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PRESS RELEASE

3rd CAB weathers hail storm

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3rd CAB Public Affairs

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan – More than 80 U.S. Army helicopters were damaged when a sudden unprecedented hail storm hit Kandahar Airfield April 23, where nearly half of Task Force Falcon’s helicopters were parked. What happened following the storm was the real phenomenon—returning the aircraft to fully mission capable status without a gap in air support to their teammates on the ground.

The 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade was immediately forced to shift their focus to replace damaged blades, stabilators and windows following the storm. The aircraft also sustained multiple damages to their sheet metal skin and were in need of repair. In order to get these tasks accomplished, the CAB had to enlist the aid from units within the basic force, supporting maneuver units and higher commands in U.S. and Afghanistan. This ‘Enterprise’ of leaders had to unify to realign critical air assets to Kandahar Airfield where commanders on the ground were still conducting missions in Regional Command-South.

The Army and Aviation Enterprise answered the call for assistance. U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence, U.S. Army Aviation and Missile Command, 36th CAB, 101st CAB, U.S. Army Installation Management Command, International Security Assistance Force-Joint Command, U.S. Forces-Afghanistan, 1st Theater Sustainment Command and Department of the Army staff joined with resounding effect to coordinate a solution for the damages.

Daily video conferences simplified the communication across various command echelons, theater logistical units in Afghanistan and logistical experts across the globe orchestrating resupply efforts, resulting in over half of the damaged helicopters repaired in the first week. Within five days, nearly 25 percent of the blades had arrived for replacement.

Army Col. Allan Pepin, commander of Task Force Falcon, 3rd CAB said he was impressed with the enterprise’s response and minimal impact on the mission.

“I remain impressed at the incredible capacity of the enterprise to source resources to support the

combatant commander. The enemy had no opportunity to take advantage of the impact on our aircraft,” said Pepin.

For Chief Warrant Officer 5 Marty Calkins, the Brigade Aviation maintenance officer, his priority was the oversight of receiving new parts and installation onto helicopters needed for the fighting season. He saw firsthand the Army providing the logistical support required to get the aircraft back into the fight.

“We received immediate support from the aviation task force in Regional Command-East and units in Kuwait, who began sending every blade, canopy and anything else we requested,” said Calkins.

This is where several of the Army major commands aided to provide parts and assistance where needed, demonstrating the Army’s logistical tenacity—all without a noticeable reduction in supporting ground forces with air assets.

Calkins said Aviation and Missile Command had the lead in the United States to begin movement of replacement items, which were mostly helicopter blades. He attributes the quick turnaround for repaired helicopters to the Theater Aviation Sustainment Maintenance Group and says that the sheer number of airframe repairs required after the hail storm provided five years worth of experience for the airframe mechanics.

“Their [TASM] dedication, commitment and professionalism throughout the repair processes produced incredible results getting 90 percent of the damaged fleet back into the fight within three weeks—a complete success story,” said Calkins.

Army Chief Warrant Officer 2 Calvin Lambert is a platoon leader for the maintenance shop from Task Force Workhorse, 3rd CAB and coordinated for the repair of all the stabilators—an aircraft component that sustained significant damage from the golf ball-sized hail.

“The support we received from the outlying Forward Operating Bases as well as the support received from stateside in parts was phenomenal,” said Lambert.

Lambert said his unit was in charge of receiving and issuing all the blades and stabilators as they came into KAF from the U.S., Afghanistan and Kuwait. He says the contributions by those involved was what made the quick recovery of replacement parts possible. Lambert also credits the repairs to the TASM, attached to the CAB.

“TASM was a big help in all the repairs,” said Lambert.

The 1106th Theater Aviation Sustainment Maintenance Group from Fresno, Calif. supports the maintenance initiatives for the fleet of helicopters operated by Task Force Falcon, 3rd CAB. The TASMG provides the capability of repairing damaged sheet metal on helicopters, sustaining the helicopters’ outer skin and internal structure.

The California National Guard unit provided over 200 sheet metal repairs for the CAB following the hail storm. The unit, charged with providing depot-level structural repair for helicopters, keeps Task Force Falcon’s helicopters mission ready in Regional Commands-South, Southwest, and West—an area slightly smaller than Montana.

Army Spc. Samuel Miller, a 15G Aviation Structural Repair with TASM, supports maintenance

operations for Task Force Falcon, 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade. Miller says that if there are any dents, damages or cracks, he must replace the entire part or repair as needed. His expertise was put to use following the damages when helicopter parts, mostly blades and stabilators, were in need of repair.

“This is my first deployment and it means a lot to me,” said Miller. “I’m proud to serve my country and be out here and do what I was meant to do—fixing aircraft so that the people who are using them can have them when they need them to do the real mission out there.”

Miller understands his role in supporting combat operations and for him; his mission is aircraft structural repairs.

“For me it’s learning and doing what needs to get done and accomplishing the mission. It’s our top priority,” said Miller.

Army Staff Sgt. Patrick Jubrey, from Fresno Calif., is a 15G noncommissioned officer and helped to supervise maintenance operations for TASMG following the hail storm. He says that his team will complete the mission no matter how big the task is.

“The big end game is support overall. We don’t have big jobs or little jobs; we take on any job and get it done,” said Jubrey. He said the influx of repairs following the hail damages did not slow the unit down.

Although it is unlikely a hail storm of this magnitude will affect U.S. Army Aviation units again in Afghanistan, if it does, the helicopters will not be out of the fight for long. Pepin, among others in the Army Aviation community and Task Force Falcon, say that the hail storm was not as impressive as the reaction to resupply or repair damaged parts.

“I remain inspired and in awe to serve with our great leaders and maintainers who made this significant challenge and historical event easy to overcome; a remarkable accomplishment by any standard,” said Pepin.

Editor’s Note:

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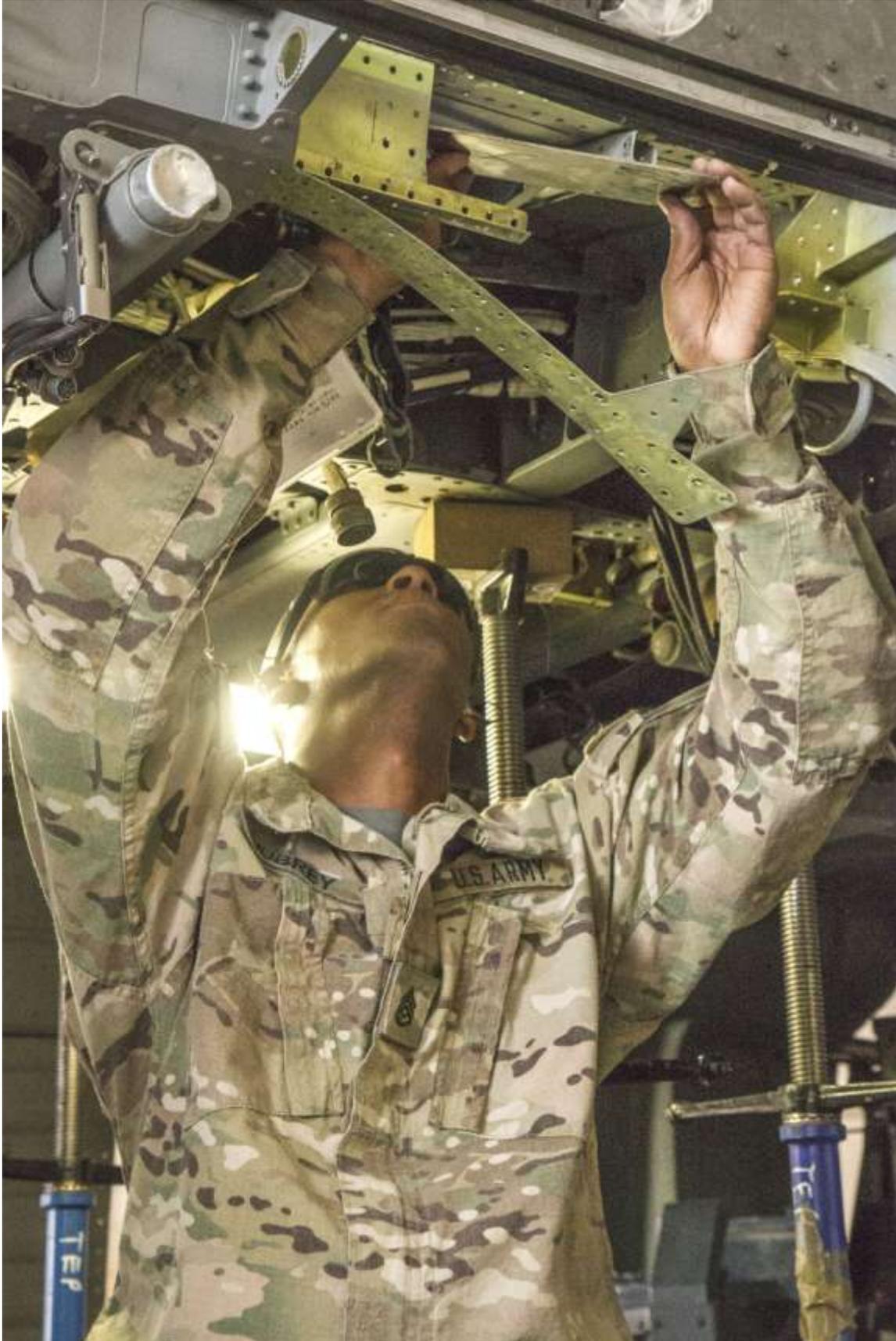
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Army Chief Warrant Officer 2 Caleb Sharpe holds a piece of hail on Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan, April 23. The hail size was slightly larger than a golf ball causing damages to Task Force Falcon, 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade's fleet of helicopters parked on the flight line.



Army Spc. Samuel Miller, from Ahwahnee, Calif., fastens rivets to a helicopter stabilater on Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan May 22. Miller is a 15G Aviation Structural Repairer with the 1106th Theater Aviation Sustainment Maintenance Group, a California National Guard unit from Fresno, Calif., who is supporting maintenance operations for Task Force Falcon, 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade.



Army Staff Sgt. Patrick Jubrey, from Fresno, Calif., repairs sheet metal inside a UH-60 “Black Hawk” helicopter May 22. Jubrey is a 15G Aviation Structural Repairer with the 1106th Theater Aviation Sustainment Maintenance Group, a California National Guard unit from Fresno, Calif., who is supporting maintenance operations for Task Force Falcon, 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade.