

Wash Rack Operations: The Use of Unit Decontamination Assets to Enhance Vehicle PMCS

By First Lieutenant Jerry Daugherty

Near the end of December 2003, as the Soldiers of the Army's first Stryker Brigade began preparing for movement to their new area of operations in Iraq, the Dragon Soldiers from two battalions in the 3d Brigade, 2d Infantry Division, were uniquely tasked to perform missions other than those typically expected of chemical Soldiers. There was a simple problem: Due to several continuous weeks of combat operations in the soft clay mud, most of the brigade's vehicles needed to be thoroughly cleaned to facilitate preventive-maintenance checks and services (PMCS) efforts prior to movement. But, there was an equally simple solution: Use the brigade's organic chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) decontamination assets to provide high-pressure spray capabilities at a makeshift wash rack.

The wash rack was constructed along a small section of the airfield within the confines of the forward operating base (FOB). First, engineers prepared drainage trenches on both sides of the runway for runoff control. Next, multiple M-17 Lightweight Decontamination Systems were positioned near the drainage trenches on opposite sides of the runway and were subsequently prepared for operation.

As the first mud-caked Stryker vehicles; heavy, expanded-mobility, tactical trucks (HEMTTs); and high-mobility, multipurpose, wheeled vehicles (HMMWVs) rolled forward to the wash points, it became quite clear just how important wash rack operations would be to completing the PMCS requirements necessary for successful movement. Even though vehicle crews had valiantly attempted to remove as much of the mud as possible using pioneer tools, many areas of the vehicles

could not be sufficiently cleaned by such methods. The high-pressure water available with the M-17s served as the primary means of cleaning these areas. Although the vehicle crews were responsible for spraying the vehicles, chemical Soldiers actually operated the M-17s. The chemical Soldiers also ensured that vehicle crews did not waste water by carelessly spraying the vehicles or by focusing cleaning efforts on nonessential areas of the vehicles.

Wash rack operations were conducted eight hours per day for a period of two weeks, providing the opportunity for every vehicle within the brigade to be processed through the wash rack. Understandably, some vehicles were muddier than others and, consequently, required more attention. Therefore, on a case-by-case basis, extremely muddy vehicles were allowed additional spraying time, as determined by the wash rack officer in charge (OIC) or noncommissioned officer in charge (NCOIC).

Overall, the wash rack operation was a great success. Although time and resource constraints made it impractical to clean the vehicles to the level of satisfaction desired by some of the crews, all vehicles attained a level of cleanliness which assured that proper PMCS could be conducted. Additionally, conducting wash rack operations provided an excellent training opportunity for chemical leaders and Soldiers to plan and execute a nondoctrinal support mission using the skill sets that may be necessary to perform combat missions. 🇺🇸

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