

Chemical Lane-Training Exercises:

Essential Planning Considerations

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I have an awesome job! Like many active-duty senior chemical NCOs, I have been assigned to work with the Reserve Component (RC). Over the past year, I've had the privilege of wearing the 91st Division patch, serving as an observer controller/trainer (OC/T) with the 3-360th Training Support Battalion at Fort Douglas in Salt Lake City, Utah. This battalion is a unique multicomponent, active-reserve unit which has 20 active-duty personnel and about 120 RC officers and NCOs. Our mission is to provide mobilization and training assistance to selected National Guard and Army Reserve combat support and combat service support units in a four-state area. We spend most of our time planning, preparing, and executing lane-training exercises (LTXs) for our customer unit's annual training (AT) or weekend drills.

Over the past few months, our team of four reserve officers and NCOs, my active-duty chemical officer CPT Jeffrey Nelson, and I have conducted numerous LTXs with a brigade headquarters (to include its chemical platoon) and three subordinate battalion headquarters from the Idaho Army National Guard. We also have worked with an Army Reserve quartermaster unit from Montana and a mobile-public affairs detachment from Salt Lake City. Most of our lanes have been some version of "React to Chemical Attack," taken from various ARTEP manuals. We've executed this lane seven times, with and without decon, and have had a surprising amount of success because of a number of factors.

This article explains what we did, how we did it, and what we learned so that it might help those who have a similar mission. Perhaps there is a newly assigned brigade, battalion, or company NBC NCO or chemical officer who would like to conduct lane training but needs a few good ideas to get started. Hopefully, they can use these ideas and won't have to start from scratch like

CPT Nelson and I did. Although the bulk of our experience with lanes have been with RC units, the techniques and procedures outlined here can be used for any type of unit that wants to train on specific NBC-related ARTEP collective tasks or on any other task under NBC conditions. This is not "the way" but "a way" to help chemical leaders conduct lane-training exercises successfully.

General Planning Guidelines

Lane training, according to FM 25-101, *Battle Focused Training*, is simply a technique for training a company or smaller unit on a series of selected soldier, leader, and collective tasks that support the unit's mission-essential task list (METL) on a limited area of terrain. Reacting to a

chemical attack (to include planning and preparing for it) is an excellent example of this kind of multiechelon training because it involves performing many soldier and leader tasks simultaneously. These situational-training exercises are resource-intensive and require much OC/T support. OC/Ts can either be internal or external to your unit. Externally supported lane training is more difficult to coordinate, but it can be more effective.

Our success in execution definitely was because of thorough planning and diligent preparation. Planning for lane-training events must be done well in advance. The actual dates and location were locked in about 9 months prior.

We attended an initial planning conference (IPC) with the key leaders from our supported unit 6 months before. At the beginning of the IPC, we determined the specific ARTEP tasks to be included in the LTX. We also discussed training-area requirements, personnel and logistics issues, opposing forces, and timelines. Both the OC/T team and the unit were committed to following

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up and completing certain projects before the next planning conference. As a result of this initial meeting, we drafted a memorandum of agreement, which outlined all the details necessary for this training event to be successful, and got the needed signatures 2 months before the training began. Follow-up meetings, or NBC exercise-planning conferences (EPCs), were scheduled every 2 months after the IPC. Of course, occasional contact by e-mail and telephone between meetings was critical.

Once the initial plan was established, further planning and preparation continued. It was not that difficult to put together a scenario to tie in all the collective tasks that the unit wanted to train (more on this later). We also formulated workable timelines to leave space between events, to include an OC/T-led after-action review (AAR) and an opportunity for retraining if necessary. We built an OC/T coverage plan and began to train internally on all those tasks that we were going to evaluate.

About 4 months before the lane training, we gave a complete training-support package to the supported unit's company commander and first sergeant. This proved to be an invaluable product. It immediately won us their respect because it was professional and well organized and provided what the unit needed for success before and during the lane. The binder contained the following documents:

- The memorandum of agreement.
- The OC/T team's task organization.
- The concept of the operation.
- The proposed timelines.
- A crosswalk between METL and collective tasks.
- A matrix between collective and individual tasks.
- A safety/risk-management worksheet.
- A medical-evacuation plan.

We also included copies of each of the collective-task training and evaluation outlines (T&EOs) found in the appropriate ARTEP manual, along with their supporting individual tasks from the common-task-test (CTT) manual. The General Reimer Training Digital Library, located on the Internet, was the best source for finding up-to-date versions of all these tasks. It is important to note that for most of the NBC individual tasks, the latest versions **must** be obtained from the FY00 and FY01 CTT manuals and not from STP 21-1-SMCT, *Soldiers Manual of Common Tasks*, because most of the tasks, conditions, and standards have changed. If the tasks are printed off the Web site, they look much better than photocopies from an old, beat-up manual. In addition, we put all these documents on floppy disks for the unit trainers to use.

In keeping with our customer-service approach, we scheduled a few assistance visits in conjunction with the EPCs, where we would "train the trainer" on a few individual tasks. This may or may not be necessary,

depending on the chemical personnel strength and experience in the unit you are supporting. With the brigade chemical platoon, for example, the classes CPT Nelson and I gave and a mini-field-training exercise we did with them 2 months prior were critical to the successful execution of the smoke missions during AT. We found they were short on technical manuals, and with some help from the Chemical Doctrine Net and the Soldier, Biological, and Chemical Command (SBCCOM), we were able to locate some before the next drill. On two occasions, I also taught some classes at the public-affairs detachment since they are not authorized a 54B and did not have any 2-week NBC-school-trained soldiers.

Planning a Chemical Lane

Now let's look at chemical lanes specifically. As we began planning our first chemical lane-training event, our goal was to make it *doctrinal, realistic, and challenging*. Building a solid exercise scenario was the first step. The document used to describe the scenario is the operations order (OPORD). Sometimes the units put the OPORD together, and other times, we wrote one for them. If there is going to be any NBC play, ensure that some mention of the enemy's chemical capability is in the OPORD's Intelligence Annex. For example, "Possible chemical munition shipment has arrived at (location). Chemical use in support of the attack is likely. During the attack, persistent and nonpersistent nerve agents may be used. Persistent agents will be placed on the flank to seal it, while nonpersistent agents will be placed on the brigade maneuver units to stop repositioning."

There also needs to be something else in the OPORD. In paragraph 3 (Execution), subparagraph d (Coordinating Instructions), the MOPP level must be addressed. I recommend starting the unit at MOPP Zero, emphasizing that soldiers must either carry their MOPP gear with them or keep it at arm's length. Many confuse this with the "MOPP Ready" posture, which means MOPP gear can be left in your truck or somewhere else as long as you can get to it quickly (within a couple of hours if stored in a central location).

For every chemical lane, units must decide before beginning whether or not decon will be included. Performing decon operations is probably a separate collective task from react to chemical attack. You could go either way, depending on what the unit needs. The quartermaster unit from Montana wanted to train on decon operations, which worked well. However, during the Idaho National Guard units' AT last summer, we decided, for a number of reasons, that we would only go with a nonpersistent chemical-agent attack this time around and not worry about decon at all. In the harsh desert environment found in Orchard Training Area during the month of July, a nonpersistent chemical agent would probably dissipate quickly, eliminating the need for operational decon.

Secondly, performing an operational decon is somewhat of a logistical nightmare that most units cannot do without the support of a chemical company, which in our case was not available. In addition, because of a real concern for heat injuries to soldiers, we decided that we would only keep the units in MOPP4 for about 1 1/2 to 2 hours at a maximum. Since it was apparent that they had not conducted NBC-collective tasks recently, we wanted to follow the “keep it simple, Sir,” (KISS) principle. By executing the task from “Gas, Gas, Gas,” to “All Clear,” without decon, we met the unit commander’s intent of conducting NBC training to standard, while minimizing risks to the soldiers.

Another key ingredient in planning a chemical lane is a good timeline. We designed two separate standard timelines, one for a dawn attack and one for a dusk attack, depending on what was agreed to. Backwards planning was used to construct this tool to allow time to execute all necessary tasks in a logical sequence. The timelines must start the day before the scheduled attack to include a realistic buildup phase and time for the unit to conduct a Rock Drill, rehearsing in detail all soldier and leader actions when the chemical attack occurs. We planned to issue a chemical-downwind message every 6 hours. We also factored in the time it gets dark in the evening for dusk attacks and the scheduled time chow was to be served for dawn attacks. It was suggested, for convenience, to have the attack occur either mid morning or in the afternoon. We explained that for training to be effective, it must be realistic—that is, performed at the time when the enemy would most likely use chemical agents. One unit that understood the concept requested one chemical attack at dusk for a dry run and then had the actual “for-record” lane bright and early the next morning.

I also scheduled inputting several NBC intelligence spot reports leading up to the attack. When I worked at III Corps Chemical at Fort Hood, Texas, my corps chemical officer had much success using these kinds of reports during Battle Command Training Program Warfighter exercises. These reports add realism to the exercise by giving the unit some indication that the enemy may use chemical weapons in the near future. It also exercises the NBC channels of communication from higher headquarters to lower, between the intelligence (G2/S2) and operations (G3/S3), and forces the unit commanders to conduct a MOPP analysis. These spot reports are given in a preprinted standard size, activity, location, unit, time, and equipment (SALUTE) report format. All we had to do was plug in the date-time group and location. The reports we used covered a number of situations:

- Enemy personnel seen wearing masks and complete chemical protective clothing.
- The enemy prime minister delegating approval authority to release chemical weapons down to brigade- commander level.
- A wheeled-vehicle convoy carrying chemical rounds

headed in the vicinity of known artillery units.

- Dismounted patrol finding dead birds and animals in a wooded area next to a cache of damaged mortar rounds.
- A captured enemy soldier becoming extremely agitated when he thought his protective mask would be taken away.

Along with developing a thorough, standardized plan to train and evaluate our supported unit on these chemical tasks, we also looked at ways to standardize our own team’s actions during the lane. We developed an OC/T-coverage plan that specified which individual tasks each of us would be watching once things got started. The team would be spread out to observe as many soldiers as possible. All of us would check how long it took soldiers to mask and would inspect MOPP gear to ensure that it was worn properly. Selected OC/Ts would test soldiers on skin decon or administering nerve-agent antidote kits to self or a buddy, as needed, using chemical-casualty cards. I planned to stay around the company NBC NCO and evaluate tasks such as using the M256 chemical-detector kit (no shortcuts were allowed; they had to use real time), submit NBC-1 Reports, and conduct unmasking procedures. I also acted as the higher headquarters if theirs was not participating in the exercise. Once the unit sent the NBC-1 Report up, I sent down an NBC-3 Report (part of which told the unit that the agent would only be in the area for a short time). When unmasking procedures were completed properly, we gave permission, as their higher headquarters, to give the “All Clear.”

How did we plan to initiate the simulated chemical attack? We wanted to use artillery simulators (with or without smoke grenades), but we were never allowed to use them because of possible fire hazards. Most of the time we simulated chemical artillery rounds with an audible whistle at the dismount point and then told the gate guard that he was experiencing nerve-agent symptoms. A couple of times we set off the M8A1 chemical-agent alarm. The element of surprise was key. We always wondered if we would show up with all soldiers in MOPP4 just waiting for us, but that never happened. Because of the NBC intelligence, they were usually at MOPP2, which made it quicker to get to MOPP4.

Execution Phase Lessons Learned

A few key lessons were learned from the execution phase that are worth mentioning. I could have done a little more follow-up with our customers before AT. Although we had plenty of coordination with the brigade HHC, we only got to meet one of the two maneuver battalion’s HHC commanders ahead of time. With the engineer battalion’s headquarters company, we didn’t get to do a face-to-face with the commander until day one. I gave the training-support

packages to each of these units, through the active-duty captains who were assigned to work with them. However, they all did not ensure that the packages were sent down to the company NBC NCO. One company did not have an NBC NCO, another e-mailed the package to the HHC commander who didn't want to print it all, and another left the package with the battalion NBC NCO.

Another lesson we learned was to communicate the purpose of the AAR ahead of time and let the unit commanders know what we expected. One HHC commander thought an AAR was a back brief for us to tell him what he did wrong, rather than a discussion facilitated by the OC/T involving self-discovery and maximum participation from his soldiers. I also think we may have failed to provide a complete schedule of the AARs because the commander seemed surprised when we asked to conduct one after each lane. He would have rather had a final AAR with key leaders, but that would have violated the purpose of an AAR, according to Training Circular 25-20, *A Leader's Guide to After-Action Reviews*.

One other valuable lesson learned was striking a balance between good customer service and effectively taking charge of the lane as an OC/T. There is always room for flexibility with the unit concerning some details prior to execution. Times, places, and even the sequence of events can be modified, based on the unit's needs; it is its LTX. However, it must be made clear that the OC/T runs the lane, and flexibility ends when it violates safety, conditions in the ARTEP manual, or Army doctrine.

At the end of the lane, it is also very important to provide a well-run AAR and to get off-line afterwards with the unit leaders to give them some feedback from the T&EO checklists. If you are able to be a training asset

to the commander, end on a positive note and do not burn any bridges; you will be able to support the unit next time around. Our team got a major vote of confidence from our public-affairs unit after our LTX was completed. The commander told our team chief that he wanted us to go with him to do his training assessment model during its AT overseas next May.

Conclusion

Looking back over the chemical lanes that we planned, prepared, and executed, I'm totally convinced that lane training is a great idea that really works. I believe that the best way to conduct chemical lane-training exercises effectively is to put together a thorough plan that is doctrinal, realistic, and challenging and to prepare both the supporting unit and your OC/Ts with all the tools they need to succeed.

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