

Supporting the Reserve Components

—work in a readiness group

by MAJ Thomas W. Klewin

Reserve Component (RC) forces currently make up approximately 70 percent of the chemical force structure within the US Army. These organizations range from small reconnaissance detachments (LA/LB) to chemical battalions and chemical brigades.

Many of these units have no active component (AC) counterpart, making them unique within the RCs. As currently shown by Operation Desert Shield/Storm, these units will provide critical chemical support needed on future battlefields. The Chemical Corps has a responsibility to prepare them to meet the current and future challenges.

"Do less, better" has become the focus for RC units in recent years. It is a recognized fact that RC units have less training time than their AC counterparts. They must make maximum use of the training time and available assets to become proficient in their critical, mission-essential, warfighting skills. To do this, RC units need advice, assistance, and direction from AC advisors and units.

Almost all RC units are affiliated with an AC capstone higher headquarters. This headquarters provides them with guidance that should be used in the development of a unit mission-essential task list. The guidance

should tell the unit to focus on the "need-to-do" items and ignore the "nice-to-do" items because of resource constraints. While this guidance tells them what to train, the "how-to-train" problems can still derail the efforts put forth by RC units.

The RC units need someone to advise them on "how-to-train" the essential tasks. This is where the Readiness Group (RG) chemical officers and noncommissioned officers play a large part. While different RGs may stress and do different things, their basic mission is to prepare RC units for war and assist in their mobilization. This requires the RG personnel to be intricately involved in the operations of chemical units and non-chemical units within their area of operations. They must be involved in the training planning cycle to ensure

the needed tasks are trained and adequate resources are dedicated to the training effort. They must also be involved in the training execution to offer "on-the-spot" feedback.

Some RC units require a lot of assistance; others, less so. Regardless, RG chemical personnel are recognized by RC units and personnel as the experts in the field. They have to be fully aware of the most current doctrine in not only the chemical field, but in other areas as well. This is because they provide assistance to non-chemical units as well, from company level to division headquarters. Due to this requirement, the RG personnel have to be innovative and flexible to make maximum use of the training time available and minimize the impact of training distracters.

The RG personnel must be

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prepared to do many things to support the RCs. Many advisors write training exercises for the units they support and integrate them into CPXs, FTXs, STXs, and ARTEPS. The exercises they write must incorporate multi-echelon training for company, battalion, and brigade organizations.

The advisors are also responsible for the quality control of US Army Reserve Forces (USARF) schools. They must evaluate the classes and instructors and be prepared to step in, where necessary, with no lead time to prepare. Many times, the USARF schools do not have qualified personnel on hand to instruct certain low-density MOSs, so the RG personnel either train the trainers or teach the classes themselves.

Another responsibility for the RGs is to support, train, and monitor the Maneuver Exercise Commands (MEC) and subordinate Training Exercise Detachments (TED), or its local equivalent. The MEC is responsible for conducting exercises for division and brigade headquarters in the form of CPXs. The TED is responsible for conducting exercises for battalion- and company-level units, such as CPXs and ARTEPS. If the MEC or TED doesn't have someone qualified to conduct parts of the exercises, the RG personnel augment them.

While at one time, RG assignments may have been retirement assignments for personnel, the facts of life have changed and the RG is a fast-paced, intense environment. RG

members spend a large portion of their time on the road (TDY) assisting units, both on weekdays and weekends. Their summers are spent at training areas assisting and evaluating RC units. Because of all these requirements, only "qualified" chemical personnel should be assigned to RGs.

A qualified chemical officer is one who has command experience and served at battalion and brigade level. A qualified chemical NCO is one who has experience as a platoon sergeant and served as a battalion and brigade chemical NCO. Both should be innovative and independent, as they often work alone, one-on-one with units.

As long as heavy reliance is placed on RC chemical units, we must ensure an honest effort goes into helping them, not just "lip service". To do this, the Chemical Corps should undertake measures to strengthen the knowledge of AC personnel in regard to RC matters. Some suggestions are:

- Educate AC officers during their officer advanced course in Reserve Component operations and AC support given to them. This may require greater RC presence in the Chemical School, but the payoff would be worth it.

- Seek more input from RC units when developing training products. Training manuals (ARTEP MTP, drill books, and so forth) should be written to reflect RC training constraints and use language associated with the RC. Training exercises such as CPXs and STAFFEXs should be developed,

packaged, and distributed to allow RC chemical battalions and brigades to train wartime mission skills at home stations.

- Expand the JUMPSTART program as much as possible. Assigning company grade officers straight out of command or field grade officers straight out of operations jobs will allow them to bring a wealth of knowledge needed by RC units at company and battalion level. (JUMPSTART is a FORSCOM program that sends an officer to a unit for two years followed by two years in a readiness group.)

- Assign only senior captains or majors and senior NCOs to the RG billets to use their greater experience levels. (This is for non-JUMPSTART personnel.)

If the Army continues to downsize after Desert Storm, the percentage of the chemical force structure located in the Reserve Components may grow. We must ensure this majority part of the the Chemical Corps is not forgotten and that qualified personnel are available to assist them in preparing for future missions.

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