

Team Spirit 89

—observations and discussions

by Mr. Roy Williams II
Director of Evaluation
and Standardization, USACMLS

For Team Spirit 89 I deployed as commander of the 490th Chemical Battalion with one "habitually associated" smoke generator company(-), the 310th from Gadsden, Alabama, equipped with M3A4s mounted on jeeps and trailers. On arrival in Korea, I had attached one active component smoke generator company(-), the 164th from Fort Lewis, Washington, equipped with M3A4s mounted on HMMWVs and a Republic of Korea (ROK) decon company, the 55th.

For a portion of the exercise we operated in conjunction with a dual-purpose smoke/decon company(-), the 71st from Hawaii. Each smoke company had the equivalent capability of one TO&E smoke platoon. Weather ranged from bright sunny days with highs close to 70 degrees to minus 20-degree nights with snow, sleet, and hail.

Each company and the battalion headquarters had Korean Augmentees to the US Army (KATUSAs) assigned for translation. One company commander spoke Korean, which made coordination much easier.

The ROK decon company continued to receive administrative /logistics support through national

channels, and I exercised operational control. The following represent specific issues/observations and associated discussions/solutions.

- *HMMWV-mounted smoke generators can support light infantry in a timely manner.* A significant portion of the exercise placed a smoke platoon in support of a task force. The screening of withdrawals, hasty river crossings, and emplacement of obstacles in conjunction with light forces worked well. The agility of the HMMWV in comparison to the jeep/trailer combination was significant.

- *Wheels, especially jeep- and trailer-mounted generators, cannot follow mechanized forces.* A regimental combat team (RCT) commander simply wanted his DS smoke unit to follow his mechanized forces and make smoke on order. He never understood why that didn't work. Using a Liaison Officer (LNO) system, we finally tapped into his TOC to the extent that we were able to use smoke for all deliberate river crossings, to conceal the withdrawal of a covering force, and to deny possible DZ/LZ (drop zone/landing zone).

Key lesson learned is that while the commanders want smoke, neither they nor their planner understand when and how to use it. In most cases, they wanted effects that only projected smoke could produce and demanded smoke generators provide it.

- *Positive control over smoke is necessary and very difficult to achieve.* Good communication is essential. We suffered more from radio failure than any other single problem. Some of it was due to salt air from shipping the equipment, some to the nature of the terrain in Korea. This RC battalion was simply incompatible with a Corps chemical section in terms of communication equipment and only somewhat better in talking to a division; for example, I had none of my authorized secure voice equipment. At best, I could work on only two nets at once. At one point, I needed to be on corps, division, three different brigades, and a company net. The result of bad commo was smoke causing negative effects in friendly areas. The task force (TF) didn't control all the terrain being concealed. Lesson learned—control smoke from the headquarters that owns all affected terrain.



Above, getting the mission done, a 2 1/2-ton truck is pressed into service as a smoke platform. Right, a soldier from the 310th Chemical Company keeps his generators running.

- *Commanders and planners do not yet know the basic principles of using smoke.* They continually wanted generated smoke between battle positions at noon on a bright sunny day. Terms such as curtain/haze/blanket were subsumed in their vocabulary by "screen." Tactful education was done, but we must have some training device that lets us replicate projected smoke or our commanders will continue to place generators in unsurvivable positions. Also, planners/commanders never thought in terms of deception screens. When suggested, it was almost always used.

- *Smoke attracts attention.* Cranking up a smoke generator usually got some aviators' attention. When smoke was used to create a hasty screen, obviously the operator could do little better than occupy a hasty fighting position. When the air/artillery response to smoke arrives, a deliberate mission at least permits



the preparation of a more survivable position.

- *Timely intelligence and a knowledgeable intelligence staff are critical to positioning smoke assets.* Chemical officers at all echelons must "pull" intelligence information when some should be "pushed." For example, what is the threat capability to gather data in a particular sector and where can smoke best interdict it? This sort of question should be routinely asked by G2/S2, but when addressed, was by chemical officers. LZ/DZ denial missions are great, but it

does no good to start a smoke mission when the threat is suppressing the LZ/DZ just prior to insertion.

Because of survivability and inability to smoke on the move, current generators are not able to provide on-call smoke to conceal movements between battle positions for mechanized/armored forces. If intelligence can anticipate the threat, we can position smoke assets to execute these missions. Again, projected smoke must play a large role and we cannot

continue to give commanders the impression that generated smoke can fill the bill.

- *Combined operations must share a common doctrinal base.* Our decon doctrine and ROK doctrine differ significantly. They continue to use our old procedures, for example, no hasty decon, use of a shower during deliberate decon, heavy emphasis on terrain decon. Problems did not occur since controller difficulties precluded any significant contamination and the only unit actually decontaminated was my HHD. By positioning a KATUSA at each station, the mission was completed satisfactorily. Without a linguist, it would have been very difficult for my soldiers to understand what they were to do at each station.

- *At corps/division levels, commanders understood the benefits of smoke and positioned assets to support the battle.* I believe this was due to some excellent work by the I Corps and 25th ID chemical officers who got their bosses thinking smoke. Initially, we were under corps

control with a smoke generator company in direct support of each of two divisions, with the decon company in general support. Due to extreme communications problems with corps, we were placed under the operational control (OPCON) of the 25th ID. Their organic smoke/decon company (-) was in direct support of a TF under the assistant division commander (ADC). I had one company (-) direct support to a separate infantry brigade (mechanized) and one company (-) direct support to a regimental combat team.

The SIB chose to fragment the assets to TF level and let the TF commanders employ them. The RCT kept the assets at brigade and used them for a river crossing, to conceal the withdrawal of the covering force and for LZ/DZ denial. The former used more smoke, but the latter probably made the best use of the asset. At both corps and division, the chemical officer provided taskings. At division, some missions were taken directly from the CG. The

chemical officers kept operational status charts on the battalion, and I did mission reporting directly to them.

- *Tactical SOPs were of little value.* My mission priority for planning and training is to another theater under a different headquarters. Only one subordinate unit was on my chain of command under any plan. By doctrine, I should have worked for a chemical brigade. In short, I could not read all the different SOPs I was supposed to interface with. Given the different attachments, cross-attachments, OPCONs, combined forces and so forth, we simply can't let the phrase "according to SOP" be an acceptable answer for critical events like warning of a chemical attack. Keep things simple and let the Soldier's Manual of Common Tasks and drills be "the way" whenever possible.

- *MOPP training was better at lower echelons.* MOPP was worn extensively in forward areas, little or not at all in the rear. I sat in on a division briefing and was pleased to hear the commanding general

The 310th Chemical Company smokes a river crossing.





Visitors from the Korean General Staff check out the M3A4 smoke generator mounted on the HMMWV.

discussing MOPP guidance tailored to specific battle positions. In the one case he talked about past ORANGE tendencies for using chemicals at specific times (during periods of inversion) against certain targets (prepared positions). He noted that the construction was almost done (work rate), and indicated they should go to a higher level of MOPP since the weather (temperature) and indicators of ORANGE use (threat) were such that casualties would be minimized.

• *We had controller problems.* Any combined exercise when units don't have a common language is difficult. The few controllers at unit level made the job even more difficult. A combination of problems resulted in no taskings for decon. However, each offensive and defensive operation was supported by a decon plan. A potential site for each phase was identified by a number so that a simple message giving site number and time would cause appropriate

actions to be taken by supported units. The system was based on ROK insistence that they only did terrain or deliberate decon. I believe the system would have worked fairly well; however, it was never tested.

• *Standardize either drums or bulk fog oil for smoke generator units.* In anticipation of the ORANGE hitting us with a "right hook," we positioned a smoke unit which used bulk fuel to support a defense under the assistant division commander. The other two smoke generator units used drums and were working the northern and southern sectors of the division. When the main attack hit in the center, both drum units burned all their oil while the bulk unit wasn't employed. The commanding general ordered a counterattack, but withheld those forces positioned to counter the hook.

The requirement to pull two companies (-) from engaged brigades, move them 20-30 kilometers to a link-up point, refuel from bulk to drums, and

redeploy 5-30 kilometers to conceal a counterattack was somewhat exacerbated by having an ORANGE tank platoon occupy the link-up point. After some very interesting radio conversations and quick trips over unimproved roads, a smoke curtain was placed between the bulk of the ORANGE and our counterattack.

The counterattack stalled when ORANGE forces physically blocked the movement by lying in the road and was never completed due to ENDEX. To further complex the problem, this all occurred as I was sending my HHD through a decon site. To coordinate this, I had an LNO at corps, I was spending most of my time at division taking guidance from the chemical officer and G3, and we had LNOs at two brigades and with the ADC. To orchestrate this on the ground, I made my executive officer commander-in-chief (CINC) of decon and my S3 CINC of smoke. They handworked each mission and only their physical presence ensured both missions were executed simultaneously. ☛

Roy D. Williams II is in the Army Reserve and commands the 490th Chemical Battalion. As an education specialist with the US Army Chemical School, he is director of evaluation and standardization. Mr. Williams has a Bachelor of Science degree in biology from North Georgia College, Georgia, and a Master of Science degree in guidance and counseling from Jacksonville State University, Alabama. After entering military service as a 2D lieutenant in 1965, he served in a variety of positions stateside and overseas in Europe and Vietnam. He served in Vietnam both as an infantry officer and again as a chemical officer. He entered civil service with the US Army Chemical School in 1980. Mr. Williams is a graduate of the Command and General Staff College, the Armed Forces Staff College, and the Air War College. He is the recipient of many military and civilian awards.