Shifting Chemical Leader and Staff Training to Meet the Demands of the "Long War"

By Colonel David Oaks

The Army is changing to respond to the war we are fighting in the Middle East—the Long War. The Chemical Corps is also changing, moving away from its traditional battlefield missions such as smoke operations to newer missions such as biological detection. And while the Corps is indeed transforming, it may be overlooking the full potential of its Soldiers' contributions to this new kind of war. The Army may also be overlooking this opportunity. For example, Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, makes no reference to chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high-yield explosives (CBRNE). This omission should not inspire fear of irrelevance, but rather motivate Chemical Soldiers to demonstrate that they can be a unique and valuable asset in the counterinsurgency fight. The 455th Chemical Brigade (U.S. Army Reserve), Fort Dix, New Jersey, participated in a 2006 battle command staff training (BCST) exercise that illustrates this point.

The BCST is a 36-hour, simulation-driven command post exercise designed to train brigade and subordinate battalion staffs on their mission-essential task lists (METLs). The First U.S. Army maintains overall charge of the BCST program, while the 1st Brigade, 78th Division (Training Support), conducts and supports training in the northeast region.

In the spring of 2005, the 455th was notified that it would participate in a BCST exercise the following spring. The exercise scenario attached the brigade to a corps and assigned the mission of assisting friendly governments in defense operations against foreign conventional and unconventional forces. The announcement of the BCST was met with some skepticism by brigade Soldiers. The headquarters had returned just 10 months earlier from a year-long deployment to Iraq, where it served with the Iraq Survey Group searching for weapons of mass destruction. Many of these Operation Iraqi Freedom I veterans expressed frustration with the need to be tested on their ability to operate in a combat scenario. The general feeling was that a conventional corps warfighter simulation exercise would not be of much use. But this expectation proved to be wrong.

In this BCST scenario, the corps assigned typical missions to the 455th: establish hasty and detailed decontamination sites, emplace Biological Integrated Detection System (BIDS) arrays at specified locations, and conduct a large-area smoke operation. The priorities of the exercise included avoiding contamination through reconnaissance, protecting the force with smoke, and recovering combat power through decontamination operations. The threat assessment included the possible use of biological and chemical weapons. Terrorist activity through the spread of biological agents, toxic industrial chemicals (TIC), or toxic industrial material (TIM) was also expected.

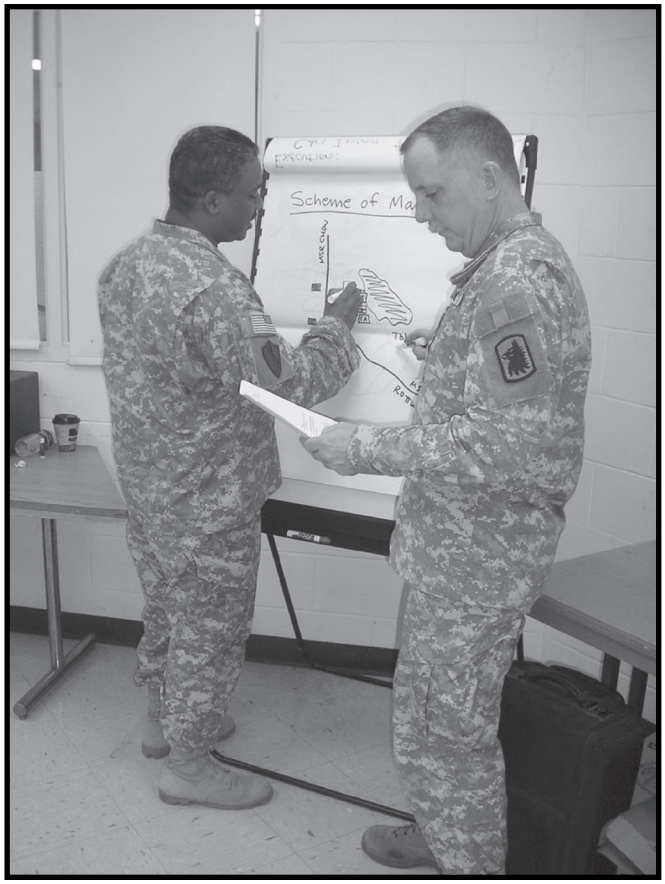
During mission analysis, the 455th determined that indigenous population decontamination was an implied mission. Preparing for this eventual mission would pay the following dividends as the BCST unfolded:

- Avoiding congestion in a main supply route (MSR) that passed through the largest city in the corps area. Keeping the MSR open was a key objective for the corps commander. The in-place treatment of civilian casualties encouraged the population to remain stationary and not clog the MSR.
- Reinforcing support for the host nation government. A rapid and effective response to an attack on the local population met the information operations support goal.
- Reducing the effectiveness of terrorism as one of the enemy's weapons by promptly responding to an attack.

During the first 12 hours of the exercise, there were several unconfirmed reports of enemy elements conducting small chemical and biological attacks in the corps rear area. Almost simultaneously, the 455th Chemical Brigade received a warning order to respond to a terrorist attack on two large pesticide plants located in the largest city in the corps rear. The mayor of the city requested coalition support to protect the civilian population and plan decontamination operations as

needed. This was the prompt for the brigade to implement the military decision-making process (MDMP).

While working through the steps of the MDMP, Soldiers from the 455th assessed the situation. Hazardous material (HAZMAT) qualified personnel (with additional skill identifier [ASI] J5) in the operations staff officer section evaluated the TIC produced at the plants, where it was discovered that the chemicals only posed a health threat to the population in a very large dose of the liquid form. The large explosions necessary to release TIC from storage tanks would vaporize the liquids before they could contaminate the adjacent housing areas. There was a negligible toxic danger to Soldiers and civilians (with the exception of those working at the plant and those killed or injured in the terrorist attack itself). However, there were still thousands of civilians living in close proximity to the plants. These civilians might panic, demand decontamination operations, or flee the area along the MSR.



Planning the scheme of maneuver

The recommended course of action presented to the brigade commander centered on the assessment that minimal, if any, chemical decontamination would be needed. However, to avoid panic in the civilian population, the 455th provided a decontamination team (roughly platoon-size) to demonstrate a show of strength. Additionally, the 455th requested 48-hour civil affairs, engineer, and military police support from the corps to coordinate with host nation officials, create a marked path, and man traffic control points to guide panicked civilians to the decontamination site or away from the MSR. The operation, termed *Task Force Decon*, was organized under the command of the subordinate chemical battalions and coordinated with the host nation government. The brigade commander approved this plan, and the 455th successfully worked through the MDMP event portion of the BCST exercise.

Beyond the learning event of implementing MDMP, there were other lessons Soldiers from the 455th Chemical Battalion took away from this training. One of these lessons was the value of HAZMAT (ASI J5) training. This unique expertise gave the brigade and, by extension, the corps commander the ability to analyze an unusual industrial chemical threat. Another lesson learned was not to be afraid to take charge in a tactical CBRNE event. Chemical Soldiers may find themselves at the forefront of a mission, not only for their rare and valuable expertise, but also because of their value as a symbol (information operation). Dragon Soldiers must be capable of and willing to create and lead a special task force.

In summary, take advantage of opportunities to participate in a BCST. They can serve as a terrific opportunity to practice the complex skills required in a counterinsurgency fight. And since BCSTs have external support, they present a unique opportunity for Chemical units to work with civil affair, engineer, military police, and (simulated) host nation forces. The BCST is an excellent training event!

References:

FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency,* 15 December 2006.

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