

Aircraft Decontamination

—USAREUR joint exercise

by SP4 Chuck Gordon
Public Affairs Office
HQ 2d Support Command (Corps)
APO New York 09160-0305

It carries hundreds of pounds of ordnance, flies at eye-blurring speed, and turns on a dime.

They call this wicked-looking little jet aircraft the A-10 Thunderbolt. Used in ground support missions and as a tank killer, the Thunderbolt packs a wallop designed to knock out

anything on the ground.

But on the battlefield of the future, there is an odds-on chance that the A-10 could be put out of action without even a scratch on its mottled green skin.

Chemical contaminants, radiation, or fallout—either individually or together—could take this feisty little plane out of commission.

“Manpower is the bottom line,” said Air Force SSG Frank Logan, decon team member. “If there is a

chemical attack, and the pilots and crew cannot service or maintain the plane due to contamination, then its effectiveness is cancelled. People are the true weapons and, as casualties, people cannot do their jobs, and the planes cannot fly.”

That's where the 11th Chemical Company, Special Troops Battalion, 2d Support Command (Corps) comes in.

In a joint exercise in the summer of 86, the 11th teamed up with Detachment 2 of the 81st Tactical Fighter Wing to help solve the contamination problem.

In conjunction with a Joint Air Attack Team exercise, the 11th traveled to Leipheim Air Base to take part in a field decontamination of the detachment's A-10s.

The 11th sent its 1st and 4th platoons, veterans of previous Army aviation decons, to the exercise.

“This is the first time we've done fixed wing aircraft, and we're all looking forward to learning and training. This will be a valuable source of new knowledge for both us and the Air Force,” said 1LT Ann L. McCarley, officer in charge of the 11th's decon team.

During the decon, the 2d Detachment flew missions with the 10th Attack Helicopter Squadron, 1st Ar-



Soldiers from the 11th Chemical Company scrub down an Air Force A-10 Thunderbolt.

mored Division. As part of the play, the aircraft landed in a "contaminated" condition, taxied to a disarmament point, and then to the decon line.

Before the actual exercise, the soldiers of the 11th were briefed on safety and care of the A-10s. Although the jets were carrying only training munitions, the items still packed enough power to severely injure anyone standing too close.

The first jet through the line was a static decon, pulled behind an aircraft tractor to familiarize the soldiers with the plane. Additional safety tips and advice were given, and the 11th practiced the decon.

Shortly after the static demonstration, the real stuff started to arrive.

"This is great. I can't wait to get on the plane. I think this is the first joint decon in USAREUR, and it's going to be fantastic," said SGT Thomas Avery of the 11th.

The first A-10 screamed onto the runway, as the decon soldiers scrambled to their stations. Clad in MOPP gear, the chemical warriors anxiously awaited the craft, to ply their trade.

As the jet taxied into the decon

area, the soldiers moved cautiously to work, beginning the decon procedure.

First a mixture of hot, soapy water was sprayed on the plane, followed by a quick scrub with aircraft brushes to remove the contaminants. The plane then taxied forward to the second station where it received a rinse and was checked with detecting paper. If contamination was found still clinging to the aircraft, the plane went through the line again.

In addition to the Thunderbolts, the 11th also took care of several AH-1 Cobras from the 10th Attack Helicopter Squadron, and several ground service vehicles for the Air Force.

"This has been good training for us. Our people have learned a lot here. Our experience has been limited in the decon field, and today's exercise has been excellent," said Air Force CPT Glenn A. Waddell, chief of maintenance and logistics for the detachment.

"Normally our aircraft go to the main base back in England for this type of thing, but now we know that if we need this kind of support, we've got it. The Army took real good care of our aircraft," he said.

SP4 Chuck Gordon, a journalist with the 2d Support Command (Corps) Public Affairs Office in West Germany, works on the staff of the Jobber newspaper. His previous assignment was with the 394th Aviation Battalion (Maintenance) of the 2d Support Command. SP4 Gordon joined the Army in 1985 and completed AIT at the Defense Information School, Fort Benjamin Harrison, IN.



Above, a jet aircraft gets a scrubdown. Below, members of the 11th Chemical Company spray an AH-1 Cobra during the Joint Air Attack Team exercise.

