

83d Chemical Battalion Honors Their Veterans

By Captain Heather McColl Morgan



Since its activation in 1942, the 83d Chemical Battalion has truly lived up to its motto of “Confront Any Mission.” From mid- to close-range mortar support during World War II to modern convoy operations and chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear reconnaissance, surveillance, and decontamination, the 83d is a full spectrum operational unit with a rich history and tradition.

The battalion was first activated at Camp Gordon, Georgia, on 10 June 1942. After undergoing rigorous training and preparation, the men of the 83d departed for the Mediterranean Theater on 29 April 1943. They served 508 days in combat in the Mediterranean Theater and on mainland Europe during World War II. The battalion firepower, which was originally designed to consist of thirty-six 4.2-inch mortars, was equivalent to three 105-millimeter howitzers and provided formidable, mid- to close-range fire support to infantry units. The battalion expended nearly 500,000 rounds of ammunition in combat. They also captured almost 5,000 Italians and Germans and liberated 230 allied prisoners. The 83d successfully performed one airborne operation and five amphibious operations in eight campaigns, including Sicily (with arrowhead), Naples-Foggia (with arrowhead), Anzio (with arrowhead), Rome-Arno, Southern France (with arrowhead), Rhineland, Ardennes-Alsace, and Central Europe. Members of the battalion received the following awards for their distinguished service: 3 Distinguished Service Crosses (posthumous), 2 Legions of Merit, 39 Silver Stars, 9 Soldier’s Medals, 97 Bronze Stars, 5 Croix de Guerre, and 876 Purple Hearts.

The veterans of the 83d maintain a highly active organization that gathers annually to retell the unit’s stories and maintain connections with old comrades. This year, the leaders and Soldiers of the active battalion decided to honor the unit legacy in a unique way—by connecting the veterans to the unit’s more recent past, contemporary operations, and future. In a ceremony combining three significant battalion events, World War II veterans were awarded the Honorable Order of the Dragon, two new Operation Iraqi Freedom campaign streamers were added to the battalion colors, and the battalion’s newly commissioned print was unveiled.

In concert with the 19 June 2010 annual reunion of the 83d Chemical Battalion Veteran’s Association, leaders and Soldiers of the 83d gathered on the steps of the National World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C., to honor their own members of “The Greatest Generation”—veterans of the 83d Chemical Battalion who fought during World War II. The transformation of the battalion through the decades was depicted by Soldiers in period uniforms, beginning with a Soldier clad in the same olive drab uniform worn by battalion members during World War II. Soldiers who were dressed to represent the Korean Conflict, Vietnam War, Operations

Desert Storm and Desert Shield, and the War on Terrorism stepped forward in succession. The battalion World War II veterans and their families were then recognized for their exceptional valor, tenacity, and commitment.

The battalion awarded the Honorable Order of the Dragon to Mr. Stephen Vukson. An additional ceremony was held in Baltimore, Maryland, where the Honorable Order of the Dragon was also awarded to Lieutenant Colonel Leon Trey (Retired), Mr. Dan Miller, and Mr. John P. McEvoy. All four of the Honorable Order of the Dragon recipients served with distinction during World War II and continue to serve in the 83d Chemical Battalion Veteran’s Association.

Building upon the exceptional, combat-hardened beginning of the 83d has proven to be a challenging task for more recent members of the battalion; so, the present leaders and Soldiers of the 83d elected to add two Operation Iraqi Freedom campaign streamers to the battalion colors during the same ceremony. This allowed the veterans of the 83d and their families to see that their blood, sweat, and tears contributed to the making of an outstanding, relevant, and combat-ready battalion that is prepared to confront today’s missions and those of the future. One streamer was awarded for the Liberation of Iraq from 19 March to 1 May 2003, and another was awarded for the Transition of Iraq from 2 May to 12 July 2003.

The battalion also unveiled a commemorative print during the ceremony. In the print, which was created by artist Marc Wolfe, 83d Chemical Mortar Battalion Soldiers are fighting alongside modern 83d Chemical Battalion Soldiers, depicting the full spectrum of capabilities in today’s Chemical Corps. The combination of the print and the living Soldiers clad in historical uniforms provided the audience with a living picture of past and present heroes—men and women who put their lives on the line for our country’s freedom.

With a chorus of echoing Soldiers, Lieutenant Colonel Michael B. Hedges, commander of the 83d Chemical Battalion, called out a cadence: “Some say freedom is free . . . well, we tend to disagree.”

These events were more than a chance for participants to see our Nation’s capitol or to put on a good show. It was with a sense of overwhelming pride that members of the 83d Chemical Battalion invited visitors to the memorial to join them in honoring the veterans and families who sacrificed so much in the fight to preserve liberty. ●●●

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