

83d Chemical Battalion

By Captain Michael Ramsey

“High-angle hell” is what they called it. The “Four Deuce,” the 4.2-inch-diameter, 48-inch-long tube capable of throwing a sustained volley of 80 rounds per hour up to 565 yards (4,400 yards with the improved high-explosive, point-detonating round), proved invaluable to infantry and ranger units during World War II. The men of the 83d Chemical Mortar Battalion carrying this tool of war emulated the bravery and versatility of Dragon Soldiers.

The 83d Chemical Battalion was first activated at Camp Gordon, Georgia, on 10 June 1942. The battalion was designed to carry thirty-six 4.2-inch-diameter mortars (with each shell weighing about 25 pounds) for a total firepower effect that is equivalent to the standard weapon of a division artillery brigade—the 105-millimeter howitzer. These mortars provided a lethal, mid- to close-range fire support capability to infantry units supported by the 83d. On 29 April 1943, after intensive training, the battalion departed for overseas duty, serving 508 days in combat in the Mediterranean theater and mainland Europe during World War II. The 83d fought in eight campaigns and successfully performed five amphibious operations and one airborne operation. The battalion boasts a brilliant campaign record, firing more than 500,000 mortar rounds in support of such distinguished units as Darby’s Ranger Force X,¹ the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions, and the 2d and 41st British Commandos. The heroism of the 83d was rewarded in the form of 876 Purple Hearts (with 91 oak-leaf clusters), 3 Distinguished Service Crosses, 2 Legions of Merit, 39 Silver Stars, 9 Soldier’s Medals, 97 Bronze Stars, and 5 Croix de Guerre. The battalion then underwent several reorganizations, redesignations, inactivations, and reactivations.

The 83d was reactivated as the 83d Chemical Battalion at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, on 1 October 1993 and relocated to Fort Polk, Louisiana, on 15 September 2000. The WARTRACE units were the 101st Chemical Company (Smoke/Decontamination), Fort Bragg, and the 59th Chemical Company

(Smoke/Decontamination), Fort Drum, New York. The 83d served as the active duty command and control headquarters for chemical units assigned or attached to the XVIII Airborne Corps or a joint task force commander. The battalion deployed from Fort Polk on 8 February 2003, serving 118 days in Kuwait and Iraq in support of the 377th Theater Support Command, V Corps, and 1st Marine Expeditionary Force.

In 2007, chemical units assigned to the 83d Chemical Battalion at Fort Polk included the Headquarters, Headquarters Detachment; 7th Chemical Company (Biological Integrated Detection System [BIDS]); and the 51st Chemical Company (Combat Support). That year, the battalion was reorganized under the 48th Chemical Brigade, Fort Hood, Texas, and 20th

Support Command (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and High-Yield Explosives), Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland. The 21st Chemical Company (Combat Support), Fort Bragg, and 101st Chemical Company were attached for training and readiness authority; and the 63d Chemical Company, Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and 92d Chemical Company, Fort Stewart, Georgia, were similarly attached during their deployments to Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)

and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), respectively. The 83d Chemical Battalion was also assigned oversight and responsibility for the 1st Maneuver Enhancement Brigade (Rear) during the most recent deployment of the brigade headquarters in support of OEF.

Immediately after 11 September 2001, the 83d Chemical Battalion deployed BIDS platoons from the 7th Chemical Company to Uzbekistan and Qatar in support of OEF and deployed the company headquarters and three platoons to Washington, D.C., to provide biodetection capabilities at the Pentagon in support of Operation Noble Eagle. The U.S. Army Reserve 310th Chemical Company (BIDS) joined the rest of the battalion, and a rigorous predeployment train-up



cycle began. In January 2003, the 83d Chemical Battalion was deployed to Kuwait as part of the force buildup. The 83d (which was task-organized with the 7th, 51st, 68th, 181st, and 310th Chemical Companies) supported V Corps, the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, and the 173d Infantry Brigade (Airborne) in Iraq; 10th Mountain Division in Afghanistan; 3d Special Forces Group in Jordan; and 377th Theater Support Command in Kuwait.

Since the redeployment of the battalion in July 2003, platoon- and company-size elements have conducted doctrinal and nondoctrinal missions in support of OIF and OEF. The battalion was awarded the Meritorious Unit Commendation for its service in combat, and individual companies received accolades for their specific missions.

On 1 October 2007, the 83d Chemical Battalion was reorganized under the 48th Chemical Brigade and the newly formed 20th Support Command. The 21st and 101st Chemical Companies were attached for training, readiness, and authority; and the 63d and 92d Chemical Companies were similarly attached during their deployments to OIF and OEF, respectively, until their redeployments in early 2009.

In 2009, the chemical units assigned to the 83d Chemical Battalion at Fort Polk included the Headquarters, Headquarters Detachment and 7th and 51st Chemical Companies.

The 83d Chemical Battalion is rich with history and valiant service. Today, the Dragon Soldiers of the 83d Chemical Battalion continue the same traditions of honorable service that were first evident during World War II. The battalion is equipped to conduct chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) reconnaissance; biological surveillance; and smoke and decontamination operations to counter CBRN threats in support of combatant commanders or other governmental agencies. They continue to support the War on Terrorism and set a strong example for all Dragon Soldiers.

Confront Any Mission. Rounds Away!



Endnote:

¹Darby's Ranger Force X was a special task force of U.S. Army Rangers charged with the invasion of Sicily.

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At the time this article was written, Captain Ramsey was a student attending the CBRN Captain's Career Course at the U.S. Army Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear School, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

Editor's Note. On 12 December 1944, Private First Class Richard H. Griffin, B Company, 83d Chemical Mortar Battalion, was killed in action near Riquewihr, France. He was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and two Purple Hearts for extraordinary heroism in action. Private First Class Griffin was inducted into the U.S. Army Chemical Corps Hall of Fame on 25 June 2009 (see page 51).



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