



83d Chemical Battalion Activates

By Major Darryl J. Briggs

On 15 September 2000, the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), Fort Polk, Louisiana, and Warrior Brigade welcomed one of the most unique tables of organization and equipment (TOE) chemical battalions in the Chemical Corps—the 83d Chemical Battalion. Considering that there are only three TOE chemical battalion headquarters in the active Army makes it more interesting to note that this battalion headquarters now serves as the direct higher headquarters for TWO “one-of-a-kind” active duty chemical units—the 7th Chemical Biological Integration Detection System (BIDS) Company and the 51st Chemical (Recon) Company.

Unit History

The 83d Chemical Battalion originally was organized as the 83d Chemical Mortar Battalion and activated at Camp Gordon, Georgia, on 10 June 1942. The battalion served 508 days of combat in the Mediterranean theater and mainland Europe during World War II. It successfully performed five amphibious operations and one airborne operation and fought in eight campaigns. The battalion’s mission was to provide close mortar support to ground-combat forces. The battalion distinguished itself by supporting units such as Darby’s Rangers, the 82d Airborne Division, the 101st Airborne Division, the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion, and the 2d and 41st British Commandos. The 83d Chemical Mortar Battalion was inactivated on 26 November 1945.

Because of the lessons learned about chemical force structure during *Operation Desert Storm*, the United States Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) reactivated the 83d Chemical Battalion on 1 October 1993 and attached the battalion to the XVIII Airborne Corps at Fort Bragg,

North Carolina. Since that time, the 83d Chemical Battalion has supported the XVIII Airborne Corps and FORSCOM units in a variety of contingency deployments and exercises.

Why the Move

By 1998, Headquarters, JRTC, and Fort Polk became the home of the 7th Chemical (Biological Detection) and 51st Chemical (NBC Reconnaissance) Companies. To provide a chemical battalion headquarters to command and control these unique assets, FORSCOM directed that the 83d Chemical Battalion move to Fort Polk. Effective



SPC Jason Alexander, the 83d Chemical Battalion Soldier of the Year, explains the M21 RSCAAL with CSM James VanPatten, Chemical Corps Regimental CSM (left); COL(P) Patricia Nilo, Commandant and Chief of Chemical; and COL Jesse E. Daniels, XVIII Airborne Corps Chemical officer (both right), at the activation ceremonies.

16 September 2000, the 7th and 51st Chemical Companies were attached to the 83d Chemical Battalion. The 83d Chemical Battalion is attached to the Warrior Brigade and retains a war-traced and training alignment with the 59th and 101st Chemical Companies and the XVIII Airborne Corps.

The 7th Chemical Company (BIDS) is the only active-duty biological-detection company. It has 35 BIDSs to conduct biological surveillance. The 51st Chemical Company (Recon) is the only active-duty chemical recon company. This company has 22 Foxes to conduct NBC reconnaissance. Almost one-fourth of the Army Foxes are located in this company. The 59th and 101st Chemical Companies are dual-purpose companies, which provide both smoke and decon support.

Conclusion

During the activation ceremony, the Battalion Commander, LTC Raymond VanPelt, stated, "As we stand here today, soldiers of the 7th, 51st, and 59th Chemical Companies are supporting the 10th Mountain Division during their Advanced Warfighting Experiment JRTC rotation at



LTC VanPelt delivers welcoming remarks.



83d Chemical Battalion Headquarters, Fort Polk, Louisiana

Fort Polk. The Dragon Soldiers on the field today have proven themselves time and time again under some of our toughest training conditions, and they stand ready to answer our nation's call to duty." The Brigade Commander, COL Lynch, added during his comments, "Because of their unique organization and mission, they are on the cutting edge of the Army's evolving doctrine. Their assignment to the JRTC and Fort Polk allows us to task-organize within the battalion and build teams that can service the complete array of NBC threats."

This battalion is ready to confront any mission! It is the cutting edge of the Chemical Corps with its technology and combat-ready soldiers. The battalion has not slowed down because of this move. The 83d Chemical Battalion's training events for the upcoming year include the 10th Mountain Division and XVIII Airborne Corps warfighter exercises, JRTC and National Training Center support to FORSCOM units, and participation in joint and coalition exercises in Southwest Asia.

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