

# Operation Marauder:

## Developing flexible response and deterrence options through multi-national airborne assault and multinational team Fires

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*M119A3 Howitzer Section conducts live-fire following Airborne Assault in Drawsko Pomorskie Training Area, Poland.*

**E**merging threats in the European theater necessitated increased interoperability with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Allies and Multinational Partners. The 4-319<sup>th</sup> Airborne Field Artillery Regiment (AFAR) serving as the direct support Field Artillery Battalion assigned to the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade (ABN), recently conducted a combined training exercise, Operation Marauder, with the 6<sup>th</sup> ABN Polish (POL). This exercise functioned to enhance Allied interoperability, prove NATO Intermediate Staging Base (ISB) and power projection capabilities, and further refine techniques for multinational Team Fires during an airborne assault and follow-on operations.

In late February 2021, 4-319<sup>th</sup> AFAR deployed from Grafenwohr, Germany, to the 6<sup>th</sup> ABN POL headquarters in Krakow, Poland, to conduct planning, rehearsals, and

heavy equipment rigging, then executed a combined airborne assault to deliver live indirect Fires at Drawsko Pomorskie Training Area (DPTA). Operation Marauder exercised NATO power projection capabilities and execution of multinational fire support at the tactical level. Task Force (TF) King, composed of 4-319<sup>th</sup> AFAR, with an attached 6<sup>th</sup> ABN POL mortar platoon, executed an airborne assault to establish firing capability inside the airhead line and deliver combined live Fires in support of U.S. and POL observers. During this exercise, *King of the Herd* artillerymen and Polish mortarmen exchanged and validated Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTPs) to increase interoperability in defense of NATO.

The 2018 National Defense Strategy outlines three major areas of focus: build a more lethal force, strengthen the alliance and attract new partners, and boost performance and affordability. Operation Marauder signifies growth in all three areas. By utilizing 6<sup>th</sup> ABN POL rigging facilities and Krakow airbase, U.S. Airborne Forces and Allies now have another platform to rapidly project combat power across the European Theater. The 6<sup>th</sup> ABN POL and the 173<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Brigade Combat Team ABN demonstrated capability to provide rapidly deployable, integrated indirect Fires, which increases the lethal deterrent options against a near-peer

threat in Large-Scale Combat Operations.

### Krakow as a NATO Power Projection Platform

Since 2014, the 173<sup>rd</sup> IBCT ABN historically conducts ISB operations from Aviano Air Base (Italy), Ramstein Air Base (Germany), or Papa Air Base (Hungary). This exercise validated another location from which U.S. combat power can rapidly project forces. Geographically, Krakow provides a unique option for onward deployment. Krakow “shortens” the legs for intra-theater air movements to the Baltics and Eastern Europe, yet remains outside of threat air defense capabilities.



*Two M119A3 Howitzers are rigged for an airdrop in 6<sup>th</sup> ABN Logistics Battalion Rigging Facility. Heavy Drop loads are transported to the Departure Airfield using a Jelcz 862 with mounted Hiab Crane Loader.*



The truck transfers the Howitzers to a Polish Military K-Loader, which loads both platforms onto one C-130J.

TF King conducted an out-load from the departure airfield at Krakow-Balice Aviation Base, a short distance from the 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Headquarters and rigging facility, with ample personnel and equipment holding areas while awaiting load time. The 6<sup>th</sup> ABN's state-of-the-art facilities, ample life support, and proximity to a military airfield proved to meet

all 4-319<sup>th</sup> AFAR requirements while conducting ISB operations. Operation Marauder highlights the potential for Krakow as an ISB for airborne operations enabling NATO Commanders greater flexibility to rapidly respond to threats in the Baltics or Eastern Europe.

### **Multi-national Team Fires Airborne Assault**



The 173rd Sky Soldiers and 6th Airborne Paratroopers await to board a USAF C-130J.

During Operation Marauder, TF King task-organized for purpose into a multinational Team Fires that planned, prepared, and rehearsed prior to infiltration. Team Fires is a proven TTP used for an airborne assault that consolidates mortars under the tactical control of the Field Artillery Battalion to facilitate the clearance of Fires, assist in local security of fire support assets and simplify fire support nets to ensure response Fires. The Team Fires TTP was first described in the March-April 2001 edition of the *Field Artillery Bulletin* by then LTC John Uberti and CPT John Herrman in an article titled, "Team Fires: Taking Responsibility for TF Mortars."

TF King further refined this technique to establish TTPs for integrating NATO allies and multinational partner indirect fire capabilities to achieve the same end state: responsive Fires to support Maneuver in ground combat. Key lessons learned include the development of a Combined Battalion Fire Direction Center (BN FDC), investment in liaisons in and out, as well as deliberate tactical and technical rehearsals prior to execution.

During Marauder, 4-319<sup>th</sup> AFAR and 6<sup>th</sup> ABN POL did not have common Communications Security Keys. As a result, TF King relied on Polish and U.S. observers to route secure Calls for Fire over respective nets, which were then tactically processed in the Combined BN FDC. The battalion fire direction officer then directed which systems would engage the Call For Fire based on target selection standards, attack guidance, weapons positioning, and target





*De-rigging an M119A3 following heavy drop and parachute assault.*

location. The fire missions were then routed from the BN FDC to the firing units using respective secure communication means and further processed for execution.

The battalion placed the

Headquarters and Headquarters Battery XO with the Polish Mortar Platoon to serve as liaison (LNO) with the intent to provide a redundant means of communication to enhance situational awareness. Likewise, the Polish Mortar Platoon Leader



*Leaders develop TTPs for multinational Team Fires fire mission requests and processing.*

co-located with the Battalion FDC and Tactical Air Control to provide the same capabilities. TF King greatly benefited from the enhanced situational awareness provided by these LNOs and strongly recommends selecting the right trooper for the mission.

Most importantly, the first time TF King executed this TTP was not on the Drop Zone in DPTA – the battalion conducted a series of tactical and technical rehearsals while in the ISB to identify friction points, develop solutions, and then validate procedures ahead of execution. The focus in preparation enabled TF King to rapidly establish firing capability on the drop zone and deliver Fires in support of our observers.

## **Execution**

TF King conducted the airborne assault into Piaskowy Brod Drop Zone in DPTA, heavy dropping two M119A3 Howitzers, then personnel to establish firing capability within 25 minutes (P+:25). At the time of execution, a rigging solution for an airdrop of the Polish 98 mm mortars was not yet approved and as a result, four 98 mm mortars were pre-positioned on the drop zone and quickly integrated into the fight as Paratroopers landed. TF King, organized itself using the multinational Team Fires TTP described, delivered 36 rounds of 105 mm and 60 of 98 mm high explosive rounds in support of U.S. and Polish observers with great effects on the target.

Training exercises like Operation Marauder highlight the importance of continuing to train to refine existing TTPs with strategically relevant partners, further identify options for





Combined Battalion FDC receives and processes both U.S. and POL Calls for Fire then routes to U.S. artillery and POL mortars.



Training with strategic partners.

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Operation Marauder leaders huddle.

**NATO Commanders to project combat power, as well as signify a strong alliance in the defense of Europe.**

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