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Training a US Army Chemical Corps Company in the Current Operating Environment

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Introduction

> ***"[The] vapor settled to the ground like a swamp mist and drifted toward the French trenches on a brisk wind. Its effect on the French was a violent nausea and faintness, followed by an utter collapse. It is believed that the Germans, who charged in behind the vapor, met no resistance at all, the French at their front being virtually paralyzed."***
>
> The use of gas at Langemarck as reported in the New York *Tribune*, April 27, 1915.

The modern battlefield for United States (US) Armed Forces lies in the Middle East and Southwest Asia. It has an adversary that is unconventional in nature. The complexities of development, production, and employment of tactical chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) weapons make it unlikely an unconventional enemy will pose a significant CBRN threat in the near future. However, CBRN specialists continue to be deployed in support of the Global War on Terror in jobs outside their areas of expertise. US Army Chemical Corps company commanders will best prepare their Soldiers for today's battlefield by focusing their companies' training away from their conventional CBRN tasks and focusing instead on basic infantry tactics and tactical command post operations.

History

The United States Army Chemical Corps began in the early 1900s during World War I due to a threat emerging on the battlefield: chemical weapons.[1] Although the name "Chemical" Corps has persisted, the Chemical Corps has grown in terms of mission, Soldiers, equipment, and importance, peaking during the Cold War. Dragon Soldiers (the nickname "dragon" is derived from the dragon's breath of fire representing the Chemical Corps' use of flame throwers) were positioned to detect, decontaminate, and employ chemical, biological, and/or nuclear weapons. Armored divisions, generally the primary force in a conventional war, were dependent on chemical decontamination specialists to keep them in the fight when they were hit with chemical agents by the Russians. Chemical Soldiers were some of the first to move on Iraqi units in Desert Storm due to the conventional threat of Saddam using chemical agents. No one undervalued CBRN specialists. One could say that during a conventional war with the USSR, one of the most important assets the US could bring to bear was CBRN defense.

With the fall of the USSR went our likely opponent in a conventional war. While there are clearly other nation-states which we may encounter on a traditional battlefield such as

[1] *US Army Chemical Corps History.* http://www.chemical-corps.org/cmhist.htm (accessed December 15, 2008).

Iran, China, Russia, the United States has moved into the era of the so-called “small wars” or asymmetric battlefield. Of all the conflicts since the end of the Cold War, we have yet to experience any real CBRN threat outside of our wars with Iraq, which did possess at a minimum offensive chemical and biological warfare assets. However, their leadership was too afraid of the retaliation of the United States to use them.[2]

Modernization

The Chemical Corps has added more modern capabilities to change as the battlefield changes. The Technical Escort Unit (Tech Escort) is the most employed chemical asset in today’s war. Tech Escort missions “include worldwide response for escorting, rendering-safe, disposing, sampling verification, mitigating hazards and identifying weaponized and non-weaponized chemical, biological and hazardous material.[3]” To the growing fleet of Stryker vehicles, the Chemical Corps has added a nuclear, biological, and chemical platform. This vehicle contains an integrated sensor suite and meteorological system,

[2] *Why WMD Were Withheld.* March 1991. http://www.gulflink.osd.mil/scud_info/scud_info_refs/n41en044/071596_cia_75701_75701_01.html (accessed January 4, 2009).
[3] *Biological Weapons.* http://www.specialoperations.com/Focus/biological.html (accessed December 14, 2008)

giving the maneuver commander real-time sampling in a vehicle platform able to fight on its own.[4]

Despite these advances, the vast majority of the Chemical Corps' equipment has remained unchanged since the 1980s and has become a dinosaur on the modern battlefield. Maneuver commanders are still unsure of what to do with their Chemical Corps assets.

CBRN in the Asymmetric War

The CBRN Specialist (MOS 74D) for enlisted Soldiers and CBRN Officer (74A) for commissioned officers in the United States Army have three general options for their assignments. They can be assigned to a chemical unit as a CBRN Soldier, assigned to a combat arms unit as their CBRN advisor, or assigned to a non-branch specific unit. When in a CBRN unit, a Soldier works for a company with a CBRN mission such as decontaminate or detect CBRN material. If a Soldier is the CBRN advisor at a company-, battalion-, or brigade-level to a maneuver unit, he or she is often relegated to working in operations and doing many non-CBRN-related tasks for that unit

[4] *M1135 Stryker NBC RV - NBC Recon Vehicle.* http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/ground/iav-nbc.htm (accessed December 14, 2008).

in addition to his or her duties to advise the commander on CBRN readiness. When working outside the CBRN field, a dragon Soldier will do such jobs as basic training instructor or recruiter, which require no specialized CBRN skill set.

When one looks at the US Army's current missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, a minimal reliance on CBRN defense is apparent. The same can be said for field artillery, air defense artillery, and armor (tanks). In an asymmetric war or counter-insurgency, the "heavy hitters" of the conventional world are left on the sidelines. Although some of all of these assets can be found in theater, none of them is the main force. Instead our forces are lighter, more mobile, and have less chance of collateral damage. Shooting 155mm Howitzer artillery rounds into a village of innocent people to kill a suspected insurgent is not in the rules of engagement. When fighting an enemy with zero air assets and with us having air supremacy, the air defenders are left without a real mission. The same can be said for CBRN defense forces that do not even deploy with the decontamination and detection equipment they were trained to use.

While the tanks, artillery pieces, and chemical/biological decontamination assets aren't being used on the front lines, their Soldiers are being sent into war nonetheless. They are augmenting the forces of which we need more, namely infantry,

military police, civil affairs (CA), and psychological operations (PSYOP). Chemical Soldiers are being used to run base operations, conduct convoy security missions, and run tactical operations centers.

Training the Modern Chemical Company

There exists a sound foundation that outlines the training of the conventional CBRN companies: US Army ARTEP 3-457-30-MTP. This document outlines the collective tasks in which a company should be proficient. There are forty-seven tasks in which a decontamination company should be trained. Of those tasks only fourteen have anything to do with CBRN. The majority are tasks such as Issue an Operations Order, Transport Casualties, Plan and Coordinate Unit Deployment, Employ Physical Security Measures, Conduct a Convoy, and Secure and Defend the Unit's Position.[5] This is a solid groundwork for a company that needs to be prepared for missions outside its primary mission, which for a decontamination company would be "conduct decontamination operations."

[5] Headquarters, Department of the Army. *ARTEP 3-457-30-MTP, Mission Training Plan for the Chemical Company Headquarters.* Washington D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2003.

Unfortunately, units are often training for their CBRN tasks at the expense of the multitude of other tasks that the training should encompass. Consider the following example: A chemical platoon is being evaluated. The platoon should be rated on every aspect of their mission such as the writing/issuing of an operation order, the tactical movement from the assembly area to the decontamination site, the establishment of security, and then the decontamination mission itself. Instead, they are too often evaluated on only the CBRN tasks. In most cases, this is simply because insufficient time has been allotted to evaluate every aspect of the mission. Many times it's because the non-CBRN tasks are seen as secondary since that unit's primary task is to decontaminate personnel and equipment.

In that training scenario, a standard one in a chemical decontamination company, the platoon should be evaluated as if all the aspects of the mission were equal. In fact, those other than the CBRN-specific tasks are what Chemical Soldiers are being asked to do today when at war. If that means allotting more time and evaluators from the combat arms world, then so be it. This is a small price to pay for preparing Soldiers for war.

Furthermore, chemical company commanders should use their companies as a training ground from which they can prepare their

Soldiers for their inevitable move to a maneuver unit. Then when those Chemical Soldiers get to their next units, infantry units, they will have the extensive background in infantry tactics that each infantryman receives. In those infantry units, Chemical Soldiers are used to fill gaps and augment combat arms teams. It is common to find the one enlisted CBRN specialist (usually a sergeant) as a point man for a room-clearing team of infantrymen. Chemical Soldiers are being asked to man .50 caliber machine guns on up-armored trucks every day in military police units. In order to give Chemical Soldiers the opportunity to excel in maneuver roles, chemical company commanders should train them accordingly.

Maintaining Specialized Skills

There is, of course, the need to remain technically proficient in one's MOS. One never knows when the conventional CBRN company will be central to our war efforts. A multitude of ways exist to combine job-specific training (decontamination, reconnaissance, detection) with the basic maneuver tasks. A company commander should conduct joint training exercises with other units outside his or her company's primary mission. Bringing in subject matter experts in such fields as tactical convoys, close quarters marksmanship, or hand-to-hand combat

will prepare chemical Soldiers to do their job, whatever that may be, in theater.

Conclusion

In the US Army today, all Soldiers of every MOS are utilized to accomplish the mission. Chemical Soldiers will be asked to perform tasks that don't sound like those of which the recruiter spoke when talking about being a 74D, a Chemical Soldier. Chemical Corps leaders must ensure their Soldiers are prepared to execute these missions. That may come at the expense of the unit's preparedness in their primary mission tasks. That adaptation of training and focus will allow the chemical Soldier to not only survive but thrive on today's battlefield.

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