

Mission in MOPP4

—training Spearhead Steel style

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The Division Artillery (DIVARTY) had been the victim of a massive enemy chemical attack. Numerous firing batteries had been targeted and all units in the immediate area had gone to Mission-Oriented Protective Posture level 4 (MOPP4). Initial indications identified the attack as non-persistent and soon detection efforts indicated no contamination was present. The commanders initiated unmasking procedures, but of greater importance was a DIVARTY Time on Target (TOT) mission which had to be fired. The mission had to be, and was, fired while in MOPP4.

The firing battery of the 155-mm self-propelled (SP) artillery battalion had received a massive artillery attack consisting of high explosive and smoke rounds. This necessitated a hasty displacement, and since chemical weapons had been employed previously, this incoming caused the displacement to be carried out in MOPP4. While en route to their alternate firing positions the battery received an emergency fire mission causing the unit to do a hipshoot. This requires the unit to stop their road march, quickly emplace the howitzers, and fire the mission. Because of possible contamination, this mission also was fired in MOPP4.

The above scenarios are not based on a command post exercise nor are

they a fictional description of some future battlefield. They are actual integrated training exercises conducted at Grafenwoehr Training Area, Germany, by the units of the Third Armored Division Artillery (Spearhead Steel).

Many reasons are given for not integrating NBC training in field training exercises (FTX), command post exercises (CPX), Army training and evaluation programs (ARTEP), and routine training:

- It will decrease safety.
- It will cause heat casualties.
- It will slow down the battle or scenario.
- It will hurt my evaluation.
- We'll do it next time.
- Etcetera.

The Third Armored DIVARTY recognizes the significant, potential NBC threat which could be employed against it in central Europe and integrates NBC training into all of its

An M577A2 undergoes decontamination during an evaluation.



field exercises and training opportunities. Examples of other significant integrated training events conducted by the units of Spearhead Steel include:

- The deliberate decontamination (deliberate equipment decontamination combined with a MOPP gear exchange) of elements of an entire field artillery battalion during the battalion's ARTEP external evaluation.
- The deliberate decontamination of a Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS) battery during its ARTEP external evaluation, after spending ten and a half hours in MOPP4.
- The hasty decontamination of the DIVARTY Tactical Operations Center in the German countryside, during a division exercise, including a MOPP gear exchange.
- The firing of numerous missions, to include special weapons missions, during an ARTEP external evaluation, in MOPP4.

A number of key factors must be considered in establishing good, realistic integrated training exercises,

the most important of which is command support. If you can get the support of the unit commander and the operations officer to integrate NBC play into exercises you are well on your way to having a sound program.

To do this you need to approach the integration of NBC play as a training opportunity rather than a training requirement. Identify where integrated training can add to the exercise and make the maximum use of the time allocated for integrated training. I have found that soldiers can and will do their jobs in MOPP4; nobody likes to wear MOPP gear but when they have to, they are often amazed at what they can do. Soldiers learn that if they can do their job in MOPP4 they can do it better when they remove the protective gear.

Make the training beneficial and meaningful. We never decide that we are going to go into MOPP4 for a certain length of time. We initiate a situation that requires units to go to MOPP4 and the amount of time spent in full MOPP is based on the situation.

This may be as little as 40 minutes for a non-persistent attack, or as much as ten hours for a persistent attack requiring a large number of vehicles and soldiers to be decontaminated.

To put a soldier in MOPP4 for six hours and not have a scenario to back it up is negative training. If a soldier is told he will stay in MOPP4 for six hours because it is a requirement, he will count the minutes and resent the training. Putting someone in MOPP4 for a number of hours once a year for purposes of acclimation is ridiculous. That "training" once a year will not acclimate anyone.

Integrated training will slow an exercise down; there is no arguing that point. MOPP gear causes degradation, which means more time will be required to perform the unit's mission. However the demonstration and documentation of this degradation can be valuable. The unit will be more aware of the problems caused by a contaminated battlefield and can

An M548A1 travels down a tank trail after a chemical attack forced the firing battery to displace in MOPP4.



explore means to overcome some of these obstacles.

Does NBC play make life more difficult during an ARTEP evaluation? Yes, without a doubt, a unit is less efficient in MOPP4. However, the artillery commanders here recognize the NBC threat and often request extensive NBC play or large-scale decontamination operations during these evaluations. The fact that the unit is willing to try a more difficult scenario generally leaves evaluators and higher level commanders with a more favorable impression than the unit that wants the minimum inconvenience.

Safety is the most important consideration during any military training. Integrated training does increase the chance of safety problems, but not unmanageably so. First line supervisors need to be more alert for possible individual soldier problems and units need to allow extra time for movements, emplacements, and displacements. Units also need to look at items which should not be

done in MOPP4. In the scenario described in the beginning of this article, the final safety checks were



Above, an M109A2 self-propelled howitzer approaches a deliberate decon site. Below, the M109A2 undergoes decon.

performed by unmasked safety officers from the evaluating battalion.

The bottom line is NBC training can be integrated almost anywhere, almost any time. In Spearhead Steel country NBC training is integrated, not conducted separately, but integrated into all exercises at all levels. It can be done, but it takes planning, initiative, and support. ●●●

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