

464th Chemical Brigade: The Final Chapter

By Sergeant First Class Mary Nist



An inactivation ceremony for the 464th Chemical Brigade was conducted on 29 March 2008 at the Holiday Inn Downtown, Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Colonel Gregory Ritch, commander of the 464th, led the official party, with Colonel Mark Smith, Deputy Commander for Readiness, 99th Regional Readiness Command (RRC), Coraopolis, Pennsylvania, following. Colonel Robert Walk, former Deputy Assistant Commandant for the U.S. Army Reserve, U.S. Army Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear School, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, and Command Sergeant Major Donald B. Riggs, command sergeant major of the 464th, completed the official party. All former Johnstown commanders attended the ceremony, including retired Major General Leonard Hoch—the only general officer to have commanded the unit. Retired Command Sergeant Major George Davis represented the former command sergeants major.

The ceremony was followed by a reunion dinner, where many former brigade members met to reminisce of past times. Before dinner was served, an explanation of the “Missing Man Table”¹ was read; and after a moment of silence, 89-year-old, World War II veteran Walter “Pete” McClelland played a moving rendition of *Taps*.

The motto of the 464th Chemical Brigade was “We Serve in Silence,” which connotes the silent, but deadly force of chemical weapons and the silent, dirty, thankless—yet lifesaving—job that Chemical Soldiers perform with the utmost expertise, dignity, and honor.

Prior to the inactivation, the mission of the 464th Chemical Brigade was to provide command and control of two to six Chemical battalions and other assigned or attached separate companies at the corps level. The brigade provided staff planning and coordination for combat, combat support, and combat service support operations for all assigned and attached units. The 464th also allocated units and resources in support of chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear reconnaissance; decontamination; biological detection; and smoke operations. In addition, the brigade conducted civilian decontamination in response to domestic chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear incidents.

The lineage of the 464th can be traced back to 20 October 1953, when it was originally constituted as the 464th Chemical Group and assigned to the First U.S. Army. The unit was

activated on 1 December 1953 in New York, New York, and continued operations until its inactivation on 31 January 1968. On 22 February 1972, the 464th Chemical Group was assigned to the Third U.S. Army and reactivated in Orlando, Florida. On 1 October 1983, the 464th was relieved from assignment to the Third U.S. Army and reassigned to the Second U.S. Army. On 16 June 1987, it was reassigned to the First U.S. Army and relocated from Orlando to Johnstown, Pennsylvania. On 16 September 1987, the 464th Chemical Group was reorganized and redesignated as Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 464th Chemical Brigade.

While in Johnstown, the brigade commanded a wide variety of battalions and units, including the 336th Military Police Battalion; 128th and 383d Military Intelligence Battalions; 392d Signal Battalion; 444th Personnel Services Battalion; 463d, 365th, and 458th Engineer Battalions; 485th Chemical Battalion; and Army Reserve Unit Consequence Management. Prior to the Army Reserve transformation on 1 October 2007, the brigade was composed of the 365th and 458th Engineer Battalions and the 485th Chemical Battalion.

Annual Training and Exercise Support

Throughout its history, the 464th Chemical Brigade was an important part of many training exercises around the world. The brigade supported several higher headquarters (V Corps, I Corps, 19th Theater Support Command, and 89th RRC)



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A subordinate unit conducts WMD training.

in a variety of exercises during its tenure in Pennsylvania, including Central Fortress; Caravan Guard; Return of Forces to Germany (REFORGER); Cascade Peak; Cascade Mist; Cascade Lightning; Cascade Steel; Yama Sakura; Ulchi Focus Lens; Urgent Victory; Alamo; Reception, Staging, and Onward Integration; and River Warrior.

In 1979, the 464th Chemical Brigade (Orlando) trained two Chemical battalions and seven Chemical smoke generation companies (which, at the time, represented one-third of the Army Reserve smoke-generating strength) during annual training at Fort A.P. Hill, Virginia. Three of the units trained—the 485th Chemical Battalion and the 130th and 355th Chemical Companies—later became some of the first units commanded by the brigade when it was transferred to Johnstown.

In addition to the exercises previously mentioned, the brigade was selected as the exercise director for the Rio Grande series of exercises for Fiscal Years (FYs) 1998, 1999, 2001, and 2002. The Rio Grande exercises, which were sponsored by the U.S. Army Reserve Command, were Chemical exercises that made use of a contemporary opposing force scenario. Rio Grande 1998 was conducted at Camp Rapid, South Dakota, with two battalions. The exercise, which was held in conjunction with Golden Coyote 98, provided support to the South Dakota National Guard. Rio Grande 1999 was conducted at Fort Bliss, Texas, with five Chemical battalions, one military police battalion, one quartermaster battalion, and one support engineer combat team. Rio Grande 2001 was conducted at Dugway Proving Ground, Utah. It provided support to the U.S. Air Force and Utah National Guard. Rio Grande 2002 was simultaneously conducted in four locations—Fort Hunter Liggett, California; Fort McCoy, Wisconsin; Camp Rapid, South Dakota; and Camp Guernsey, Wyoming. The Fort Hunter Liggett units supported a combined weapons of mass destruction (WMD) exercise at Coast Guard Island, Alameda, California, with the Coast Guard. At Fort McCoy, the exercise was held in conjunction with the Golden Medic Exercise, which provided medical units the opportunity to train with decontamination units and

chemically contaminated casualties and to get a firsthand look at how Chemical units decontaminate casualties using WMD equipment. Exercises at Camp Rapid and Camp Guernsey supported the joint exercise Golden Thunder. At Camp Rapid, the exercise supported the South Dakota National Guard; and at Camp Guernsey, it supported the Wyoming National Guard.

The 464th Chemical Brigade was one of the lead WMD training organizations, ensuring that assigned Chemical companies were trained in the use of fielded WMD equipment. The brigade also trained law enforcement agencies in preparation for Pope John Paul II's visit to the United States in October 1998. A team of instructors from the 464th devised a comprehensive training program on the fundamentals of chemical defense to assist a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) special weapons and tactics (SWAT) team, also in preparation for the Pope's visit. This specialized training program was conducted at Fort Dix, New Jersey. In addition, the 464th compiled a training program for the Department of Justice/FBI-Northeast Region; New York City SWAT team; Newark FBI SWAT team; and Newark County Emergency Response organization to assist in planning for a WMD training event conducted at Fort Indiantown Gap, East Hanover, Pennsylvania, in April 1998. The brigade was also instrumental in coordinating training on Weapons of Mass Destruction Command, Control, and Coordination (WMD C3) for personnel from all major subordinate commands under the 99th RRC. The training was conducted with instructors from the Defense Nuclear Weapons School.

Mobilization and Deployment Support

While the brigade was not mobilized as a unit, several of its subordinate units were mobilized in support of Operations Desert Storm, Enduring Freedom, Noble Eagle, and Iraqi Freedom. The first units mobilized for Operation Desert Storm were the 336th Military Police Battalion, Oakdale, Pennsylvania; 307th Military Police Company, New Kensington, Pennsylvania; and 352d Military Police Company, Oakdale, Pennsylvania. They were soon followed by the 304th Military Police Company, Bluefield, West Virginia, and 363d Military Police Company, Grafton, West Virginia.

After 11 September 2001, the 464th was called upon to mobilize units to support the war effort. From 2002 to 2007, more than 1,000 Soldiers in 10 units (comprised of a total of 5 complete units and 19 derivative [partial] units) were mobilized. The first units alerted were the 249th Engineer Battalion, Company B, Team 11, Kittanning, Pennsylvania (in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan); 300th Chemical Company, Morgantown, West Virginia (in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in Jordan); 377th Chemical Company, Richmond, Virginia (initially in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, but diverted to support Operation Noble Eagle); 431st Chemical Detachment, Johnstown, Pennsylvania (in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in Kuwait); and the Army Reserve Unit-Consequence Management, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland (mobilized to support Operation Noble Eagle at Aberdeen Proving Ground and the Department of State, Washington, D.C.).

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The 458th Engineer Battalion was mobilized for the next Operation Iraqi Freedom rotation. The battalion deployed to Iraq, where it was divided to provide support to several forward operating bases. The Soldiers of the 458th completed a variety of missions, including route clearance along major supply routes, escort of captured enemy ammunition to secure collection and disposal sites, and horizontal and vertical construction. Horizontal construction missions included force protection upgrades to checkpoints, construction of traffic control points, hardening of communication send nodes, construction of fuel points, and emplacement of various concrete barriers.

In 2004, the 464th Chemical Brigade took command and control of the 444th Personnel Services Battalion and immediately began mobilizing postal detachments for Operation Iraqi Freedom 04-06. The postal detachments provided daily mail service for the bases that they served. The brigade continued to mobilize postal detachments for Operation Iraqi Freedom 05-07 to replace the detachments mobilized in 2004. In addition, another detachment from the 249th Engineer Battalion, Company B, Team 11, was mobilized to support Operation Iraqi Freedom.

In 2006, two derivative detachments from the 464th Chemical Brigade Headquarters Detachment were mobilized in

support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Both of these detachments supported Central Command Headquarters.

In 2007, the 485th Chemical Battalion Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment was mobilized in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The 485th served as the camp command cell at Camp Virginia, Kuwait. The mission was a challenging one, as the camp population and dynamics changed on a daily basis.

The 464th Chemical Brigade was a significant asset to the U.S. Army Reserve and the U.S. Army Chemical Corps. The Soldiers of the brigade can proudly say “Mission complete.” 

Endnote:

¹An explanation of the “Missing Man Table” can be found at <http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/powday/missingman.htm>, accessed on 17 September 2008.

As a Soldier, Sergeant First Class Nist serves as the detachment sergeant for the Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment of the 464th Chemical Brigade. As a civil servant, she is employed as the staff operations and training specialist for the 464th. Sergeant First Class Nist holds a bachelor's degree in accounting.

(Photographs by Sergeant First Class Doug Lingenfelter)