

“Deadlier than a bullet: unclean, often unseen, sinister in its stealth. Goes for your head—the brain cells themselves, as well as a psychological number it lays on you—and your body. That’s NBC warfare. Therefore, it’s no fun to train for it: You have to face up to the realistic training soldiers need to survive on the battlefield. That means units, as well as personnel, must train under combat NBC conditions just as expected as rain or snow.”¹

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U.S. Army

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NBC Defense Training: *Meeting the Challenge!*

By CWO3 Jeffrey W. Curry

“It didn’t happen in the Gulf War, and Iraq had all types of chemical and biological (CB) weapons.” This is the typical response I receive from Marine Corps commanders and leaders when attempting to coordinate nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) training. What if these weapons had been used against us? Would we have been prepared? Answer the questions yourself, but I think the answer is no!

We must recognize that NBC warfare is a battlefield condition. It is not a *check in the block* for an annual-inspection checklist! Let’s face it: NBC-defense training is usually on the bottom of every commander’s priority list. Why? With more and more countries procuring NBC capabilities, the proliferation of such weapons, and the escalating terrorist threat, the likelihood of encountering these weapons on the battlefield is at an all-time high. The NBC community, leaders, and commanders must band together and meet this daunting challenge head-on. If we remove the barriers that inhibit our ability to train our troops, institute innovative training techniques that spark interest in our personnel, and effectively solicit command support for NBC training, we better prepare our troops to *win battles* in the future. The first thing we can do is to rid ourselves of some old training practices that negate and undermine the benefits of NBC training.

BARRIERS

Old training practices impede our ability to train our personnel effectively. What I am specifically targeting are the CS chamber *pain-threshold* exercises and the mission-oriented protective posture (MOPP) 4 *sweat exercises*. Most service members’ first experience with NBC-defense training begins with the M40 field protective-mask-confidence exercise. The perception our troops depart with, from this one experience alone, determines how they will respond to future training. When performed improperly, many such practices ingrain fear and resentment in our junior leaders, making it difficult for the NBC community to train its personnel once they become staff NCOs and commanders. These negative customs have a cumulative effect and significantly contribute to the fear that permeates all aspects of NBC training and readiness.

FEAR

NBC and fear are almost synonymous! Many leaders fear NBC because it provokes change, intrudes on the established methods of doing business, and interjects several complications into conventional training. Fear arises from the fact that we know our personnel are not proficient in performing their mission in a contaminated

environment. Our troops feel it! In MOPP4, it is hard to see, hear, touch, smell, communicate, and perceive what is going on around them. This fear erodes their confidence and ability to function in MOPP4—fear of exposure to CB agents, fear of dying, and fear of the unknown. Regardless of its source, fear will create American casualties on a contaminated battlefield. Ignorance fuels this fear. Effective training is the only way to combat this fear. I have researched and tested several training methods as a Marine battalion and regimental NBC defense officer. Here are a few innovative techniques that worked for me:

Crawl

Establish a tiered training program that builds on previous successes. Use the crawl, walk, and run methodology when beginning an NBC regimen. Crawl—an example is to have the unit (one platoon at a time) observe a task being performed (such as a detailed troop decontamination [DTD]). Set it up so all the unit has to do is watch. Put on a show. The NBC instructor dresses an assistant in MOPP4, then processes him through the DTD from beginning to end. For optimal learning, set the DTD up like a classroom with the stations close together so the students can see the big picture. It limits confusion and aids in retention. This type of initial training reduces fear by teaching basic concepts and procedures. Personnel usually leave this class with confidence, feeling they could process through the DTD without any problems.

Walk

Continue with the above example. The next step is to have that squad or platoon process through the DTD with the rest of the company as an audience. You can even pick a squad from each platoon and have a competition with the staff NCOs and officers as judges. The winning squad could get the rest of the day off as an incentive. Combining training and competition boosts morale and unit cohesion. A softball tournament with the troops wearing field-protective masks² or M16A2 service rifle disassembly/assembly relay races while wearing protective gloves are other ways to incorporate competition into NBC training. This training builds confidence in their abilities to use the equipment by attaching it to tasks they readily perform.

Run

Integrate NBC mission-performance standards into unit field-training exercises, joint-training exercises, and NBC field evaluations. This makes the training more challenging and realistic³ and maximizes its effectiveness. “Train as you fight”⁴ epitomizes this philosophy. Work NBC scenarios into training missions at every opportunity. For example, outfit a company in MOPP2 before it

occupies defensive positions. Once the attack begins, sound the NBC alarm. Observe the unit as it transitions from MOPP2 to MOPP4. Another example is while a company is conducting movement to contact patrols, have the NBC survey team members put on their masks and gloves and take biological samples. Evaluate, discuss, and correct deficiencies. Integrative training, coupled with evaluation, enhances skill development and builds team confidence. By consistently integrating NBC training into the unit’s schedule, it becomes a staple in regular training. Repetition sustains and perfects learned skills—proficiency through consistency. Unfortunately, there is never enough time to accomplish every training objective. Focus on quality when working on a restricted time schedule.

If the group receiving instruction isn’t learning, then everyone is wasting their time! Let’s take this a step further. Tailor each class to the specific audience, maximizing the audience’s potential to learn as much information as possible. One method of accomplishing this is by employing the whole-brain approach.⁵

The left side of our brain controls the mathematical process, sequences, and logical thought, while the right side controls imagination, music appreciation, and conceptual thought.⁶ By incorporating teaching techniques that combine aspects from both hemispheres of the brain, personnel are more apt to retain and recall the presented information. Some simple and effective training techniques I found that work well with troops are—

Motivation and Participation

As with all these techniques, your motivation and energy are vital ingredients in maximizing your student’s learning potential. Get excited, animated, and bizarre! Interject exaggeration, humor, and action in your classes.⁷ For an example, refer back to the DTD scenario to illustrate this concept, specifically, station 1 of the DTD. The key point at this juncture is to get the students to remember what is in each of the three sequentially placed containers used to decontaminate equipment. With a broomstick in hand, tap a container as an orchestra conductor would; then coerce the class to repeat (sing) after you: “hot, soapy water (repeat), decon solution (repeat), and rinse water (repeat).” If they aren’t loud enough, have them do it again, and again if necessary. Everyone remains alert while having fun participating and learning. This technique really works!

People have come to me years later just to say, “I still remember what’s in those three buckets.” People are also more apt to retain information that provokes an emotional response.⁸ Another example is to separate the students into pairs and place a splotch of ketchup (or anything) on one of the student’s hand. Then, have his training partner

remove the simulated contamination with an M291 decon kit. Ensure that he removes all of the liquid. Rubbing black charcoal onto someone's skin appears foolish, but it stimulates the brain to remember the procedure.

Imagination

Use your imagination! Develop and redevelop training methods that stimulate and enhance your audience's ability to learn. Come up with techniques that work for you. Not everyone may feel comfortable using these techniques. There are other things you can do to promote NBC training. One of the most difficult, yet important, areas of training is getting your command to place emphasis on NBC training.

Command Support

One way to solicit command involvement is to become an avid NBC salesperson. Advertise competence and exhibit those qualities that you feel best exemplify the ideal NBC expert. Remain NBC-oriented regardless of how many additional and collateral duties you hold. Keep a positive attitude. You possess an important role in your unit. Not many officers can perform and function as an NBC officer!

Standards

Train to published standards and follow established doctrine.⁹ With the fielding of new NBC equipment and updated field manuals, standing operating procedures (SOPs) become outdated. Revise unit NBC SOPs, and ensure that everyone from small-unit leaders up understands the new and current NBC requirements. Incorporate the training for these requirements into the unit's annual-training plan. Many commanders are not aware of such requirements and eagerly complete the tasks once they are aware that they are mandatory.

Involvement

Spread the gospel! Offer/solicit ideas on how to integrate NBC training into your unit's schedule. Attend training and staff meetings, and ask the executive officer or S3 to state the commander's intent on scheduled NBC-training events. Once the senior leadership is involved, officers and section leaders are more likely to accomplish NBC-training objectives. Invite the commanding officer, executive officer, and S3 to participate in NBC training. At the very least, ask them to make appearances during these phases of training. Through the principle of

"leadership by example," unit personnel will observe their commanders actively supporting NBC training and understand its importance.

We can move NBC training near the top of our commander's priority list by arousing troop interest, integrating it into tactical field exercises, and inviting staff participation in NBC training. We must do whatever it takes to prepare our troops for combat in contaminated environments. By removing the barriers that inhibit our ability to train the troops, instituting innovative training techniques, and soliciting command support for NBC training, we better equip our troops to succeed "in every climb and place."

CWO3 Jeffrey W. Curry is currently the NBC Defense Officer and Regimental Training Officer for the 10th Marine Regiment, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. His previous assignments include NBC Defense Officer for 2d Battalion, 2d Marines and 2d Marine Regiment, and HQ Company Commander and Regimental Training Officer for the 2d Marine Regiment, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. He was promoted to Warrant Officer in February 1993. CWO3 Curry is a graduate of the Technical Escort, Radiation Safety Officer, Radiological Emergency Team Operations, and Chemical Officer Advance Courses and the Amphibious Warfare School Nonresident Program. He holds a bachelor of science degree from Campbell University's School of Education, Buies Creek, North Carolina.

Endnotes

¹ CG, Marine Corps Combat Development Command, "MAGTF Nuclear, Chemical, and Defensive Biological Operations (OH 11)," (Quantico, VA, 1991), 8-1.

² Major Charles E. Heller, USAR, "LEAVENWORTH PAPERS – Number 10; Chemical Warfare in World War I: The American Experience, 1917-1918," (Washington, D.C.: Combat Studies Institute, 1984), 57.

³ Department of the Army, "Training the Force: Soldiers, Units & Leaders (FM 25-100)," (Washington, D.C., 1988) 1-4.

⁴ Dept of the Army, "Training the Force: Soldiers, Units & Leaders (FM 25-100)," Washington, D.C., 1988) 1-3.

⁵ Stanley D. Frank, Ed. D., "Remembering Everything You Read," (New York: Random House, 1990), 166 & 167.

⁶ Colin Rose, "Accelerated Learning," (New York: Dell Publishing, 1987), 11.

⁷ Fred B. Chernow, "The Sharper Mind," (Paramus, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997), 24.

⁸ Joan Minninger, Ph. D., "Total Recall: How to Boost Memory Power," (New York: Pocket Books, 1986), 154.

⁹ Department of the Army, "Training the Force: Soldiers, Units & Leaders (FM 25-100)," (Washington, D.C., 1988) 1-4.