

DEAD Casualty exercise provides realism without reality

OR ALIVE

Spec. Marc Loi, 13th Public Affairs Detachment

It was 10:28 a.m. on a Saturday morning in Kuwait and unlike most days, Camp Virginia was unusually quiet. Perhaps even eerily quiet.

Somewhere in Chicago, it was also quiet. Citizens of the "Windy City," deep in their sleep, did not know that when they woke up the next morning, they would be greeted with the horrible news – two of their citizen-Soldiers had been killed.

It happened just moments earlier. A sport-utility vehicle, driven by an anti-coalition extremist, pulled into the entrance control point at Camp Virginia. A vigilant Soldier, seeing the vehicle had bypassed other vehicles to the left only to come to an abrupt brake, yelled, "Breach!" and blew a whistle. Alas, it was too late.

A thunderous explosion rocked the desert camp, bellowing smoke and creating carnage. Over in lane one lie three Soldiers -- all of the 379th Chemical Company, an Army Reserve

unit from Chicago. One had been killed instantaneously, while two others were fighting for their lives.

Spc. Jessica Cali was bleeding profusely. Without any medical attention soon, she would die. At 10:45, Cali took her last breath.

Just a few minutes earlier, the nuclear, biological and chemical team had responded to the explosion. The result for airborne chemicals came back negative.

For such a small-scaled and primitive attack, the threat of NBC may seem unlikely, as weapons of mass destruction were

never found in Iraq. But according to one noncommissioned officer, it's the greatest threat anytime there is an attack.

"NBC is one of the greatest threats there is," said Sgt. Nigel Samuel, of the 268th Engineer Detachment.

"It's one of the first things that has to be eliminated," he added.

The reason for this, said Samuel, of Columbia, S.C., is NBC weapons could be disguised as almost anything – and it is the job of NBC personnel to come in to ensure it is safe for EMT and fire department personnel to enter the attack zone.

At this point, the fire department arrived on the scene. Running over the berm, firefighters located the vehicle that had exploded. Its flames burned a furnace of hate. Much like servicemembers

quenched other fires of hate, they quenched this one, too, but perhaps more literally than figuratively.

Then, as if by magic, Cali sat up. With a smile on her face, the Chicago native took a swig of water.

Turning around to a fellow Soldier pulling

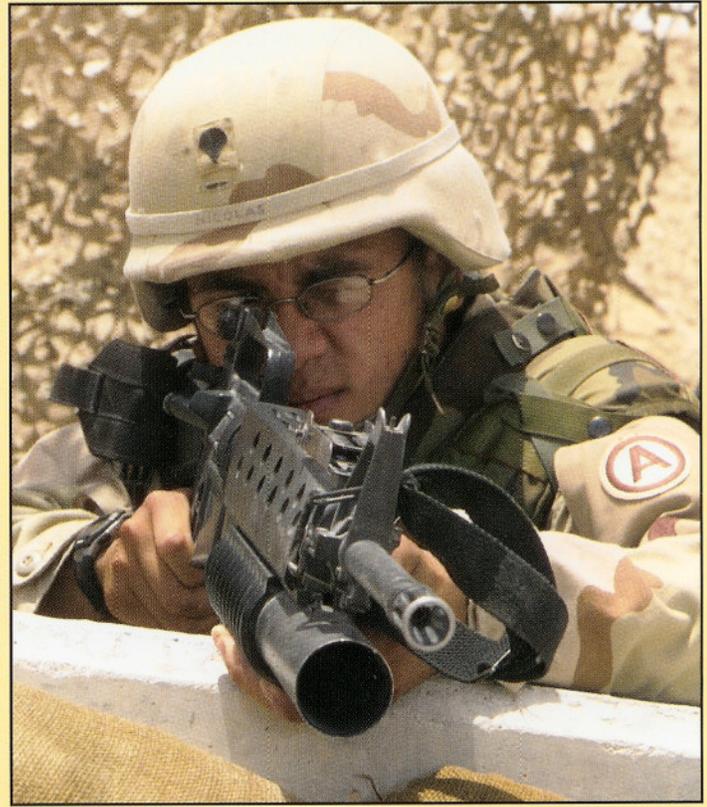


Photo by Spc. Marc Loi

Spc. Edmar Nicholas maintain security at the entry control point during a mass casualty exercise at Camp Virginia.

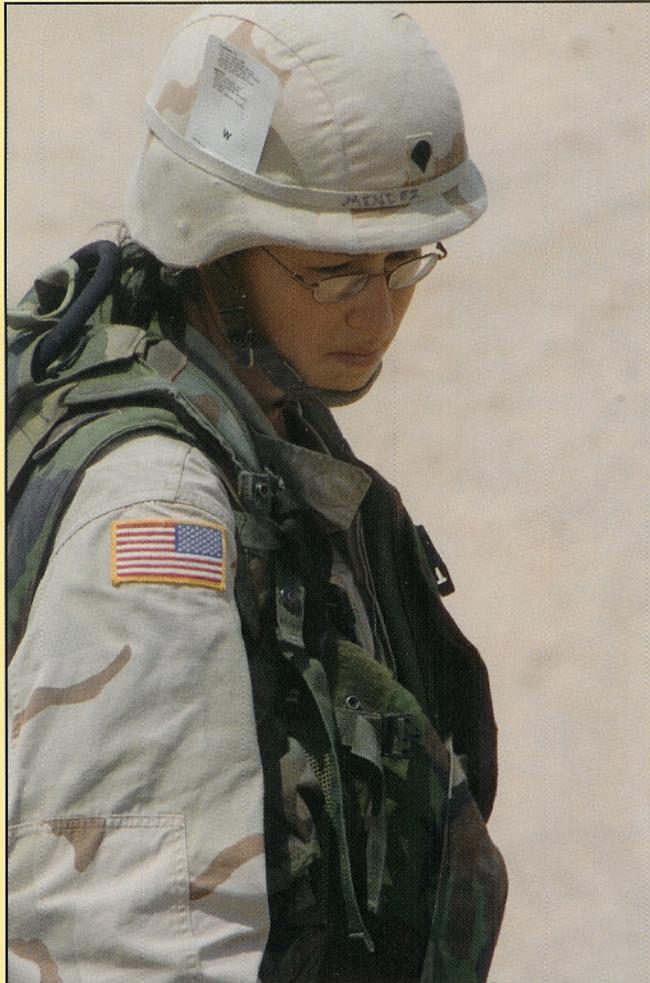


Photo by Spc. Scott Akanewich

Spc. Veronica Mendes was one of the "wounded" during the exercise, witnessed by the casualty card on her kevlar.

8 Desert Voice

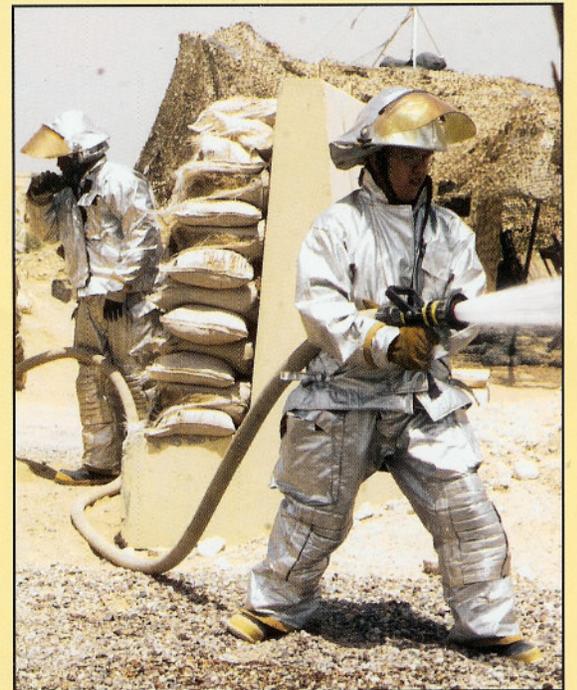


Photo by Spc. Marc Loi

The fire department arrived on the scene to extinguish the "fire" caused by the enemy "breach."

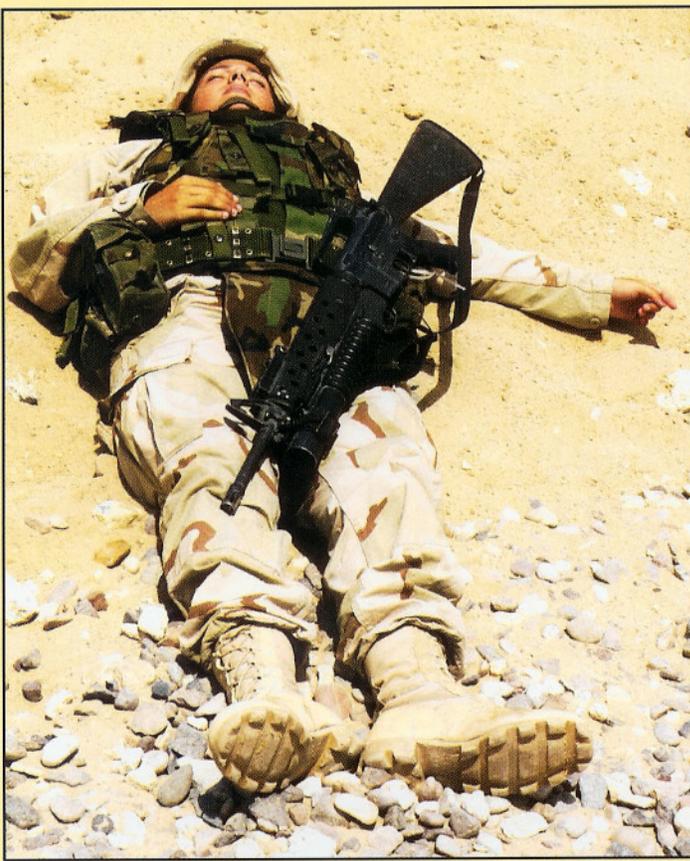


Photo by Spc. Marc Loi

Spc. Jessica Cali “died” after not receiving medical attention fast enough after the blast at the gate she was guarding.

guard duty, she smiled and exclaimed, “What would you have done had I really been dead? Admit it, you’d cry, huh?”

No, the Soldier won’t cry this time. It’s probably better that way. There won’t be any chaplains having to knock on doors to deliver the bad news either – this was just an exercise. Cali’s death – mainly because her injuries weren’t treated in a timely manner – was merely a simulation. The explosion was staged. The chaos was just a part of the mass casualty exercise put on by Camp Virginia personnel to better prepare Soldiers in the event a real attack should take place.

Though the scenario may seem far-fetched, as Camp Virginia nestles in the confines of the Kuwaiti Desert, far from any Islamic militants, Maj. Edward Dawson, 379th Chem. Co. commander, said Soldiers must be able to react quickly to such a situation because the threat is real.

“We’re doing training based on intelligence we’re getting,” Dawson said. “This is to prepare for both north and south of the border.”

Though the exercise only involved members of the camp’s quick reaction force, medical, fire and security personnel, Dawson said future training exercises will involve a larger scale of units because the intent is for everyone to know their role during an attack.

One of the many positive aspects of the exercise, Dawson said, was how well units

worked together.

After relocating the “injured” to the troop medical clinic, it was determined some injuries were more severe than TMC personnel originally thought. A medical evacuation helicopter was called in.

Coming from Camp Doha, personnel on the Black Hawk helicopter that’s the Florence Nightingale to the Grim Reaper listened intently for requests to call them off – this would mean they had been too late. The speedy lifesaver that was the Black Hawk would no longer be needed. The dreaded call never came.

The Black Hawk successfully landed on the flesh-burning tarmac, and one-by-one, injured personnel were loaded into the chopper, which took off, creating a cloud of dust large enough to overcome anyone standing 20 feet within its radius. Safely inside the bird, however, the servicemembers were at peace. They would be given additional first aid and taken to a nearby U.S. military medical facility. Had this been a real emergency, the reaction force would have gotten an A grade. Even with the loss of lives, the U.S. flag, along with the

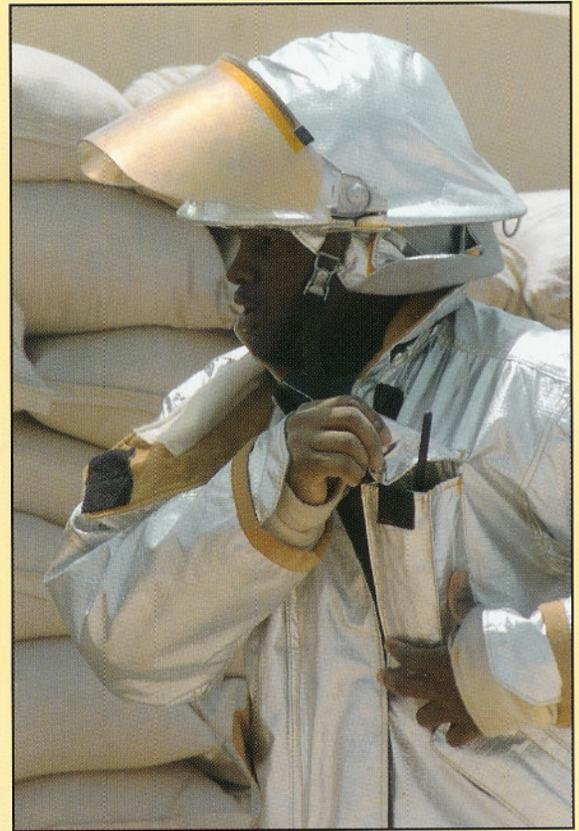


Photo by Spc. Scott Akanewich

Sgt. Nigel Samuel of the Camp Virginia Fire Department was one of the first emergency personnel to arrive.

competence and morale of Camp Virginia’s personnel, much like the Black Hawk – still stood high and gallantly waved against the desert wind.

“They did an excellent job,” Dawson said of the servicemembers’ performances. “What we’re doing is practice and rehearsal. We need to continue to do this.”

The continuation of practices and rehearsals in Kuwait may just ensure citizens of Chicago and everywhere in America, sleep easier at night, knowing their sons and daughters are ready – should an attack ever come.



Photo by Spc. Scott Akanewich

Spc. Ryan Festerling was evacuated from the entry control point by field ambulance to the troop medical clinic, where he received treatment for his “wounds.”