

# Military Review

The Professional Journal of the United States Army

OCTOBER 1994

**Our  
Changing  
World**

*See pages 14*





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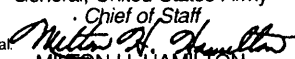
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Professional Bulletin 100-94, **MILITARY REVIEW**, appears monthly. This publication presents professional information, but the views expressed herein are those of the authors, not the Department of Defense or its elements. The content does not necessarily reflect the official US Army position and does not change or supersede any information in other official US Army publications. Authors are responsible for the accuracy and source documentation of material they provide. **MILITARY REVIEW** receives editorial comments from all active and former field grade officers of the Active Army, and one per headquarters (battalion and higher) of the Army National Guard and US Army Reserve. **MILITARY REVIEW** is available on microfilm from University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, MI 48106, and is indexed by the Public Affairs Information Service Bulletin.

**MILITARY REVIEW** (US ISSN 0026-4148) (USPS 123-830) is published monthly for \$24 US/APO/FPO and \$32 foreign addresses per year by the US Army CGSC, Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-6910. Second-class postage paid at Leavenworth, KS, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Military Review, CGSC, Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-6910.

# Military Review

Headquarters, Department of the Army

Prepared by  
**US ARMY COMMAND AND GENERAL STAFF COLLEGE**  
VOLUME LXXIV — October 1994 — NO 10

Professional Bulletin 100-94-10

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## Mission—Essential Training and Weapons of Mass Destruction

Colonel John A. Mojecki, US Army, Retired

“We could all be dying right now because we were not prepared to do our mission [under nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) conditions].”<sup>1</sup> This chilling statement by a mortar platoon sergeant in a light infantry company should cause leaders at all levels to reflect on their own abilities, and those of their soldiers, to conduct successful operations and win on a battlefield where weapons of mass destruction are used.

Too often, because of real and perceived reasons that consume a leader’s training day, the mission—essential task list (METL) training fails to include NBC conditions. If it is included, NBC training is used in a “block-checking” manner, which can have a negative effect on training. Soldiers quickly learn that if NBC training is not a major concern of their leader, it cannot be very important.

Those who participated in the Gulf War were deeply concerned about the biological and chemical warfare threat posed by Iraq. The anxiety level was especially high during early entry deployments. Even though our basic NBC defense posture had greatly improved in the years preceding the Gulf War, we were still far from ready, especially in our tactics, techniques and procedures for mission performance under NBC conditions.

It was common knowledge that, in their prolonged war with Iran, Iraqi forces had used chemical weapons on Iranian troops with devastating effect. The situation of the Iranian troops fit the historical criterion for use of such weapons—they were not well equipped or prepared to defend or respond to such use. Chemical weapons use quickly regained lost ground for the Iraqis and ended the war, which had been stalemated for almost six years.<sup>2</sup>

Some now say that, since chemical or biological weapons were not used in the Gulf War, the NBC threat was not credible. What path would the Gulf War have taken and what would have been the outcome, though, if chemical weapons had been used against our initial deployments? A coalition victory still would have been likely but at what additional cost? Fortunately, there was a six-month timespan in which to build up our NBC defense stock levels and, more important, to train with this materiel.

Another tendency, particularly among democratic

nations, is to put more faith in treaties than history can justify. Such a situation now exists with the Chemical Warfare Convention (CWC).<sup>3</sup> There are a number of nations—Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Libya and Syria—that have not signed this treaty. Additionally, some signatories to previous chemical warfare treaties have not hesitated to employ such weapons when it was to their advantage, as was the case with Italy against Ethiopia in 1935.<sup>4</sup>

According to the CWC Treaty, we cannot respond in kind to chemical or biological weapons use against us. We must rely on NBC defensive measures as our primary deterrent against such use. This is a major change in US policy. Previously, any potential user of chemical weapons knew the United States would respond in kind, with superior delivery and NBC defensive systems, and quickly place the enemy at a disadvantage. This reduction in our arsenal of retaliatory capabilities could encourage chemical misadventures by states hostile to the United States or its interests. This possibility places a greater burden on our NBC defensive training and readiness.

We should be concerned more than ever about the NBC threat. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is clearly shown in the Defense Intelligence Agency numbers (fig. 1).<sup>5</sup> Any nation with the will and resources can convert its legitimate nuclear, medical, pharmaceutical or chemical (such as insecticide) facilities to the production and development of NBC weapons. For totalitarian governments, this is a politically easy conversion. The development, production and “weaponization” of chemical warfare agents is a relatively cheap and easy process with low technical risk. Advances in biotechnology are leading to a similar potential in biological warfare.

To improve our NBC defensive posture, more emphasis on METL training under NBC conditions is needed. Some training is occurring now, but we are not doing enough. What we are doing is not of the proper quality according to the results of the Combined Arms in a Nuclear/Chemical Environment (CANE) force-on-force field tests and lessons learned from the Gulf War.

The last CANE test examined the effects of a chemical environment on the mission tasks of the

light infantry company. A common major finding of all the CANE tests is that troops and leaders are not initially well prepared to operate in an NBC environment.<sup>6</sup> As the test progresses, soldier and unit effectiveness increases, indicating that extended training under NBC conditions is a key solution to many problems. Figure 2 clearly illustrates this fact.<sup>7</sup>

During the light forces test, three attacks were conducted over a 96-hour period in each of six company-size iterations (three baseline conventional iterations and three chemical iterations). The outcomes of the baseline attacks on the number of opposing forces (OPFOR) targets destroyed are relatively similar. However, there is an almost three-fold increase in effectiveness from the first attack through the third attack in the chemical environment.

Obviously, learning is taking place. This factor was statistically significant in the analysis and evaluation of the test data. Demographic data collected during the test also verifies a major problem.<sup>8</sup> Overall, all troops—combat, combat support and combat service support—spend very little training time in mission-oriented protection posture (MOPP); on average, about 80 percent had never spent more than 3 consecutive hours in MOPP4 (the highest MOPP level). Also, 40 percent had never fired their weapons in MOPP4 in their unit, even though this is a regulatory requirement.

Although our forces killed more OPFOR targets, the level of effectiveness did not match the baseline results (fig. 2). This is expected, as currently fielded individual NBC defense materiel will cause some degradation in overall task performance. Under NBC warfighting conditions, leaders should ask, "Do I want to wait until hostilities start and accept heavier casualties and possibly not win or should I spend more mission training time in MOPP now?" Although the answer is not easy to execute, it is obvious. Consider what the possible impact might have been on Gulf War operations had chemical weapons been employed during early entry and force buildup.

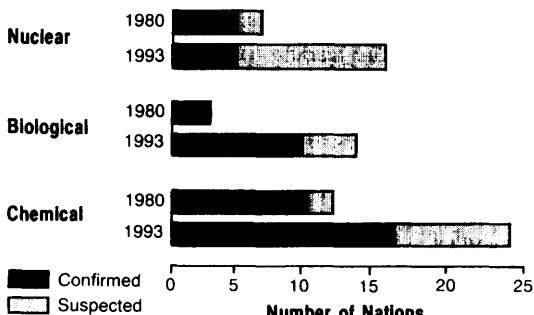


Figure 1. NBC Proliferation

Examining what happens over the three- to four-day period of a CANE test is very instructive. Soldiers and leaders learn how to operate in MOPP. It sounds simple, but the key point is that if soldiers only put on MOPP gear occasionally for several hours at a time, they really do not learn much more than that it is uncomfortable and restrictive. If the leader's goal is to do as little as possible in MOPP, that also becomes the soldier's focus. If soldiers are not properly trained, they will be hesitant to reduce MOPP after the first use of chemical weapons. Here are some of the outcomes of this approach to NBC training:

- Soldiers (and leaders) never become acclimated to MOPP.
- Proper fitting and maintenance of the protective mask (the key individual NBC defense item) does not occur and optical inserts, if required, are not obtained.
- Necessary work-arounds to perform mission-essential training tasks are not developed, incorporated into standing operating procedure (SOP) or practiced.
- Proper size tariffs and realistic usage factors for NBC materiel are not developed.
- Army leadership is not sufficiently pressured to improve NBC materiel (through command emphasis and budgeting).
- Ultimately, unnecessary casualties will be sustained and success jeopardized on an NBC battlefield.

What then should be a leader's approach to NBC training? The leader's goal must be to have his unit NBC trained and ready. Achievement of this goal requires that:

- Individual soldiers (all ranks) be able to survive.
- Unit leaders be able to supervise common collective NBC tasks.
- Squads, platoons, companies and battalions be able to perform the common collective NBC tasks in the Army Training and Evaluation Program (ARTEP) Mission Training Plan.
- Unit NBC equipment operators and teams be able to monitor, report and decontaminate.

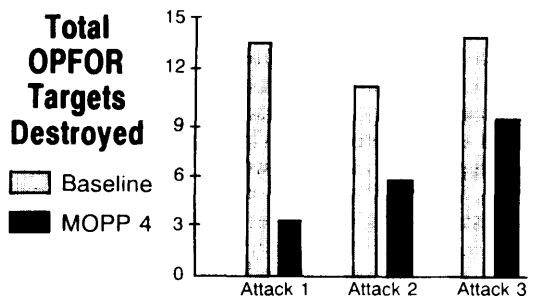


Figure 2. OPFOR Killed Per Attack, CANE Light Forces Test

- NBC defense equipment be available and is operational.

- The unit be able to perform its mission—essential tasks under NBC conditions.

Unit officers and noncommissioned officers, with assistance from the chemical battle staff, acting under specific command guidance, should focus on the first five tasks. The sixth task is the key to NBC readiness and requires the close attention of the commander and his staff. The commander should review his METL and identify which tasks must be performed (and therefore trained) in MOPP4. NBC thus becomes a condition, like night, under which battlefield tasks are performed.

A review of the METL should result in tasks being sorted into four categories for training program development:

- Tasks that can be done in MOPP4 with little or no change in performance (normally routine and practiced tasks). Most tasks will probably fall into this category.

- Tasks that, through training, cannot be done effectively in MOPP4 and can be delayed until the unit can reduce protection to MOPP2 or lower (such as skilled maintenance tasks where the mask or gloves inhibit correct performance).

- Tasks that cannot be delayed but which are severely degraded in MOPP4. These require the most training and developing and incorporating work-arounds into SOP.

- Tasks that cannot be delayed, are severely degraded in MOPP4 and cannot be effectively improved through training or work-arounds. Identify this situation as a battlefield deficiency and forward to the Battle Operating Systems (BOS) proponent for solution (such as organizational, doctrinal or materiel solution required).

Validated CANE test program data based on ARTEP task performance in an NBC environment by BOS are available at the US Army Chemical School through the Chemical/Biological Operational Support System.<sup>9</sup> Use of these data can aid in the review of METL. Also, using the chemical battle staff to provide after-action reviews of training and exercises will refine and focus the METL review.

Although imposing NBC conditions on your mission—essential training adds complexity and difficulty to mission performance, it supports battle-focused training. Our soldiers and leaders are trained to cope with stressful and potentially lethal situations. It is not necessary that NBC training be entirely in MOPP3 or 4. The key element in the learning process is one of extended operations in MOPP. The level of MOPP should be varied according to realistic scenarios.

A major learning goal for leaders should be MOPP decision risk analysis—the tactics, techniques and procedures for reducing to MOPP2 or lower. The chemical battle staff will assist in the analysis and provide recommendations on the appropriate MOPP level. This is a critical part of operating under NBC conditions, as even short periods of relief from MOPP3 and 4 can restore combat effectiveness to soldiers. The extended operational NBC scenarios of the CANE test program have shown that soldiers and leaders emerge with the realization that, with practice, they can survive and win.

The breakup of the Soviet Union has reduced our major threat and led to decreasing US force levels and defense budgets and to the restructuring of our force commitments. But the world is increasingly unstable. More and more, we are looking at power projection of largely Continental United States-based forces to regional contingency areas. The threat of NBC weapons use, although not on the scale presented by the former Soviet Union, is now more likely to be encountered by our forces.

It is unrealistic and potentially disastrous to think that unstable or megalomaniacal national leaders with an NBC capability have not also learned from the Gulf War experience. Selection of the weapons of mass destruction as a Louisiana Maneuver 1994 issue is a strong indicator of the concern of our Army leadership regarding this threat. Our forces must be NBC trained and ready when they hit the ground in any future deployment. Mission—essential training under NBC conditions will make it happen. *MR*

## NOTES

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