

NTC Rotation?

— here's what to do

by CPT Linda Lee-Long

One of the most challenging missions any chemical decontamination platoon leader can receive is to train and lead a platoon through a rotation at the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, California. With a detailed training plan, energy, and attention to detail, a platoon leader can make this training opportunity an unforgettable experience.

I would like to focus on four major areas where a platoon leader can make the difference for the platoon—the platoon training plan, training with the maneuver brigade, the deployment and redeployment to the Training Center, and the execution phase.

Platoon Training Plan

The platoon training plan must begin with an emphasis on the individual skills that support the decontamination squad and platoon collective tasks. In addition, aggressive training on common soldier tasks, the use of MILES, first aid, NBC survival skills, maintenance tasks, driver's training, and physical training will produce a solid foundation for later success. Sustainment of these skills over a four or five month train-up and NTC rotation is crucial.

Leader training is often postponed or even neglected. Because squad leaders can sometimes operate independently over wide areas, a

successful training plan must include leader tasks on desert navigation, communications, decontamination site selection and set-up, command and control, and the troop leading procedures.

Once individual skills training is on course, the platoon can begin work on collective training at squad and platoon level. Since 90 percent of the platoon's operations are conducted in the form of decontamination squad missions, this is clearly where the focus should be.

Prior to the start of the maneuver brigade's train-up at home station, the decontamination platoon should conduct a intense training period to include the mission essential squad and platoon tasks and the associated critical individual and leader tasks. The chemical company commander and ISG should work together to certify the platoon on these tasks. A thorough after-action review session should consolidate lessons learned and the platoon leadership should then develop or modify a decontamination standard operating procedures. This SOP should be as detailed and comprehensive as possible, and will go far in ensuring the platoon is fundamentally sound.

Training with the Maneuver Brigade

The maneuver brigade with its full complement of combat support and

combat service support elements typically comes together as a team for an intense train-up lasting about 4-6 weeks. There is a lot of emphasis on live-fire training, team building of the slice units, and extensive field training exercises.

During the train-up, the decontamination platoon leader must be aggressive in selling NBC training, an area often overlooked in the efforts to train the combat maneuver units. NBC skills proficiency, particularly in decontamination operation are crucial to the brigade's success in the desert. During the train-up period all members of the brigade team need to cycle through a hasty decontamination site. This is an excellent opportunity to finalize the decontamination platoon's SOP internally as well as raising the brigade's NBC skills posture.

Because the threat to the rear area is as great or greater as that to front line units, the decontamination platoon leader should coordinate with the brigade chemical officer to ensure that all members of the brigade team are trained in hasty decontamination. The brigade sections that are often overlooked are the tactical operation center, administration/logistics operation center, combat support, and combat service support personnel.

Deployment

A safe, smooth, and orderly deployment to the NTC is the mark of a professional unit. The decontamination platoon leader and non-commissioned officers must take the time to ensure their equipment is ready to railroad and their personnel have met all POM (preparation for overseas movement) requirements. The platoon leader's appropriate role is to give the subordinate leaders the time, resources, and information to accomplish the mission. The platoon SOP should cover this routine operation, including vehicle load plans, equipment packing lists, security of personnel property, inventory procedures and key control.

Select an aggressive NCO and drivers who are cross-trained on all platoon equipment for the advance party personnel to assist in the off-load of the platoon's equipment at the NTC. This will also allow them to give a situation update to the platoon leader and platoon sergeant upon arrival concerning billeting and mess arrangements, details, MILES issue information, etcetera.

Execution

A detailed comprehensive training plan that is aggressively executed to standard at home station will lead to success at the NTC for the decontamination platoon. Desert navigation is usually the major stumbling block, but leaders thoroughly trained in the basics can learn this skill rapidly. The following points are the major lessons learned during the execution phase at the NTC:

- An effective task organization for training is to place one squad at the live-fire training area, and two squads with the platoon headquarters at the force-on-force training area.

- The decontamination platoon headquarters must have the ability to talk secure FM. Take extra KY-57's and cables.

- The lack of natural terrain features or trails and roads makes raffic

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control, both day and night, challenging at the decontamination site. The method of marking the site should be an SOP at maneuver brigade level.

- Take mechanics along for your equipment if possible. Coordinate this with your company commander. It is always better to have your own mechanics, under control, working on equipment he is familiar with.

- All squad leaders must have maps, graphics, and operational communication systems, in case the platoon leader or sergeant is killed during the battle.

- The platoon leader should maintain frequent face-to-face contact with the brigade chemical officer.

- The platoon headquarters must get the frequency hopping plan, and the entire brigade operations order, if possible. The platoon leader should maintain communications with the brigade support area through the brigade TOC for coordination of resupply of water and class II (NBC) items. M2 heaters and M12 decontamination apparatuses should be high on the brigade maintenance priority list.

- Keep link-up points well away from the actual decontamination site, so that contaminated units don't blunder into the site.

- The brigade operations order should specify the priority for decontamination by type of unit and equipment in order to meet the

commander's intent.

- Squads should have as many soldiers licensed to drive vehicles as possible, so that battlefield casualties don't prevent vehicles from moving.

- Be aggressive in the resupply of water and class II, since these are often overlooked in the urgency to resupply classes III, V, and IX.

A rotation to the NTC is a big challenge to the decontamination platoon leader. It is a complex event that can intimidate a new lieutenant. It is also a great opportunity for first class training. A detailed, comprehensive training plan that addresses individual, leader, and collective tasks combined with a thorough platoon sop will set up the platoon for success and make the NTC experience rewarding, memorable, and enjoyable.

At the time this article was written, CPT Lee-Long was a student at the Chemical Officer Advanced Course at Fort McClellan, Alabama. She graduated from California State University, Long Beach with a BS in chemical engineering. Her previous assignments include Chemical staff Officer, Pine Bluff Arsenal, and Decontamination Platoon Leader for the 45th Chemical Company, 5th Infantry Division. She had deployed to the NTC two times, once as a decontamination platoon leader. CPT Lee-Long is a graduate of the chemical officer basic course.