



Inactivation of the 455th Chemical Brigade

By Colonel Robert Walk



The 455th Chemical Brigade, the only Chemical brigade in the history of the Chemical Corps to deploy from the United States to a theater of operations, was inactivated on 15 September 2007. In a fitting ceremony, the brigade colors were ceremonially sheathed and retired by Lieutenant Colonel George C. Frank (brigade commander), Command Sergeant Major Honora Rhatigan (brigade command sergeant major), and Brigadier General William Terpeluk (commander of the 77th Regional Support Command). An exception to policy was granted to allow the colors to remain at Fort Dix, New Jersey.

The lineage of the 455th Chemical Brigade starts with the constitution of the 100th Chemical Battalion (Motorized) on 7 June 1944, followed by its activation in La Fagianeria, Italy, on 5 August 1944. The 100th Chemical Battalion was reorganized and redesignated as the 100th Chemical Mortar Battalion on 15 November 1944. The 100th Chemical Mortar Battalion received battle streamers for the Rome-Arno, Po Valley, and North

Apennines campaigns. Five soldiers were killed in action. The battalion was inactivated at Camp Miles Standish, Massachusetts, on 13 October 1945. Over the next several years, the battalion was allotted to the Organized Reserve Corps and was activated and inactivated in Boston, Massachusetts. In 1952, the unit was redesignated as the Headquarters, Headquarters Company, 100th Chemical Group (Communications Zone [COMMZ]) and allotted to the Regular Army. From 17 July 1952 to 24 June 1967, the unit (which was redesignated as the Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 100th Chemical Group [COMMZ] on 25 November 1953) was located at Fort McClellan, Alabama.

The most recent term of service for the 455th Chemical Brigade began on 4 June 2000 at Fort Dix under the command of Colonel Joseph Leonelli. There were two subordinate battalions—the 462d Transportation Battalion, Trenton, New Jersey, and the 479th Chemical Battalion, Fort Tilden, New York. The brigade motto was, “Protecting the Force.” Over the next three years, the brigade and subordinate units conducted traditional inactive-duty training and prepared for possible mobilization following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. One company—the 320th Chemical Company in Jamaica, Queens, New York—alerted all available personnel in case they were needed for decontamination operations after the fall of the twin towers in Manhattan.

The 455th Chemical Brigade was mobilized as a major subordinate command of the Combined Forces Land Component Command in support of the War on Terrorism and Operation Enduring Freedom on 10 February 2003 under Colonel Robin Byrom. The brigade was first assigned to perform joint task force elimination and disablement functions and tasked to support Defense Threat Reduction Agency operations designed to eliminate Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (WMD).



455th Chemical Brigade colors being sheathed



Brigadier General William Terpeluk speaking at the inactivation ceremony

After the cessation of major combat operations on 1 June 2003, the brigade was reassigned as part of the Iraq Survey Group (ISG), a Presidentially directed, joint, multinational, interagency organization charged with unveiling the truth about Iraqi WMD programs and the fate of Navy Captain Michael Speicher, who had been missing in action since Operation Desert Storm. Other functions performed by the brigade included taking garrison command of Camp Slayer, Iraq; providing convoy escort security and decontamination support for various WMD teams operating in Iraq; and manning positions in the ISG Survey Operations Center, Sector

Control Point–Baghdad, and Central Media Processing Center. The 455th Chemical Brigade operated in conjunction with the 450th Chemical Battalion (which was mobilized from Houston, Texas) to carry out much of this work.

Elements of the Pennsylvania Army National Guard and Kansas Army National Guard assumed responsibility of Camp Slayer and the ISG in April 2004, and the 455th Chemical Brigade returned from deployment on 28 April 2004. Despite involvement in combat operations, the unit suffered no casualties. The brigade was released from active duty and returned to reserve status on 1 July 2004.

After returning from Iraq, the brigade continued to train—focusing on the Army Reserve homeland defense mission and the mobilization of other brigade Soldiers and units for deployment overseas. One brigade Soldier killed in action, Sergeant Jose Velez, was fatally wounded on 8 June 2006 during the deployment of the 773d Transportation Company. As part of the ongoing Army modernization initiative and transition to a modular force, the 455th Chemical Brigade was selected for inactivation no later than 2011. However, due to Army Reserve restructuring initiatives, the unit was inactivated in 2007.

Colonel Walk is the deputy assistant commandant for the U.S. Army Reserve, U.S. Army Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear School, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

(“The Netherlands? What’s Over There?” continued from page 28)

CBRN training program, the initial response was, “You’re in the Netherlands—that won’t happen here.” After much discussion, negotiation, and persuasion, I am finally developing an SOP and CBRN plan for JFC Brunssum. I have also begun building an early-response team to respond to any incident that occurs at JFC Brunssum. The team will be comprised of American, Belgian, British, and German soldiers who will work alongside host nation authorities in the event of an attack or chemical spill. Although it has been quite an undertaking, this approach will result in a unified team that follows a plan which incorporates contributions from each nation represented.

The position of CBRN/force protection officer for a NATO JFC HSG is very demanding, but the experience

and opportunities that the job affords (including the opportunity to visit other European countries during downtime) more than outweigh the occasional aggravations. In this position, I work hard but I also get to play hard. In the end, I consider myself extremely lucky to have secured this assignment.

Captain Shackelford is the CBRN/force protection officer for JFC Brunssum, the Netherlands. He holds a bachelor’s degree in psychology from Texas A&M University and a master’s degree in environmental management from Webster University.