

The Chemical Corps Annual Writing Contest

2nd Place

Not many chemical soldiers, noncommissioned officers, or officers will get the opportunity to experience a Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) inspection first-hand. Hopefully, by sharing my experience during Johnston Island's CWC initial storage site inspection, you will have a better understanding of the inspection process. At the time of the inspection in August 1997, I was assigned as the Chemical Ammunition Company executive officer. Our company was responsible for the storage of Johnston Island's chemical weapons, and therefore played a significant role in the inspection.

CWC Inspection — *Up close and personal*

By CPT William J. Epolito

Overview of the CWC Treaty

The CWC Treaty entered into force on 29 April 1997. The treaty —

- Prohibits the development, production, acquisition, stockpiling, transfer, or use of chemical weapons.
- Prohibits the use of riot control agents as a method of warfare.
- Requires the destruction of all chemical weapons and production facilities within 10 years of entry into force.

To ensure compliance, each country must submit a declaration containing data on their chemical weapons sites and production facilities. They are also subject to the following inspections conducted by foreign inspectors from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the CWC governing body:

- Initial Inspection: first inspection of a declared site.
- Routine Inspection: periodic inspection after a site's initial inspection.
- Challenge Inspection: inspection to verify alleged treaty violations.

The treaty also authorizes investigations of alleged use of chemical weapons or riot control agents as a method of warfare.

As of 14 August 1998, 168 countries have signed the treaty, and 114 have ratified it. Countries do not have to abide by the treaty until they ratify it.

Overview of Johnston Island

Johnston Island is a remote island located approximately 800 miles southwest of Hawaii. It is approximately two miles long by three-quarters of a mile wide.

In 1990, before demilitarization began, Johnston Island stored 6.6 percent of the US chemical weapons stockpile. As of June 1998, over 75 percent of the original stockpile on Johnston Island had been destroyed by incineration.

The storage area is controlled by the US Army Chemical Activity, Pacific (USACAP).

The demilitarization facility, Johnston Atoll Chemical Agent Disposal System (JACADS), is controlled by the

Photos: **Top:** JACADS (Johnston Atoll Chemical Agent Disposal System) Demilitarization Facility; **Middle:** Sealing of a structure; **Bottom:** Inventory of an M23 VX Landmine Structure.

Photos courtesy of CPT William J. Epolito

program manager for chemical demilitarization and operated by Raytheon Demilitarization Corporation®.

Pre-CWC Inspection Preparation

We started our intense preparation for the CWC initial inspection in early April 1997 before the treaty went into effect. These preparations included:

- **Preparing our draft facility agreement.** This agreement set guidelines for the inspection on Johnston Island.
- **Preparing an operational plan (OPLAN).**
- **Preparing an inventory plan and several briefings.** The briefings included an information security briefing, a pre-inspection briefing, and a storage structure safety briefing.
- **Coordinating logistical support.**
- **Preparing a reference guide.** This guide was given to soldiers to help them follow the guidelines of the treaty and our plan.
- **Conducting inspection rehearsals.** We conducted two rehearsals before our initial inspection.

Initial Inspection

Johnston Island's initial storage site inspection was conducted from 13 through 18 August 1997. The inspection was only of the storage site because the demilitarization facility is considered a separate site and had already received an initial inspection.

Notification

We were notified on 9 August at 2300, 86 hours before the inspection was to begin. We used this time to conduct final preparations and logistical coordination.

One of the major differences between our inspection and that of other sites was that the inspectors were already on the island before we were notified. The OPCW used 6 of the 15 inspectors already conducting continuous monitoring of the demilitarization facility instead of bringing more to the island. On a day-



to-day basis these OPCW inspectors conduct 24-hour monitoring of the demilitarization process at JACADS to ensure it is in compliance with the CWC treaty.

General Inspection Operations

The six OPCW inspectors formed into three inspection teams of two inspectors each. Two teams conducted inventories while the third team reviewed documents and the draft facility agreement. Each inspection team also had two US On-Site Inspection Agency (OSIA) personnel with them to serve as liaisons between the inspectors and USACAP and to assist in answering the inspectors' questions.

To speed up the inventory process, we assigned two USACAP escort teams to each inspection team.

The first USACAP escort team was responsible for escorting and briefing the inspectors. Also, we put a USACAP stock control representative with the escort team to verify the inspectors' count with our chemical weapons inventory records. The two OSIA personnel with each inspection team also inventoried the structure to provide a third verifying count.

The second USACAP escort team was responsible for "opening and clearing" the next structure to be inventoried. This leapfrog effect cut the time it took to complete the 100-percent inventory in half.

"Opening and clearing" is a 15- to 30-minute process consisting of several strict safety and security actions that, once complete, allow personnel to enter a chemical weapons structure without having to put on their protective masks (everyone must still have their mask within arm's reach).

After each structure was inventoried, the inspectors sealed it with a special plastic seal. The seal ensured no one could re-enter the structure without the inspectors knowing about it. These seals were removed at the completion of the inspection. To remove a seal before the end of the inspection, the inspectors had to be contacted first to get approval.

Day One

The inspection started on 13 August at 1300 with the preinspection briefing. The briefing familiarized the inspectors with administrative, safety, security, and storage operations.

At the completion of the briefing we gave the inspectors several required documents in accordance with the treaty. After discussing several administrative issues, the inspectors reviewed and rejected our inventory. Our plan dictated what chemical weapons magazines would be inspected each day for a five-day period based on inventory times from annual inventories and CWC rehearsals. The inspectors did not want to follow

a time schedule; they just wanted to inspect as many magazines as they could each day. Once we agreed to their plan, the inspectors asked to inventory several structures that afternoon.

At 1517, we gave the inspectors a short tour of the storage site and then they inventoried 4 of the 57 structures.

After the inventories, the inspectors conducted facility agreement negotiations and coordinated the next day's inspection activities with OSIA and USACAP.

Days Two and Three

For the next two days (14-15 August), the inspectors inventoried the remaining structures. Each day they started at approximately 0830 and ended at 1700.

On 14 August, the inspectors inventoried 18 of the 57 structures and tagged three chemical weapons for future sampling. Sampling will occur when the tagged chemical weapon is shipped to JACADS for demilitarization. At that point the laboratory that supports JACADS will analyze the sample under the direct supervision of the inspectors to verify that the chemical weapon contained the agent we said it did.

On 15 August, they inventoried the remaining 35 structures and tagged four chemical weapons. The inspectors inventoried more structures this day because many of the structures were empty.

On average, each structure took between 10 to 30 minutes to inventory once inside the structure.

At the completion of each day, the inspectors, OSIA, and USACAP (including other Army representatives) conducted a meeting to discuss any inspection issues and to coordinate the next day's inspection activities.

Days Four and Five

On 16-17 August, the inspectors, OSIA, and USACAP reviewed the inventory results, discussed issues from the inspection, finalized the draft facility agreement, and prepared the preliminary findings report (this document contained the preliminary results of the inspection). On 17 August, with the approval of the instructors, we removed the seals placed on the storage structures.

Inspection Completion

On 18 August, the inspectors, OSIA, and USACAP reviewed and made changes to the preliminary findings report. The finalized preliminary findings report was signed at a ceremony at 1630, signifying the official end of the inspection. The inspection verified the storage site declaration submitted on 29 April 1997 with no discrepancies noted.

Lessons Learned

Here are the key lessons learned from Johnston Island's initial storage site inspection:

- There is no substitute for a well-thought-out and detailed plan. The USACAP Treaty Compliance Officer, Ms. Janice L. Treadaway, ensured we started extensive planning, coordination, and rehearsals in early April 1997, even before the US ratified the treaty. This paid high dividends when we were notified of our inspection because we were able to concentrate on final coordination and preparation, instead of rushing the planning process at the last minute and overlooking important details due to time limits.

- Effective communication eliminates many possible conflicts and issues. Many of the issues brought up during the inspection were a result of miscommunication or a breakdown in communication. One good example of this was the improper removal of an OPCW seal. Two demilitarization plant employees needed to get into one of their hazardous waste structures that the inspectors had sealed. They were supposed to notify the inspectors before removing the seal, but they did not because they were not informed of the proper procedures. This communication failure could have resulted in serious consequences, but thankfully it did not.

- Be flexible throughout the inspection. Inspections never seem to go according to your plan, mainly

because you cannot always accurately predict what the inspectors will do. The key is to make a plan and be flexible to change. A good example of this was when the inspectors rejected our rehearsed inventory plan and presented one of their own. By remaining flexible and making their plan work, we not only satisfied the inspectors, we also impressed them with our can-do attitude.

Conclusion

Hopefully, by sharing my experience during Johnston Island's CWC initial storage site inspection, you now have a better understanding of the inspection process.

At the time this article was written CPT Epolito was attending the Chemical Officer Advance Course at Fort McClellan, Alabama, with a follow-on assignment as the Chemical Decontamination Training Facility Operations Officer, Fort McClellan, Alabama. Previous assignments include Battalion Chemical Officer (ADA Patriot Battalion), Battalion S4 (ADA Patriot Battalion), Battery Executive Officer (ADA Patriot Headquarters Battery), and Brigade Chemical Officer (ADA Patriot Brigade), Fort Bliss, Texas; and Chemical Ammunition Company Executive Officer, Johnston Island. CPT Epolito has completed the Chemical Officer Basic Course, Radiological Safety Course, NBC Reconnaissance (L5-Fox) Course all at Fort McClellan, Alabama; and Airborne School, Fort Benning, Georgia. He was commissioned as a 2LT in the Chemical Corps from ROTC, Clarkson University with a BS degree in Chemical Engineering in May 1994.