

Space unit likes its training 'cubed'

By SSG Franklin Barrett, Unit Reporter

OKINAWA — Training recently took on a third dimension for E Company, 1st Satellite Control Battalion, Army Space Command. It was not just another routine few hours at the rifle range. Instead, these soldiers spent a hard-charging day firing, testing on Common Tasks, and, the perennial soldiers' favorite ... getting "gassed" in the CS chamber.

The unit conducted the action-packed training and testing day recently, with 27 soldiers participating in the three-part range. The range, conducted on Camp Hansen here, qualified soldiers on their assigned weapons, the M16A2 and tested them in this year's Common Tasks. The third "dimension" showed up as soldiers endured and survived mask-confidence training, an annual requirement for all soldiers.

The planning and coordination effort for the scheduled training involved every aspect of the unit. The unit's Training NCO, SGT Robert Nelson, was the centerpiece for conception and planning. To accomplish the same objectives in the past, the unit would have had to conduct several large ranges throughout the year.

"By having large ranges, there were a lot of soldiers who were having to wait for their firing line — complaining about how most of their day was spent that way when they could have been training," said Nelson. He thought grouping the ranges would largely eliminate that aspect of the training. With cooperation and participation from the other NCOs in the unit, Nelson was able to coordinate the combination of the three events.

NCOs from the first sergeant to team leaders worked together in planning and execution.

The unit's Supply NCO, SGT Victor Glaze, handled all of the logistical needs. SFC Brian Groves, Operations Platoon Sergeant, and SGT Erica Schaffer, the unit's Nuclear, Biological and Chemical NCO, made it happen at the mask-confidence training. SGT Michael Stansbury and Groves worked together as Range Safeties to ensure the success of the M16 Qualification Range, while SFC Brian LaMay oversaw the event as the NCOIC and Range Safety Officer. The unit armorers, SGT Christopher Golden and SPC Daniel Fagan, teamed up to ensure weapons and ammunition were a "go."

Vehicle load plans developed by LaMay and his Support Platoon enabled the advanced party to move out from Fort Buckner, the unit's installation, in a



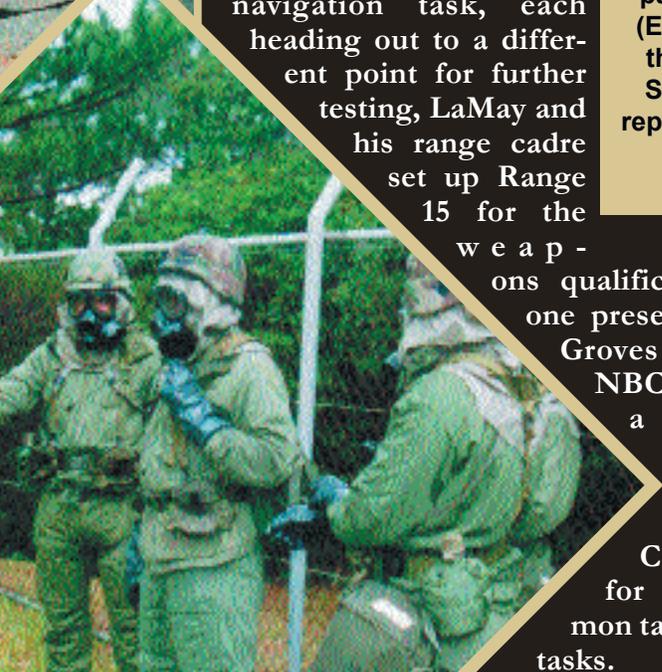
Above, SFC Brian LaMay fires his assigned weapon, the M16A2, in the prone-unsupported position; right, SGT Erica Schaffer inspects soldiers protecting themselves against Nuclear, Biological and Chemical (NBC) attack; below, SFC Brian Groves directs SPC Shamikka Fenstermaker and SPC John Ames in the Gas Chamber. Photos by SSG Franklin Barrett





timely manner on the morning of November 21, 2002. The soldiers being trained and tested fell in for accountability and inspection at 5 a.m. With the bus warmed up, and gear in store, bus driver SPC Mitchell James began the long drive to Camp Hansen at 5:35 a.m.

The plan for the day was to integrate all three of the tasks, weapons qualification, CTT and mask confidence. While the teams of soldiers prepared their land navigation task, each heading out to a different point for further testing, LaMay and his range cadre set up Range 15 for the



weapons qualification of everyone present. Meanwhile, Groves prepared the NBC chamber with a stout treatment of CS gas, and Schaffer and SGT John Castine prepared for the NBC common task testing (CTT) tasks.

Three checkpoints were plotted for land navigation, one at the weapons range, one at the NBC chamber and one in between.

At the weapons range, Nelson tested the soldiers on the Claymore and communicating in a secure net, as well as verifying the soldier's land navigation checkpoints.

At the NBC Chamber, Schaffer and Castine tested soldiers on the NBC Common Tasks in conjunction with Groves' mask confidence training.

At the third checkpoint, SSG Daniel Bleifield, the unit's Personnel Sergeant, tested soldiers on first-aid tasks.



BLAST FROM THE PAST

In February 1984, then LTC Robert Stewart along with Navy CAPT Bruce McCandless II, participated in two extravehicular activities (EVA's) to conduct first flight evaluations of the Manned Maneuvering Units during the STS-41B Challenger mission. These EVA's represented man's first untethered operations from a Spacecraft in flight.

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In the NBC chamber, always a 'hot-spot' for drama, range cadre observed soldiers in mask-confidence training.

One soldier, SPC Christopher Smithson, went beyond the call of duty by singing the Army Song, unmasked, in the CS chamber. After this unique exhibition of his pride in the Army, Smithson spent more than 10 minutes clearing his uniform and his body of the unpleasantly potent CS gas.

While the M16 Range was being prepared, the gas chamber remained hot, and this added to the simultaneous completion of both. As a result, "Everyone was in

and out of the chamber, and tested on the CTT tasks, within the three-hour scheduled time frame," Groves said.

By 10:30 a.m., the weapons range was ready to go "hot," and the first firing order prepared for zeroing their weapons.

On Okinawa, the only ranges available for Army units are 25 meters, with stationary paper targets, rather than the familiar 300-meter pop-up ranges. With the first firing order zeroed, qualification began. When the smoke cleared later in the afternoon, four soldiers achieved the coveted "Expert" qualification. Fourteen soldiers achieved sharpshooter, and five made it as Marksman.

"There was a 100-percent first time 'go' overall, which is an accomplishment itself," said SFC Lester Blandin, the unit's Operations Trainer.

With all the soldiers tested in CTT, and cleared in mask confidence, the last group of firers completed the range by mid-afternoon.

For larger units, the combination of these three events into a one-day range may not seem like much, but for smaller units like E Co., it takes a large amount of cooperation and coordination to ensure the success of such a feat.

"Leadership, especially that of the junior non-coms, was key to the success of this type of range," said Schaffer, with understandable pride.