

Dragon's Challenge 2006

By Major Veronica Chinn and Master Sergeant Colin Greene

As the morning dawned on the second annual 11th Air Defense Artillery (ADA) Imperial Brigade Dragon's Challenge, Soldiers anxiously awaited the trials ahead. With the awareness of the potential threats that Soldiers could face in the not-too-distant future, the days of "nobody cares" have dissolved. Commanders understand and emphasize that one of the key elements in deterring threat is having Soldiers who are well trained in chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) defense. This sends a message to potential enemies that the employment of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) against our troops will have little or no effect on operations and mission successes.

Our Dragon's Challenge competition evolved from the old nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) rodeo concept. The NBC concept brings the spirit of fun and competition to tasks that are otherwise grueling and physically demanding. Organized events such as this reinforce skills and allow Soldiers to practice their abilities to complete a mission in a CBRN-contaminated environment.

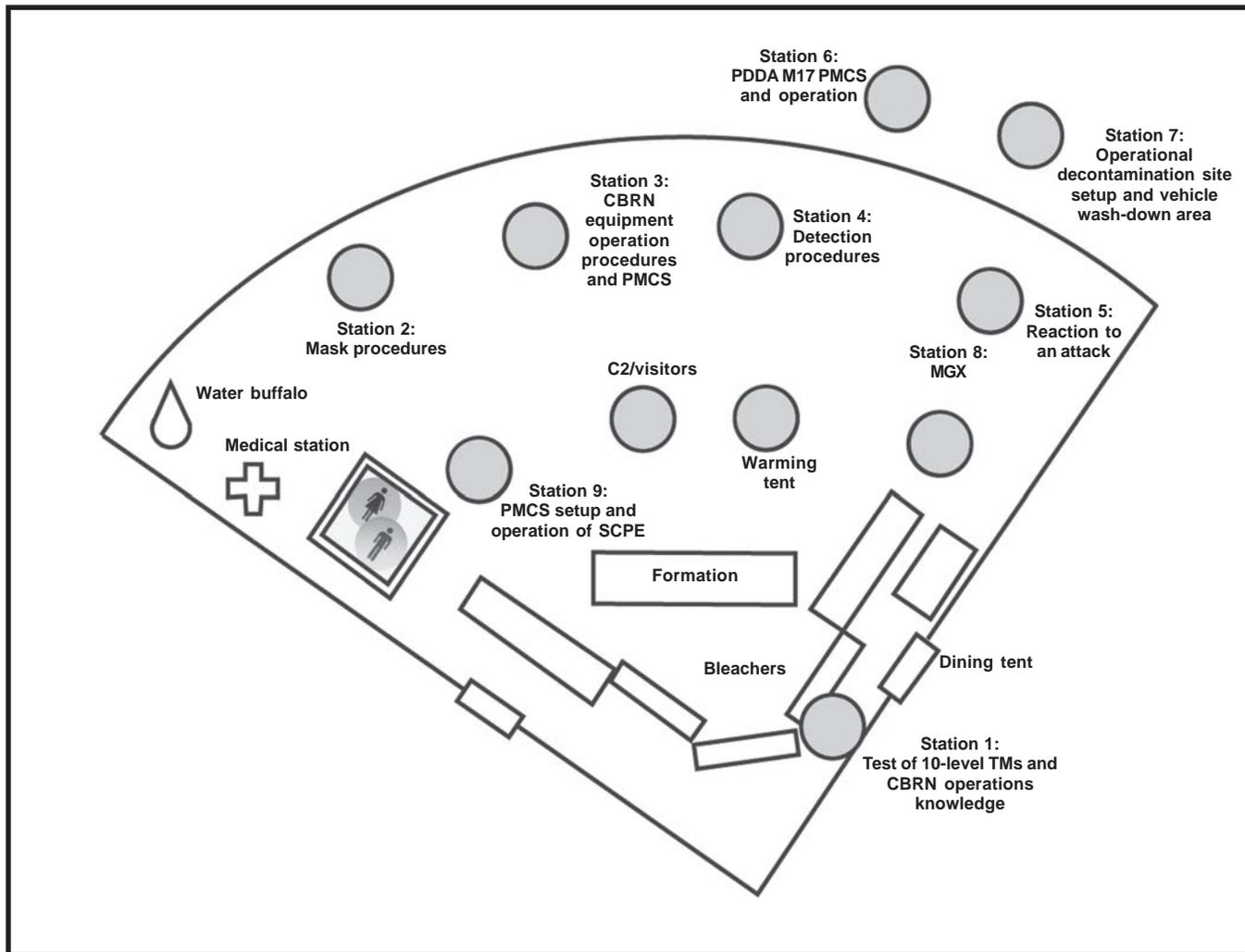
More than twenty-five Chemical Soldiers in the 11th gathered together six months prior to the Dragon's

Challenge to plan an event that would bring their fellow Soldiers together and test their mental and physical stamina and knowledge in all aspects of CBRN training. The three-day event required each battery and separate company in the brigade to create a team of ten Soldiers (for a total of twenty teams). Each team consisted of an officer, a noncommissioned officer, and eight enlisted personnel.

The Stations

The overarching concept for this event was the completion of nine stations. The teams approached the stations in succession and were evaluated on specific CBRN tasks and equipment preventive-maintenance checks and services (PMCS). Each station was worth up to 100 points. The teams had two days to complete all nine stations. The testing field was arranged as shown in the figure on page 18. The stations covered the following tasks:

- **Station 1.** This station contained a multiple-choice test that covered 10-level technical manuals (TMs) and basic CBRN operations knowledge. Each team member took a forty-question test and

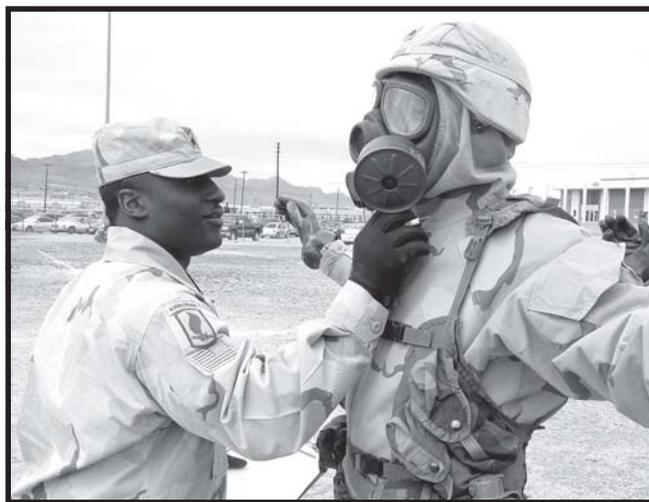


The station layout on Fort Bliss' Finney Field

correctly answered as many questions as he could in twenty minutes.

- Station 2.** This station covered mask maintenance and storage procedures. The primary evaluator at this station randomly selected five members from the team to conduct full PMCS on an M40-series protective mask. They had to correctly identify at least five faults; complete a Department of the Army (DA) Form 5988-E, *Equipment Inspection Maintenance Worksheet*; and answer questions concerning mask maintenance and storage procedures.
- Station 3.** This station covered the PMCS and operation of the improved chemical-agent monitor (ICAM), AN/VDR-2 radiac set, and M22 automatic chemical-agent detector and alarm (ACADA). For this station, the teams brought three pieces of their own equipment. The evaluator randomly selected several team

members to conduct PMCS on one piece of equipment and then put it into operation.



An evaluator checks a Soldier's gear following a MOPP 4 race.

- **Station 4.** This station covered detection procedures using M8 and M9 detector paper and an M256 chemical-agent detector kit. The station evaluator randomly selected Soldiers to identify the types of agents (using detector paper) and selected other Soldiers to correctly put an M256 kit into operation.



Soldiers read the results of an M256 kit.

- **Station 5.** This station covered the procedures for reacting to a CBRN attack. At this station, teams reacted to various forms of warnings—voice (“Gas, gas, gas!”), metal on metal, an M22 alarm, a vehicle horn, and a Soldier showing symptoms of nerve-agent poisoning. After donning the correct mission-oriented protective posture (MOPP) gear, Soldiers correctly recorded information on a CBRN marker.
- **Station 6.** This station covered the PMCS and operation of an M17 lightweight power-driven decontaminating apparatus (PDDA). Teams performed PMCS on the M17 and then put it into operation.
- **Station 7.** This station covered operational decontamination site setup and vehicle wash-down procedures. Team members correctly recited the steps of a site setup, taking into consideration the wind direction, and then correctly recited the techniques to wash down a high-mobility, multipurpose, wheeled vehicle (HMMWV) using an M17.
- **Station 8.** This station covered the procedures for a MOPP gear exchange (MGX). All team members were required to go through the steps using the joint service, lightweight, integrated suit technology (JSLIST).

- **Station 9.** This station covered the PMCS procedures, setup, and operation of M20 simplified collective-protection equipment (SCPE). The setup and operation of the M20 SCPE had to be completed according to TM 3-4240-313-10. Due to high winds, Soldiers were required to only partially fill the room liner package.



Soldiers perform an M20 SCPE setup.

The Relays

The excitement peaked on Day Three when teams competed in relays. The first-place teams were awarded 100 points; the remaining teams were awarded points in decrements of five.

M16 Relay

The first relay required each team member to run a 20-meter course in MOPP 4 gear and then disassemble an M16 rifle into five major parts—the upper receiver, the lower receiver, the bolt housing group, the charging handle, and the sling. After the evaluator observed that the weapons had been broken down correctly, Soldiers reassembled their rifles and performed function checks. When all team members completed the task, the overall team time was recorded.

M13 Relay

In the M13, decontaminating apparatus, portable (DAP) relay, each team member ran 20 meters in MOPP 4 gear to a disassembled DAP, assembled the DAP, pumped two full streams of water into the apparatus, and ran back to the starting point.

MOPP 4 Race

In the final relay, team members donned their MOPP 4 gear at the cue “Gas, gas, gas!” A timer at the starting



Soldiers practice with their M13 DAPs.

point monitored the team to ensure that all members achieved the correct posture within the eight-minute standard. Team members had the option of running to the finish line as soon as they achieved MOPP 4 status or running as a group. However, after the team or a team member crossed the finish line, they put their hands up so that evaluators at the finish line could check for deficiencies and add time for each deficiency found. Time stopped when the last member of the team crossed the finish line.

All teams kept the winning trophy in focus and remained competitive until the very end. Three teams came out on top but, of course, there can only be one champion. The winner—D Battery, 5-52d ADA Battalion—received the first-place trophy, a streamer, and bragging rights until Dragon’s Challenge 2007.

Why Do We Do This?

The benefits of organizing and conducting an event like the Dragon’s Challenge are numerous. First, in order to brainstorm an event concept and determine what tasks require emphasis, you must gather subject matter experts—all the Chemical Soldiers within the unit,



D Battery, 5-52d ADA Battalion is awarded first place.

regardless of rank. This is how you get ideas flowing and tap into creativity. You also get to know the Chemical Soldiers in each battery and company. By gathering Chemical Soldiers together, you afford them the opportunity to network and share ideas and suggestions and, ultimately, develop concepts that result in well-trained Soldiers and well-maintained equipment—ready to deploy at any time. And the competitive atmosphere makes for great fun! When you mix these elements, Soldiers remember their training.

The improvement of training is a continual process that must involve Soldiers at all levels. A commander’s involvement and support during all phases of planning and execution are essential to the successful completion of these events. Evaluator rehearsals and equipment coordination are also crucial to the success of an event. After-action reviews following each event capture lessons learned and identify improvements to be made. We plan to make next year’s competition more challenging by conducting it in a more tactical location and by incorporating lessons learned from Operation Iraqi Freedom. 🗣️

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