

Preparing Coalition Forces for the Chemical Threat

By MAJ Robert W. Buchanan

Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm generated many training and combat experiences among the coalition forces. Many of the forces from the Middle East were poorly equipped to deal with the threat, and had little or no combat experience. They did possess the warrior spirit and determination to successfully accomplish the undesirable tasks that were so recently required. I would like to describe one small but important aspect of Desert Storm as seen through the eyes of one of the participants.

Historical Background

Today, an important arm of the Saudi Arabian land forces is the Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG). SANG is unlike our National Guard. Its mission dictates a full-time military organization capable of conducting operations throughout the Kingdom on short notice. The roots of SANG originate with King Abdul Aziz Al Saud's Ikwan Army.

This army consisted of 13 Bedouin tribes and was the force behind King Abdul Aziz in the early 1900s in his successful attempt to reclaim the crown of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This loyalty to the royal family remains today and results in over 99 percent of the SANG force being of Bedouin descent.

Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud commands SANG. The mission of SANG is to protect the borders, the vital installations such as the oil fields and industrial and com-

munications installations, maintain internal security, and assist the regular army as ordered.

SANG is in the midst of a long-term modernization program that was initiated in 1973 following an agreement between Crown Prince Abdullah and the American Ambassador. The result of this is a unique US government organization, headquartered in Riyadh, subordinate to AMC, and chartered to execute that agreement. The Office of the Program Manager, Saudi Arabian National Guard (OPM-SANG) is composed of 53 US Army personnel and 33 civilians. That, of course, was as of the beginning of the crisis. As the rest of the army is downsizing, OPM is going to grow in both size and responsibility, and will include several chemical officer and NCO positions (04, 03, and E7). This program costs the US taxpayer nothing. SANG reimburses the US government for all expenses incurred by those assigned to OPM.

Immediate Response to the Crisis

You have to have been in a cave not to be aware of what has transpired since August 1990, but I am going to refresh your memory. In the predawn hours of 2 August, Iraq swallowed the oil-rich emirate of Kuwait and massed combat units on the Saudi-Kuwaiti border. Facing the stark possibility of being invaded itself, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reacted. An order was issued on 5 August to deploy the King Abdul Aziz Mechanized Brigade (KAAMB) to the Kuwaiti border in

northeastern Saudi Arabia. The brigade deployed and occupied hasty defensive positions along the 60-kilometer border.

One of the major realizations was that SANG was totally unprepared to face a military force with a viable, demonstrated, offensive chemical capability. By 7 August the Chemical School had received from TRADOC the tasking to provide one Major, 74A, from the Directorate of Training, to support OPM-SANG. This tasking was one of the first group of ten requested by the program manager, Brigadier General J.E. Taylor, to immediately fill significant shortfalls within the OPM structure. Although given 48 hours to be prepared, departure was delayed until 17 August. The first challenge was to determine what the mission entailed. Unfortunately no one in CONUS had any idea what awaited me in Saudi Arabia.

Assessment of Chemical Posture

Upon arrival in country, my first mission was to determine the chemical defense posture of SANG and OPM-SANG. This was the easiest challenge faced during the entire TDY. There was no chemical program in either organization, but there was a limited quantity of British S-10 masks utilized for riot control during Haj (the period of religious pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina). OPM submitted a foreign military sales (FMS) case (request) for \$12.1 million worth of individual chemical defense equipment (CDE) the second week of August. Upon



Top, Saudi soldiers being taught MOPP gear exchange at Al Khafji by American chemical advisors—the author, standing left and SFC Robert Dhillon, standing third from left. Bottom, Saudi soldier checks his mask for leaks. SFC Dhillon and interpreter observe. (Photos courtesy SFC Robert Dhillon.)

arrival I reviewed this FMS case to ensure that all items had been included for 30,000 complete sets of CDE. Simultaneously, the National Guard Military School with Vinnell assistance, had formed a Chemical MTT which was being trained on the M17 protective mask.

The training of the MTT provided my exposure to one of my four personnel assets. Before the crisis OPM-SANG was strictly a contract manager with training and work being completed by the Vinnell corporation. Vinnell hired a chemical specialist in 1989 to satisfy a known need in the area of chemical defense, a need which SANG was not prepared to deal with prior to 2 August 1990. COL(R) Johnny Humphrey had "Saudiized" a number of the 3-series field manuals. He developed and conducted the

training for the Chemical Mobile Training Team and proved to be an irreplaceable ally to me. I could write this article just on what he accomplished during my TDY.

Culture Clash

With the completion of this first iteration of training, I traveled with the MTT to check the quality of training presented. This brought the greatest challenge faced by any advisor in a foreign country, that of learning and accepting the cultural differences between two nationalities, and in this case two cultures with nothing in common. The first experience I had was the first morning in the desert during my second week. I walked into the KAAMB commander's tent to use the telephone, as the tea boy entered through the other door. The com-

mander, COL Turki Ibn Al Firm, asked if I had ever tried camel's milk. With my negative reply, he offered me the glass the tea boy was carrying. Unfortunately, it was not a fruit glass, but a water glass, filled to the brim. It was so warm that I'm certain the camel was going out the back gate of the perimeter as I was entering the front. A little richer than whole milk, it tasted pretty good, although I must admit I always refused to drink warm cow's milk as a child. The clincher was when COL Turki gave me "best wishes that I not get a case of Rocky Mountain quick-step, as most people are afflicted with that the first time they drink camel's milk." Consider our situation: We slept in or on our vehicles, we had no facilities or tents, and MREs had not even been issued yet. I spent a rather restless day riding around the desert waiting for the curse to catch up with me. Once again I escaped a practical joker, suffering no ill effects from my first encounter with the local, colorful population.

OPM Chemical Training

Upon my return to Riyadh I conducted basic skills training in chemical defense for all OPM-SANG civilian employees, dependents of the military and civilians, and refresher training for assigned military personnel. Over 250 personnel were trained. This four-hour block of instruction included: the threat, available equipment, fitting of masks and overgarments, and the proper wear of the chemical ensemble. The primary purpose of the training was to provide some relief to the psychological stress being experienced due to the situation, while demonstrating the protective qualities of the equipment. This may be the first time that children were trained on and fitted with chemical defense equipment. Surprisingly, the overgarment proved to fit a large number of the children (with the XXXSmall suit). The extra small mask fit more of the children than I imagined.

More Help

I soon realized that I was incapable of being in all of the places I was needed and a 54B E-7 was requested in the second augmentee package. SFC Robert Dhillon arrived on 2 October with the other members of this package. SFC Dhillon proved just how good our NCOs can be. Within two weeks of his arrival SFC Dhillon was sent to Dammam to conduct training for the SANG personnel located in the Eastern Province and the Prince Mohammed Abdul Rahman Light Infantry Brigade. This augmentee package resolved a significant question for OPM-SANG – how will NCOs be accepted by the SANG commanders and officers? SFC Dhillon quickly demonstrated his ability not only as an instructor, but also his flexibility. He accomplished more in the next two months than was believed possible. The major challenge he faced was in the educational level of the SANG soldier. Prior to his departure to Dammam, he developed a series of lesson plans with handouts. The lesson plans required major changes and the handouts proved useless. He quickly discovered that the soldier had no concept of chemical agents. The training went from the chemical specifics – this is a temperature gradient, to the environmental generic – the desert is our friend in a chemical environment and why. The other challenge was that many of the soldiers were unable to read. To correct this, training was changed to short lectures with lots of hands-on training. Make no misconceptions, the SANG soldiers are smart. They just had never been exposed to the concept.

Desert Storm

After a short break for the holidays, SFC Dhillon and I deployed to the KAAMB area of operations west and south of Al Khafji. The brigade mission at the time was to provide the screening force for the Eastern area command along the Southern Kuwaiti



SFC Dhillon, aided by interpreter, talks with Saudi and Qatar soldiers on equipment decon. (Photo courtesy SFC Robert Dhillon.)

border and the Eastern brigade of the sector. We determined our mission at this time to be refresher training of basic skills and the development and conduct of collective training – prepare the force within artillery range to deal with the known threat. We were also faced with training the attached Qatari armor battalion how to utilize the French equipment they were issued. This phase required the identification of locally purchased decontamination equipment and the procedures to properly utilize that equipment when necessary. MOPP gear exchange, reconnaissance of contaminated areas, and a functional warning and reporting system were also key to the brigade's operations.

This brought to light one of an advisor's major functions of taking the policies developed for a national command authority and turning them into viable procedures at the squad level. I am not sure which should really come first, but that was the situation I had developed. I started the program at the national headquarters and then during Desert Storm had to develop collective defense procedures. These started at the squad level and had to reflect those HQ policies. It certainly validated the policies and pointed out the inconsistencies.

You can never tell the quality of your efforts until they are really

needed. The effectiveness of our training was demonstrated in three examples. First, after conducting a day of training with the screening force on 17 January, the first artillery attack occurred. SFC Dhillon decided the proper thing to do was suit up. This immediately got the attention of everyone. If the chemowie (chemical) instructor was donning his gear then everyone should be! Alarms sounded and a battalion was soon in MOPP4. Secondly, another of the SANG battalions had four personnel get sick at the same time. They sounded the alarm, the unit quickly masked and remained in MOPP4 until it was determined that no agents caused the illness. That one even got the battalion advisor's attention! Finally, SANG soldiers were seen demonstrating the proper procedures for using their protective equipment to Ministry of Defense and Aviation (MODA) (regular army) counterparts. SANG had their equipment for only three to four months and MODA has had the M17 mask for years.

Back in Riyadh another 54B E-7 arrived with augmentee package 5. SFC Brown remained in Riyadh as the chemical advisor to the Imam Mohammed bin Saud Brigade. The brigade mission was to provide security to key facilities in the Riyadh area, with a contingency mission to

deploy to the Yemen border. The chemical MTT had conducted a train the trainer program in the brigade. After conducting refresher training with the brigade's personnel, SFC Brown provided training to 15 of the brigade's officers. This training followed the NBC officer/NCO course program of instruction. He was assisted in this class by SFC Searles from Fort Hood, augmentee package 6. The total success of the class again reflected the quality of our noncommissioned officers in theatre.

Change of Focus to Sustainment

Fortunately, none of our training was necessary to the completion of the coalition mission. Sometimes I feel this was the easy part of my TDY. Training continued even after Desert Storm. Our focus was again changed and we developed procedures and conducted training on the maintenance and storage of the equipment. We had to formalize all the training we had conducted and get it institutionalized. Annotated task lists were developed for basic chemical defense skills and approved by the National Guard Military School, and annexes to programs of instruction were developed for all courses taught within SANG. With training support packages completed, the training of instructors was scheduled to begin in August with the first iterations of training being conducted in the equivalent of Basic Training. These classes will be included in BNCOC/ANCOC/OAC for four to five years to ensure all personnel receive the training. The chemical officer/NCO course required similar procedures and will be a six-week course.

The Program (Future)

The most difficult area remained the official SANG approval of a comprehensive chemical defense program. My final significant action was to brief His Royal Highness Major

General Mit'eb bin Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, Deputy Chief, Military Organization, Saudi Arabian National Guard, on my proposed chemical defense program.

To spare you another article I will summarize my proposal. The program includes the four fundamental areas: operations; equipment; training; and force structure. In operations: appoint a senior officer as the SANG chemical officer. SANGTEPs must include chemical defense tasks, unit chemical defense SOP, and unit drills. Standard items of equipment need to be selected for individual, the unit, and the chemical defense company, to include training equipment—equip the entire force. Unit training must be conducted to maintain those skills learned during Desert Storm and procedures developed to train the remainder of SANG on those skills; approve a chemical school under the National Guard Military School; train basic skills in all courses; prepare to conduct chemical specialist training; utilize the US Army Chemical School courses. In the force structure two major actions were accomplished last fall: career management field 54 was approved and included in SANG Regulation 611-201, and a chemical company TO&E was developed (not approved to date) with the decontamination and reconnaissance capability. Still remaining is approval of 105 officers and 766 enlisted chemical specialists for doing what chemical weenies do.

Wrapping It Up

I have understated the happenings of the time spent with the King Abdul Aziz Brigade from January through March and did not address the tactical situation nor the battle of Al Khafji. I ask myself some basic questions when I complete a trip; sometimes people even listen to the answers.

What was accomplished? In six months we took a major military force

with no knowledge of a key element of the integrated battlefield and prepared them to survive and operate on that battlefield. Over 60,000 soldiers were trained during this period. A lot of money was spent. The ground work for the continued development of a viable chemical defense program was laid down. We demonstrated the professionalism, abilities, and quality of one of the Armies' smallest corps.

What does the future hold for OPM-SANG? OPM has requested a significant increase in the TDA. This will include one major, 74/54; three captains, 74; and four E-7, 54B. There will be a major change in the way OPM does business. They will no longer be strictly contract managers, but will become trainers and advisors in the fullest sense.

What did I learn? The same thing I always learn when I go TDY. There is still a lot to learn! After a couple of nightly artillery attacks you develop a different sense of close. The Missouri and Wisconsin make a great evening fireworks display, the Daisy cutter makes a big bang, and you cannot sleep when an MLRS unit fires over your head. I was very fortunate to get stuck with this trip. You seldom get to go into a unit where there is no program in existence. There are great people wherever you go.

At the time this article was written, MAJ Robert W. Buchanan was assigned to the US Army Chemical School. He deployed to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia where he served as the chemical advisor to the Saudi Arabian National Guard, and is being reassigned to the 1st Infantry Division (Mech). His previous assignments include commander of the 11th Chemical Company, HQ 21st TAACOM, HQ 3d Armored Division, and brigade chemical officer Division Support Command 4th Infantry Division (Mech). MAJ Buchanan has a BS degree in biology.