order."

—Department of Defense, 2018, p. 1

JTF-B supports the following commands:

- **612th Air Base Squadron** — provides base operations support, air traffic control, crash and fire rescue, logistics, and civil engineering support to JTF-B and U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) operations.
- **Army Forces Battalion** — command and control for JTF-B, responsible for counter transnational organized crime missions, foreign humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and partner building.
- **1st Battalion, 228th Aviation Regiment** — general aviation support and medical evacuations.
- **Joint Security Forces** — provides law enforcement, security, and force protection for Soto Cano Air Base.
- **Medical Element** — health services and support for U.S. forces, as well as medical readiness training exercises throughout Central America, and maintains a forward surgical section capable of basic surgeries in remote conditions. (Department of Defense, 2019)

JTF-B is a SOUTHCOM asset that addresses external states working to secure a foothold in Latin America and gain more influence in the Western Hemisphere. For example, China currently invests in 56 port facilities in Latin America, and their control over the technology and cyberinfrastructure is postured towards future military power projection, while Russia, Iran, and Cuba seek to implement conditions that would destabilize the region and allow them to bring their campaigns of misinformation closer to U.S. borders (Lopez, 2019).

With the threat of Iranian and Russian influence, coupled with China's "Hundred-Year Marathon" strategy to replace the U.S. as the dominant global power in the Western Hemisphere, SOUTHCOM uti-

lizes JTF-B to produce effects and partnerships as an area denial element against their influence (Lawler, 2019; Pillsbury, 2016).

U.S. Navy Adm. Craig Faller, commander, SOUTHCOM, stated before the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities, July 2019:

"The principal problem facing the Department of Defense is interstate competition with China and Russia. I believe an important element of this involves competition for values, ideas, and ideals. In Latin America and the Caribbean, this competition is also taking place in parallel with another competition: one between legitimate governance and illegitimate power wielded by transnational criminal organizations and violent extremist organizations." (Statement of Adm. Craig S. Faller, 2019, p. 1)

The JTF-B offers combatant commanders multiple options to counter malign foreign influence in the region and to meet the commander's intent.



A CH-47F Chinook from 1st Battalion, 228th Aviation Regiment sling loads a UH-60 Blackhawk back to Liberia Airport in Costa Rica, July 29, 2019. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Eric Summers Jr.)

JTF-B and Command and Control

JTF-B is the command and control hub for combatant command elements, U.S. State Department, partner nation militaries, and government agencies. Officers and noncommissioned officers assigned to the task force gain critical knowledge in joint and partner nation capabilities and employment. Daily interaction exposes Soldiers to the joint force environment as well as different service cultures and combined perspectives across the spectrum of rank and experience from junior enlisted to field grade officers. These dynamic interactions prepare Soldiers to maintain crisis response capabilities and solve complex problem sets with critical thinking skills and cross-cultural communication and empathy (Atkins, Uskul, & Cooper, 2016).

Central America and USINDOPACOM

The geography of the Central America (CENTAM) area of responsibility is similar to what U.S. forces would encounter during large-scale combat operations (LSCO). The U.S.'s near-peer adversaries are aware of its ability to utilize rotary-wing assets to transport personnel and equipment; therefore, they are likely to target those assets in order to stop the buildup of combat power and its capability to maneuver across the battlespace ("Asymmetric Warfare," 2018). It would be beneficial for U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) units to utilize JTF-B's experience and training areas as they prepare for multi-domain battle, to include: coordination with U.S. Embassies



U.S. Army Lt. Col. Rhonda Dyer and Spc. Jeriel Hernandez, Joint Task Force-Bravo, help treat local Hondurans while out on a Community Health Nurse mission in Comayagua, Honduras, May 10, 2017. The CHM is a weekly partnership with the staff at Jose Ochoa Public Health Clinic, administering vaccines, vitamins, deworming medication and other medical supplies to over 180 Hondurans around the Comayagua area. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Scott Thompson)



U.S. Army Reserve Soldiers assigned to Joint Task Force-Bravo conduct a hernia surgery at the Atlántida Regional Hospital in Honduras, Aug. 7, 2019. Providing general surgeries for Honduran patients frees the local providers to treat other complex cases, while the U.S. Army team helps alleviate the surgical backlog for common cases such as hernias and cholecystectomies. (U.S. Army photo by Maria Pinel)

and foreign nations, flights across international boundaries, interoperability with U.S. Special Operations Forces, deck landing operations at sea, and rotary-wing operations over terrain resembling the USINDOPACOM region (mountainous jungle terrain, oceans, and deck landings with unpredictable tropical weather).

JTF-B's aviation unit does not have a dedicated downed aircraft recovery team to conduct helicopter recovery operations. In the event of emergencies, 1st Battalion, 228th Aviation Regiment depends solely on organic assets and expertise to perform its recovery. Recently, the unit conducted such recovery operations using only improvised field expedient methods of removing external fuel tanks and rotor blades in the jungles of Costa Rica. The unit successfully rigged and sling loaded the damaged aircraft to a recovery airfield (Summers, 2019).

The lessons learned from JTF-B are critical for Army and Marine aviation units fighting in the USINDOPACOM regions since near-peer enemies will likely target and disable the capacity to recover helicopters, and aviation units will be forced to conduct improvised recovery operations to maintain supply lines, move troops, and continue the build up of U.S. combat power in the region.



U.S. Army Spc. Jeriel Hernandez, Joint Task Force - Bravo, gives deworming medication to a local Honduran child while out on a Community Health Nurse mission in Comayagua, Honduras, May 10, 2017. The CHM is a weekly partnership with the staff at Jose Ochoa Public Health Clinic, administering vaccines, vitamins, deworming medication and other medical supplies to over 180 Hondurans around the Comayagua area. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Scott Thompson)

Medical Readiness and LSCO

Medical rotations throughout CENTAM provide the reserve component with unparalleled training platforms for readiness and opportunities for U.S. service members to work in a joint environment and treat war-type injuries (gunshot wounds, amputations, severe lacerations, etc.). Recently, aided by JTF-B's Civil Affairs Team (which partners with host nations), the JTF-B's General Surgeon conducted 77 procedures, 20 open intra-abdominal procedures, and trained 13 Soldiers to perform 16 mission essential task list (METL) tasks during a two-week expeditionary readiness platform. Because of the high medical training and procedure tempo, medical personnel attached to JTF-B often meet their annual training goals in a single week when conducting medical and surgical readiness exercises.

The U.S. Army Asymmetric Warfare Group's Mosul and Raqqa study groups indicate that due to disputed air space in future battlefields, achieving the "Golden Hour" (the critical first hour after a traumatic injury when the patient requires emergency treatment) will be consider-

ably more difficult as conflict evolves (Department of the Army, 2017). Therefore, medical personnel must share the forward line of troops in order to preserve and utilize the "Platinum 10 Minutes" (the first 10 minutes after a traumatic injury where immediate lifesaving care like stopping blood loss must occur) for casualties (Kowitz, 2018; Boyce, 2011). On average, JTF-B medical personnel treat over 19,000 patients and train over 500 medical staff each year on more than 36 METLs and individual medical tasks critical to achieving lifesaving medical timelines on the modern battlefield.

Conclusion

JTF-B offers a myriad of options for the SOUTHCOM commander to achieve desired effects, enhance partnerships, and combat near-peer influence in the region to preserve U.S. national interests. These capabilities offer a significant contribution to the joint force, and makes the JTF-B not only an asset to the Western Hemisphere, but also to other locations that could use its training areas and experience in order to prepare for future conflicts. ■

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