

# NBC Training for Special Operation Forces?

By MAJ Vincent Hughes

**Y**es! General Stiner, commander of the U.S. Special Operations Command stated that "the proliferation of powerful weapons of mass destruction and great lethality continues. As the Gulf crisis has revealed, these weapons are now in the arsenals of Third World countries and in the hands of radical factions around the world." Nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons are such weapons of mass destruction.

Desert Shield and Desert Storm brought the "weapons of mass destruction" into clear focus as never before. Commanders and military planners had to consider the possibility that U.S. troops' NBC posture may not have been as strong as desired. In the middle of all the military activities were special operations soldiers who had to face the same NBC threat as conventional forces.

Special operation forces (SOF) concentrate their training to specified geographic regions. The United States, Soviet Union, France, and Iraq are known to have chemical weapons. Yet, the countries of Egypt, Syria, Libya, Israel, Ethiopia, North Korea, Iran, Vietnam, Taiwan, South Korea, China, and South Africa are reported to have chemical weapons. This proliferation is too significant to be ignored by special operations forces.

SOF units that operate in regions where there is a low threat from NBC weapons still have a need for NBC training. This need stems from two facts: Chemical personnel have special

skills that they can train SOF personnel on. Secondly, the training guidance in AR 350-42, *Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Defense and Chemical Warfare Training*, and AR 350-41, *Army Forces Training*, apply to SOF units.

Special skills that Chemical Corps personnel have that they can train SOF personnel on include:

- Use and employment of riot control agents.
- Use and employment of smoke.
- Construction and employment of flame field expedients.
- Use and employment of herbicides
- Use of chemical agent detectors in counternarcotics operations

The training requirements of SOF units is the same as for all Army units as indicated in AR 350-41 and AR 350-42. These regulations prescribe the type and frequency of NBC training to meet Army standards. The chemical staff officers (SC 74) in SOF units are a ready source of information on the planning and conduct of NBC training.

This ensures that SOF soldiers are ready to operate in an NBC environment, in the event that their region of operations changes. This was the case for some SOF soldiers during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

The inability to operate in an NBC environment has a direct impact on an SOF unit's ability to accomplish its tactical mission. Chemical weapons can be used to counter special reconnaissance (SR) and direct action (DA) missions.

The world's political and military situations continue to undergo change on a daily basis. These changes present opportunities for Special Forces soldiers to practice their peacetime and wartime crafts of unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, direct action, special reconnaissance, and counterterrorism missions. If and when the need arises for SOF units to perform their mission in an NBC environment, they must be ready to do so.

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