

101st ESB Provides Critical Support Overseas

Communications power

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The 101st Expeditionary Signal Battalion (ESB) was notified in the middle of 2021 that they would deploy again in 2023. This would be the battalion's second time in the last five years supporting Operation Spartan Shield (OSS) under the 160th Theater Signal Brigade (TSB), and the third deployment in the last 10 years.

Veterans of the previous deployments would say to anyone who would listen, "This is not Afghanistan in 2013 or OSS in 2019. Don't let what you did last time make you think it'll be the same."

The 101st key leaders began working with Army Central Command (ARCENT) G6 planners and the unit in-theater, the 151st ESB, to develop a scheme of signal support based on what to expect. The answer given from ARCENT was simple: "Make sure your teams are proficient and your equipment is working, because you'll support ARCENT exercises, but this area of responsibility is very dynamic."

Based on that guidance, the 101st would spend drill weekends, during annual training, and countless days in-between discussing team proficiencies, mission location assignments, training methods, and ways to get after physical and logical signal maintenance to ensure the teams and equipment would be postured the best possible to conduct operations overseas.

The last part of the answer from ARCENT would prove to be prophetic. Less than 14 days after officially assuming the mission following the transfer of authority (ToA) in late September 2023, Hamas launched a devastating terrorist attack on Israel. Within days, the 101st was called to action to provide upper tactical internet (UTI) support to 75% of the contingency command posts (CP) of the forces deploying from the continental United States (CONUS) into the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) AoR. These mission requests were being received as the final systems were still being delivered from the ports to mission locations, and systems that had arrived were still being validated for service. Despite the intense pressure on each team chief to "put points on the board," they delivered.

The 101st deployed over 50% of its combat power to existing OSS missions and established services for incoming forces. Support included multiple air defense artillery (ADA) assets, new radar site emplacements, expanded UTI support to security forces (SECFOR), and sustainment CPs at each location.



Three unidentified 101st ESB Soldiers provide communications support while deployed to Jordan and Syria. (Courtesy photo)

With the relentless pace of requests for UTI support showing no signs of letting up, there was a silver lining coming to support 101st Soldiers; one of the units in the final group being deployed was Charlie Company, 57th (C/57th) Expeditionary Signal Battalion-Enhanced (ESB-E) from Fort Cavazos, Texas, who would arrive to provide even more combat power for the 101st ESB.

The arrival of C/57th meant the 101st was now a "multi-component" battalion. The Soldiers of C/57th did not stay in place for long however, and within 12 days of arrival they unpacked, validated their teams and equipment, and were missioned forward into three countries to expand UTI capabilities to even more units. The battalion had committed the entirety of C/57th's combat power to the warfighter in less than two weeks of their arrival.

Good work turned into more work; the support requests did not stop. Communication exercises (COMMEX) for ARCENT exercises still needed to be fulfilled, and the battalion was about to take part in the most critical one the USCENTCOM AoR had ever conducted. At the center of it was the 101st ESB and C/57th. The exercise was tasked, resourced, and executed in less than four weeks. It required detailed coordination between the 1st Theater Sustainment Command (TSC), Task Force Spartan (TFS), 54th Strategic Signal Battalion (SB), 25th SB, and the

101st ESB to provide UTI support at multiple locations in-theater.

The exercise successfully proved the ability of the rotational ESB to enable all ARCENT commands simultaneously, fully enabling mission command for all supported units. Following the successful COMMEX, calls for 101st support slowed but did not stop, and the Soldiers continued to step up.

Despite being more than halfway through their rotation and having kept the throttle pinned since leaving New York over half a year earlier, they had gotten their second wind. For the remainder of their tour, Soldiers focused on improving the larger theater-level communications picture now that they realized how integral they were to the larger kinetic fight.

They began stepping into the lower tactical internet (LTI) realm and looking at ways to improve quality

of service (QoS) on their assemblages.

Despite being in the final two months of their tour, there was a call to support a truly large scale operation before leaving: cross into European Command (EUCOM) and expand Southwest Asia (SWA) services to ARCENT units working with EUCOM Signaleers to support a multinational joint operation. The 101st analyzed the mission, developed a plan, moved, and extended the SWA network to support operations in under eight days.

The 101st was told in 2021 they would deploy again in 2023, and what awaited them was very different from anything the Soldiers had expected. Despite facing consistent threats from enemy forces across the region and a relentless pace of operations, the Soldiers of the 101st and C/57th lived up to the 160th's motto: "Finest of the First, Forged in Fire."



*The 101st ESB Phoenix, STT, and JNN staging to support ARCENT and NAVCENT forces.
(Photo by Spc. Kenyon Horsford, New York Army National Guard)*