Russian/American NBC Exchange Visits

By Major Shirley DeGroot

Peacekeeping duty in Bosnia-Herzegovina is not a branch-specific job for a chemical soldier. The Multinational Division North (MND)(N) headquarters does not have a chemical section, so chemical soldiers assigned to the headquarters are performing branch-immaterial jobs. On the other hand, assignment to a multinational headquarters affords opportunities for training with other nations. Such an opportunity presented itself to the chemical soldiers of Task Force Eagle during the spring of 2000.

Since 1996, when the Implementation Force determined there were no chemical hazards and only traces of industrial chemical pollution in the MND(N) area of responsibility, the U.S. contingent of the Stabilization Force has shrunk its chemical-force structure to zero assets. However, the 1st Peacekeeping Russian Separate Airborne Brigade (1PRSAB) maintained an NBC platoon at the brigade headquarters at Ugljevic. Upon the transfer of authority to the Stabilization Force 7 (comprising the 49th Armored Division and 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment [ACR]), the 1PRSAB extended the MND(N) headquarters an invitation to do an NBC-exchange visit. The MND(N) G3 training, along with the chemical personnel assigned in the Joint Military Commission, organized a visit of 25 members of the quick-reaction force from Mad Dog Troop, 3/3 ACR to Ugljevik for an NBC demonstration.

The demonstration started with an introduction to Russian detection equipment. Major Gennady Tarchov, the 1PRSAB chemical officer, displayed the current models of the radiacmeter and chemical-detection kit that is used by the 1PRSAB. These items were one or two generations older than comparable U.S. detectors and were not digitized or computerized, but as Major Tarchov demonstrated, both detectors functioned properly. In terms of technology, the radiac equipment brought back memories of the AN/PDR-27 that I trained on as a lieutenant at the basic course in the mid-80s, and the chemical-detection kit was a composite of old M8 detector technology contained in a portable kit. Although the equipment was old, it appeared well maintained.

Following familiarization with the detection gear, the quick-reaction force was instructed on the operation and employment of Russian-made smoke pots, smoke projectors, and smoke grenades. The AKS-74 automatic rifle, which arms the Russian chemical soldier, and the RPG-7 rocket-propelled grenade launcher were also demonstrated.

Major Tarchov demonstrates the chemical-detection kit to the 3/3 ACR quick-reaction force.

Next, the current protective-mask model used by the 1PRSAB was demonstrated. Each member of the quick-reaction force was issued a Russian protective mask for the training. The group walked through basic instructions on the maintenance and wearing of the mask. The mask has many of the same features as the M40-series mask; in fact, the drinking tube even works with the U.S. canteen-cap adapter. However, the construction of the mask is not comparable to the M40-series mask. It is obviously designed to be used as a training device or used only once in a contaminated environment and then replaced. Compared to the M40-series, the Russian mask is cheap, disposable, and mission-capable.

Next, the quick-reaction force received familiarization training on the precombat checks required to put the BTR-80 RhM-4 chemical-reconnaissance vehicle into action. The BTR-80 RhM-4 is an improvement of the BTR-70 Kh. The BTR-80 has an all-new power train, and new placement of doors and hatches make it easier for the crew to enter and exit. The vehicle is equipped with an NBC-filtration system; however, because the vehicle crew must exit the vehicle during a mission, the crew must be in full NBC gear while in the vehicle during a mission.

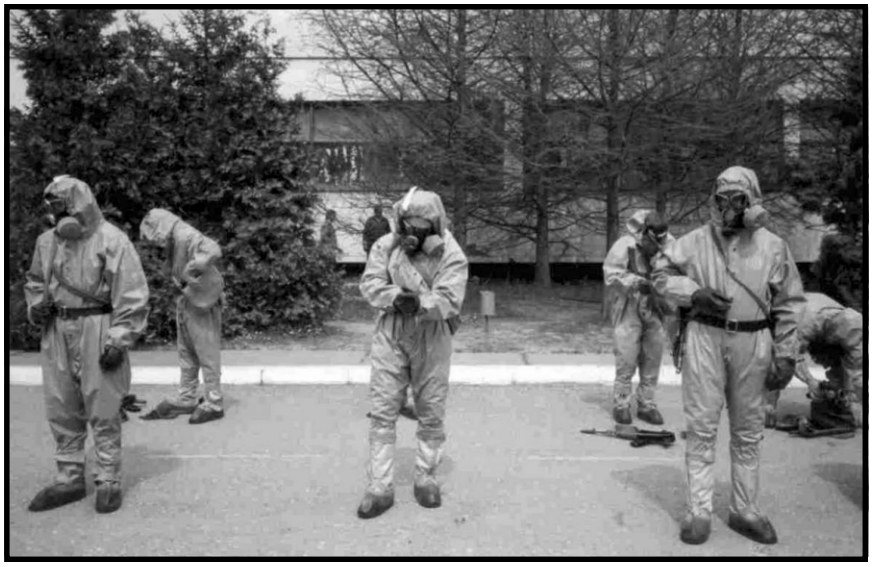
In addition to the usual vehicle maintenance and communication checks, the crew demonstrated how to load the detection-marker-flag carrier at the vehicle's rear and how to load the detection flare launchers and the smoke projectors on the vehicle. The vehicle crew then suited up in its protective posture. NBC specialists in the Russian army wear a two-piece rubber suit. The jacket has a hood, and the trousers are the step-in variety with overboots attached. The suit is easy to put on, and aside from being rubberized fabric, it is comparable to the U.S. suit.

At this time, the BTR-80 RhM-4 moved out to the training area, and while the crew was preparing to conduct its detection drills, the quick-reaction force observed two demonstrations by the 1PRSAB Artillery Battery. First, the gunners demonstrated the "mask-only" drill. The Russian standard is to don the protective mask in 7 seconds. Once they had donned their masks, the lieutenant in charge of the section inspected them. Of the 12 soldiers inspected, 10 passed. Two soldiers had installed their mask filters improperly, and the officer was able to pull the filters out of the masks. The ensuing display of discipline really drove home to me that this certainly was not U.S. Army training that I was observing. The gunners practiced the task over and over until all 12 soldiers got it right.

Loading signal flares into the BTR-80 RhM-4, part of precombat checks on the vehicle

Following the mask-only drill, the gunners performed their reaction drill to a full protective posture. The standard suit issued to Russian combat troops is a rubberized gas cape with rubberized overboots that secure to the bottom of the cape. The entire outfit seemed complicated to put on, with ties, buckles, and multiple closures to deal with. The soldiers finished their suiting-up drill within 10 minutes, and after inspection, they were given the all-clear signal. As with the NBC troops' suit, the cape is made of rubberized fabric, and the heat stress of fighting while wearing an impermeable garment had to be intense.

The quick-reaction force moved out to the local training area to observe the final demonstration with the BTR-80 RhM-4. Major Tarchov explained the procedure for the drill. First, the BTR would move down range until it detected an agent. Upon detection, the BTR crew would fire a signal flare, and one crewmember would exit the vehicle to sample the agent and determine its identity. Once the sample was collected, the BTR backed off from the contamination. The distance that the vehicle backed off depended on climatic conditions, but essentially the vehicle moved a safe distance out of the contamination and fired one of the marker flags, by remote control, into the ground. Then the vehicle continued to scout and performed the same drill, eventually cordoning off the contaminated area.



Gunners of Russian airborne artillery go through the gas-reaction drill.

This explanation sounded a bit dubious, in that I could not understand why a crewmember was required to leave the protection of the BTR. I resolved to wait and see what the demonstration showed. However, for the actual demonstration, "Murphy" proved to be alive and well. The BTR began the drill, fired the initial signal flare, took a sample, and backed up. Upon firing the first marker flag into the ground, the entire marker-flag carrier caught fire. This was obviously not a planned demonstration event, and the Russian NBC officers supervising the exercise reacted quickly to the fire. However, eventually all 25 marker flags burned, and the quick-reaction force suppressed their smiles to refrain from offending their hosts.

A flare goes up from the BTR-80 RhM-4 to signal contamination.

The final event of the demonstration was sort of a let-down after watching the marker flags burn. Major Tarchov demonstrated the different types of smoke pots and grenades. After this, the quick-reaction force retired to the main base for lunch.

Three weeks later, it was time to arrange a reciprocal visit. The MND(N) G3 Training Section hosted the 1PRSAB NBC platoon at Eagle Base. The Russians were given demonstrations on—

- Emplacing the M8A1 chemical-agent alarm.
- Exchanging mission-oriented protection posture (MOPP) gear.
- Wearing the M40-series protective mask.
- Performing self-decontamination.
- Using M8 and M9 detector paper.
- Using a chemical-agent monitor.
- Using the AN/VDR-2 radiacmeter.
- Identifying chemical agents using the M256 kit.

Upon completion of the training, members of the NBC platoon were guests of honor at a Texas barbeque, followed by some free time.

Overall, the NBC-exchange training was an unqualified success. It was part of an overall program in the MND(N) that strives to build trust and confidence in the abilities of our multinational force. I remember serving in Europe in the 1980s when the Soviet Union was the enemy, particularly to any Chemical Corps soldier. I would have never guessed that by the year 2000, I would be training alongside some of the same people I once guarded against at the German border. I saw more similarities than differences between U.S. and Russian chemical-detection methods, use of protective equipment, and response to NBC hazards. Certainly, our two doctrines contain differences, but it is most important to know that we can work out those differences with one another in Bosnia or elsewhere.

Russian NBC soldiers learn how to emplace the M8A1 chemical-agent alarm.

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Supporting material provided by CW4 Badder, 3d ACR PAO and SGT Decarou, TFE combat camera crew.

Correction

In our July issue, the article "Combined-Arms Training-Strategies Aid—short- and long-range training plans," stated, "Starting June 2000, with the fielding of the Standard Army Training System (SATS) 4.2, unit commanders and staffs will be able to download these CATSs from the Reimer Digital Library (General Dennis J. Reimer Training and Doctrine Digital Library Web site) in database format." February 2001 is now the projected date for fielding the SATS 4.2. **This delay was necessary to expand the utility of the CATS information as a module in the SATS and to user-field test the program before extended Armywide fielding.**