

Concealment

—emphasis on low intensity missions

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Shortly before dawn, a company of infantrymen assemble on the bank of a river, preparing for a crossing. As first light breaks, they become aware of a hazy fog shrouding the crossing site.

The soldiers climb aboard rubber

boats and push off. There's no cover on the water, and the men are grateful for the fog which conceals their approach to the far side.

But the "fog" is not simply the result of good luck. It's actually smoke, put there by specially trained soldiers who arrived at the river ahead of the infantrymen and put smoke generators into operation.

For Hawaii's 25th Infantry Division (Light), with its emphasis on small unit, "low intensity" missions, this type of concealment is a valuable asset. But, until recently, the division had to rely on outside augmentation when it wanted smoke.

But that changed in late 1986 when

SP4 Wes Spivey oversees the operation of two smoke generators.



the 71st Chemical Company was activated and assigned to the division. The 71st is the Army's first dual-purpose chemical company. Its three platoons each have a smoke generation and NBC decontamination capability.

The company was designed specifically to meet the needs of a light infantry division, according to CPT Paul Funk, the company commander. Smoke and decon missions are usually handled by separate companies. Consolidating the equipment of two companies with less than half the personnel reduces the number of air sorties the division needs to deploy, Funk said. There are other companies which perform both missions but, unlike the 71st, their platoons are not dual-purpose.

Smoke can be used offensively,

SGT Jonathan Chisolm controls flow of smoke at platoon assault course.



defensively, and for deception. The smoke is produced by heating a substance called "fog oil," and can vary from a light haze to a thick blanket.

A haze, which reduces visibility to about 100 meters, is used to cover the position of troops and equipment. "If we provide a haze over our front line troops, enemy forward observers can't call in accurate artillery fire," said 1LT Valentin Novikov, the company operations officer. "They'll know we're in there, but they won't be able to pinpoint anything." Weather conditions permitting, the company can cover an area six to eight kilometers square with smoke.

A blanket of smoke, which reduces visibility to zero, can be dropped on an enemy position to create disorientation. A blanket can also be used to protect support units in the rear from enemy airborne raids by obscuring potential drop zones.

Smoke can also be used to restrict nap-of-the-earth flight of enemy aircraft. "You fill a valley with smoke and I guarantee no helicopter pilot is going to want to fly through it," Funk said. "It's a very flexible combat multiplier."

Each platoon is equipped with 12 M3A4 smoke generators, and the company can equip a fourth platoon if necessary.

Each platoon can also decontaminate up to 12 vehicles an hour of any nuclear, biological, or chemical agent, Funk said. The M17 Lightweight Decontamination System (SANATOR) allows the soldiers to clean equipment with high-pressure soapy water, decontaminants, or steam.

A platoon can burn up to 660 gallons of fog oil per hour, and a decon mission uses 25,000 gallons of water per hour. Since the company must fill and haul its own oil and water, it is well equipped with vehicles. Thirty-one HMMWVs and 29 five-ton trucks keep the company's 114 soldiers, smoke generators, SANATORs, oil, and water on the road.

The 71st will give the division an opportunity to train frequently and realistically with smoke, Novikov said. "Before we came on line, the division

had to use smoke pots. But if you use a smoke pot, you have to wear a protective mask at all times, and that limits the effectiveness of training in smoke," he said. "We can generate a haze that soldiers can train in for four hours without a mask."

The company has been helping the division chemical office develop a new NBC proficiency course, and occasionally works with the Air Force when the airmen conduct disaster preparedness training. The company provides a more realistic environment for rescue workers during simulated aircraft accidents.

Though only recently assigned to the division, the unit's history dates to 1942 when it was originally activated as an all-black company. The unit was later redesignated the 71st Chemical Smoke Generator Company, and in 1945 served on Okinawa. The company was reactivated in 1946 and assigned to the 7th Army at Fort Benning, Georgia. In 1950, the unit deployed to Korea and served throughout that conflict. The unit was inactivated in 1955.

"One of the exciting things about being the first unit of this type is that we're helping develop and formalize the doctrine for using a dual-purpose chemical company," Funk said.

"Eventually, there will be three more units like this one, and TRADOC and the US Army Chemical School are relying on us to test the concept."



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