



# CHEMICAL WARRIORS IN THE PHILIPPINE CAMPAIGN

*By Colonel Robert Walk*

In December 1941, the Chemical Warfare Service (CWS) (an early name for the U.S. Army Chemical Corps) was a small part of the Army. Averaging about 80 officers and 700 enlisted men through the interwar years of 1920 to 1940, the CWS exploded to 993 officers and 5,591 enlisted men by December 1941. Of these, 14 officers, 275 enlisted men, and 12 Philippine scouts (divided into two companies) were on the Philippine Islands (a commonwealth of the United States at the time). These men were the first Chemical Soldiers to see combat during World War II.

At the beginning of the war, one of the two companies in the Philippines was the 7th Chemical Company (Aviation). The 7th was formed with personnel from several small Chemical detachments located at Clark, Nichols, and Iba Airfields. Their mission was to support the Philippine Far East Air Force with smoke and chemical warfare material. When the Far East Air Force was eliminated as a formidable fighting force, the 7th was left without a mission. The company then joined the 31st Infantry Regiment and fought as infantrymen on Bataan. The 7th Chemical Company began the war with 3 officers and 185 Soldiers; of these men, 8 were killed in action prior to capture and 62 returned home at the end of the war.

The second company was the 4th Separate Chemical Company (Weapons), a small unit with 2 officers and 64 enlisted men. Since chemical weapons were not available for use in the early stages of the war, the 4th was not assigned a mission. But in February 1942, the 4th Separate Chemical Company was attached to the 31st Infantry Regiment to fight as infantrymen. Only 22 Soldiers from the 4th returned home at the end of the war.

The 301st Chemical Company (Depot) (Philippine Army) was formed in December 1941 with 4 officers and 70 enlisted men. The 301st, along with American units, ran the Bataan and Fort Mills Chemical Depots on

Corregidor. They also fought as infantrymen against the invading Japanese Army and died alongside their American comrades. Casualty figures are not available for this Philippine unit, but the figures are likely comparable to U.S. casualties.

During the first Philippine Campaign, Chemical Soldiers performed laboratory services, prepared insecticide-impregnated clothing, repaired chemical warfare equipment, and performed other missions as needed. One of the first and most important missions they undertook was the emergency installation of ventilation equipment for the hospital in the Malinta Tunnel on Corregidor. Without these blowers, life in the tunnel would not have been pleasant for the Soldiers needing to work there. Knowing they needed to support the Soldiers in the field, Chemical personnel converted chemical warfare material into battery acid to enable the continued use of vehicles and chemical decontaminants into water purification material. They even designed a makeshift working flamethrower. In short, Chemical Soldiers supported the Army as best they could, given the means available. At least six Silver Stars were awarded for gallantry to Soldiers from these units. When the surrender of forces in the Philippine Islands was evident, Soldiers destroyed the chemical warfare materiel considered useful to the enemy, including the small stockpile of chemical agents. One can only imagine what the Japanese propagandists would have done if they had captured chemical warfare agents!

On 9 April 1942, the Filipino-American forces on Bataan surrendered. Survivors from these companies were part of the infamous Bataan death march. No one knows how many died on the march or in the early months at the disease-ridden Camp O'Donnell and Cabanatuan prison camps, but thousands of American and Philippine Soldiers paid the ultimate price. Troops at Corregidor

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stationing, base defense, protection of lines of communication, and area and local security.

The individual unit and base cluster retain defense responsibilities of the unit or base. However, when the threat level exceeds the capability of the organization, the CSB (ME) will provide for additional defensive support through the use of the assigned military police or tactical combat force. This assigned force will provide a needed tactical capability short of assigning a BCT with the protection mission.

### Transition

While the exact stationing of the new CSB (ME) headquarters organizations has not been decided, the number of units will extend across the entire Army force structure. A limited number of organizations will be placed in the Active Army, while the remainder will be spread throughout the Army National Guard and United States Army Reserves. The first four units will be activated in fiscal year 2006.

The formulation of this new unit will require two major adjustments in the philosophy of training. The first is in the development of the senior leadership through progressive education and experience. The ability to command and control a multifunctional unit demands the development of new skills to coordinate multiple functions into an integrated execution plan. The second is the development of the collective skills within the headquarters to produce a coordinated and integrated understanding of the multiple

functions on the tactical and operational environment of the future.

The United States Army Maneuver Support Center (MANSCEN) is currently designing the training plans and materiel to support the formulation of the new headquarters.

### Summary

The deployment of the newly created CSB (ME) will provide a valuable and capable element to the Future Force. The brigade will provide support to the committed BCTs; perform missions in its own area of operations to support the offense, the defense, or stability operations; and support the division and corps rear areas with essential control functions. ●●●

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This article is a reprint from the January–March 2006 issue of *Engineer* and has been reprinted in its entirety.

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surrendered on 9 May 1942. Soldiers stationed in Corregidor fared better than the Bataan defenders, but they still suffered a large number of casualties throughout their imprisonment. Some Soldiers died on the “hell ships” bound for Japan, while others were victims of the sinister chemical and biological warfare tests of Unit 731 in Manchuria. When the war ended in 1945, only one out of every three Chemical Soldiers stationed in the Philippine Islands in 1941 returned home. We must never forget their sacrifice! ●●●

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