



# PREPARING FOR DISASTER

When an emergency hits home,  
the DCRF stands ready to assist

BY DAVID CROZIER NCO Journal

Ask any Soldiers what they do in the Army and most will tell you how they train for combat in far off lands. Ask a member of the 1st Maneuver Enhancement Brigade at Fort Polk, La., the same question and you'll hear, "Save lives and minimize human suffering in the United States."

The 1st MEB is involved in a two-year mission as part of the Defense Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and High-Yield Explosive Response Force, or DCRF. It is the first to conduct this new mission, established in 2011 to deploy forces in support of Joint Task Force-Civil Support, which provides support to civil authorities, protects personnel and provides the engineering expertise to restore normalcy after a major incident has occurred in the United States. DCRF responds to catastrophic natural disasters,

like major hurricanes or earthquakes, or CBRNE events when requested by a governor, federal agency or the president.

"It is a unique process the way we get called out," said Command Sgt. Maj. Edward Russell, command sergeant major of the 1st MEB. "It has to be something catastrophic ... and only after all other resources — National Guard, federal emergency management assets, and state and local emergency management assets — have been exhausted."

Though the 1st MEB plays a large role in the DCRF mission, it is but a piece of a much larger picture.

Russell said the 1st MEB reports to many command echelons when it comes to the DCRF mission. The unit is a part of JTF-CS, a subordinate unit of U.S. Northern Command, whose mission it is to provide mission command of military

homeland defense efforts and to coordinate defense support to civil authorities. JTF-CS plans and integrates military support with the primary federal agency whenever domestic CBRNE operations require. The 1st MEB also works with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Forces Command, Installation Management Command and U.S. Army North.

JTF-CS responds to CBRNE incidents after civilian resources have been used fully. JTF-CS tasks include incident site support, casualty medical assistance and treatment, displaced populace support, mortuary affairs support, logistics support, and air operations. These are broken into four smaller joint task forces — operations, aviation, medical and logistics.

The 1st MEB has the mission of Task Force-Operations, and provides the technical response in the form of military police, engineering and construction assets, CBRNE units and mortuary affairs — a total of 21 units including some from the Air Force and Marine Corps.

“We have more than 5,000 Soldiers assigned to the DCRF mission,” Russell said. “It is a very simple mission, but it entails a lot.”

He added that the brigade is quite busy, training constantly, with each unit having specific roles and responsibilities.

### First responders

“We are like the 9-1-1 of the nation’s highest priority in dealing with any natural disasters,” said Command Sgt. Maj. John Narcisse, command sergeant major of the 519th Military Police Battalion, 1st MEB. “We are kind of like the first responders for the initial response force.”

Narcisse said that, as a military police unit, the battalion’s roles and responsibilities within the DCRF mission are to prevent human suffering, save lives and assist local law enforcement where needed. But like other Title 10 Soldiers, their role is limited by the Posse Comitatus Act, which limits the powers of local governments and law enforcement agencies in using federal military personnel as law enforcement.

“Unless the president directs us and the secretary of defense says that we have established martial law, we cannot perform a law enforcement duty in terms of ap-

prehension authority. We have to leave that up to the local law enforcement,” he said. “For our own safety and security, we are allowed to, in terms of our rules of engagement, protect our equipment and facilities, as well as Soldiers. If a Soldier was fired upon, then we would have to use a gradual use of force to prevent any injury to any one of our Soldiers.”

Because this is not a typical military mission, Narcisse said, training for the DCRF mission has a different focus than in most Army units.

“From a tactical standpoint, we have to have patience — to be compassionate. [We have to] now just think in the capacity of a civilian agency,” he said. “You have to put on that hat of the first responder in terms

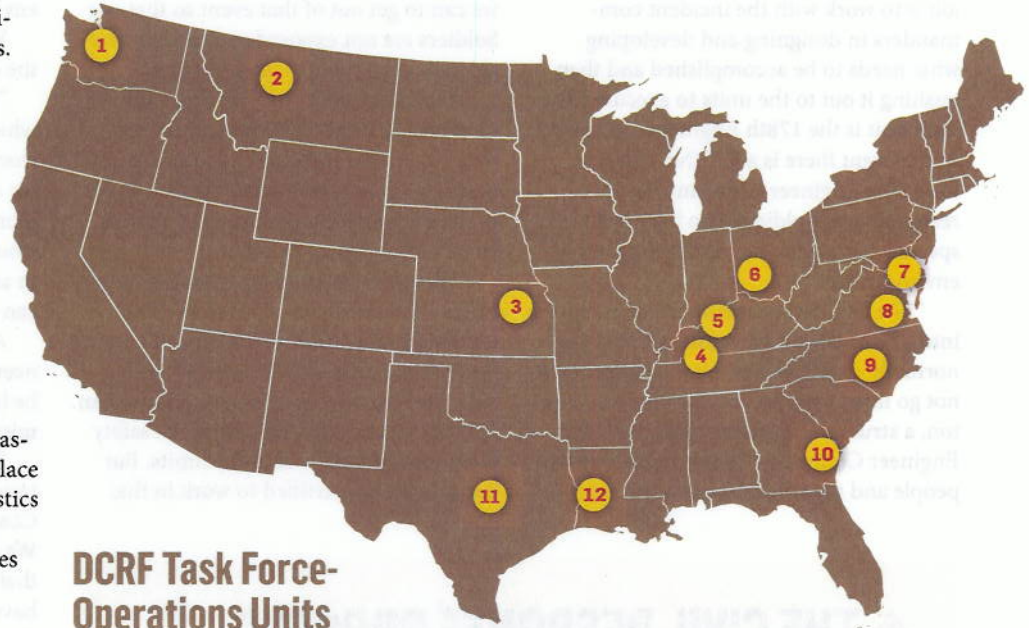
of providing that initial first aid to the community as needed.”

With the unit being located at Fort Polk with the Joint Readiness Training Center, Soldiers have a prime training environment, Narcisse said.

“JRTC gives us the flexibility to use top-notch facilities to do some real-world training and have the role-players, be it internal or external to the installation, testing our troops,” he said. “From where we started to where we are [today], I am very confident that we have the right training.”

Preparing for the DCRF mission, the unit also focuses on ensuring its vehicles are maintained properly and its load plans are right, Narcisse said.

“We didn’t focus directly on the mission



## DCRF Task Force-Operations Units

### 1. Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash.

66th Military Police Company

### 2. Malmstrom Air Force Base, Mont.

819th Rapid Engineer Deployable Heavy Operational Repair Squadron Engineers (RED HORSE) Squadron

### 3. Fort Riley, Kan.

172nd Chemical Company

### 4. Fort Campbell, Ky.

63rd Chemical Company

### 5. Fort Knox, Ky.

15th Engineer Company

### 6. Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio

711th Human Performance Wing  
Air Force Radiation Team  
711th Human Performance Wing  
Epidemiology Team

### 7. Indian Head, Md.

Chemical Biological Incident Response Force

### 8. Fort Lee, Va.

111th Mortuary Affairs Company

### 9. Fort Bragg, N.C.

21st Chemical Company  
101st Chemical Company

### 10. Fort Stewart, Ga.

546th Military Police Company

### 11. Fort Hood, Texas

2nd Chemical Battalion  
64th Military Police Company  
181st Chemical Company

### 12. Fort Polk, La.

Headquarters and Headquarters Co.,  
1st Maneuver Enhancement Brigade  
519th Military Police Battalion  
204th Military Police Company  
46th Engineer Battalion  
178th Engineer Company  
687th Engineer Company  
337th Signal Company

SOURCE: 1ST MANEUVER ENHANCEMENT BRIGADE; MAP BY SPC. SHANE BRIDGER

itself, because that really is the easy part,” he said. “Instead we started out with the basics of getting load plans and vehicles ready before we even went out the door. We can go either 200 miles or 1,000 miles, and going that far in a military vehicle, they are susceptible to breaking down.”

Earlier this year, the 204th MP Company, part of Narcisse’s battalion, held an exercise in the JRTC training area where it established some facilities to replicate a tornado hitting the area. The exercise included role-players, simulated casualties and outside police agencies.

During the exercise, local law enforcement agencies took command of the scene, while the Soldiers assisted both law enforcement and the Red Cross in helping the families get to shelters and keep the community safe.

“One of the great things we have done so far is partnering with higher headquarters and all the key players,” Narcisse said. “When we started this, we really didn’t have a great understanding of the magnitude of what it takes to get us out the door. We have had to replicate moving the unit to an incident site and even replicated going to the Alexandria International Airport to have the U.S. Air Force put several of our vehicles on their aircraft. ... I have no doubt that if we are called out the door tomorrow, we could do it with our eyes closed.”

Narcisse said that along with the 204th MP Company, and soon the 272nd MP Company at Fort Polk, the battalion has three MP companies assigned to it — the 64th MP Company at Fort Hood, Texas; the 66th MP Company at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash.; and the 546th MP Company at Fort Stewart, Ga.

The Soldiers of the 204th

MP Company said they have learned how to be a part of a DCRF mission.

“We are used to being the ones [who] are in charge of the good order and discipline and law enforcement on a post,” said Sgt. 1st Class Jacob Hill, an operations NCO in the 204th MP Company. “Whenever an incident happens [on post], we are the people [who] normally take charge. However in [DCRF], we are the response force. When we get on-scene, whoever the incident commander is for that location — whether it is a police chief or a fire chief — we take direction from them. That is where our training comes in.”

That training helps the 204th MP Company conduct critical-site security, another DCRF function.

“Let’s say there is an area that is deemed to be critical in nature — a DoD site, a bank or a bulk fuel storage area for example — and we get assigned to that location,” Hill said. “We have to get away from aggressively engaging the civilian population and have to understand that we are not in charge; we are there to help. We have to take a less aggressive posture, because we are helping Americans.”

That hits home for Hill who recounted when a tornado hit his hometown in Kentucky in January 2000.

“I remember what it was like when we

had to help our neighbors. My dad and I pitched in, and it touches the heart to help your own,” Hill said. “Because they are Americans and you are an American, and that is what we do in America.”

Sgt. Brandon Smith a public affairs NCO with the 204th MP Company, agreed that helping Americans is a unique mission.

“DCRF is a completely different mindset than a combat environment,” he said. “It is kind of hard once you jump right into it, because for the last 10 years, we have been in the mindset [that] we have an enemy whereas now we are on our home soil, and we are helping our own.”

### Tech rescue

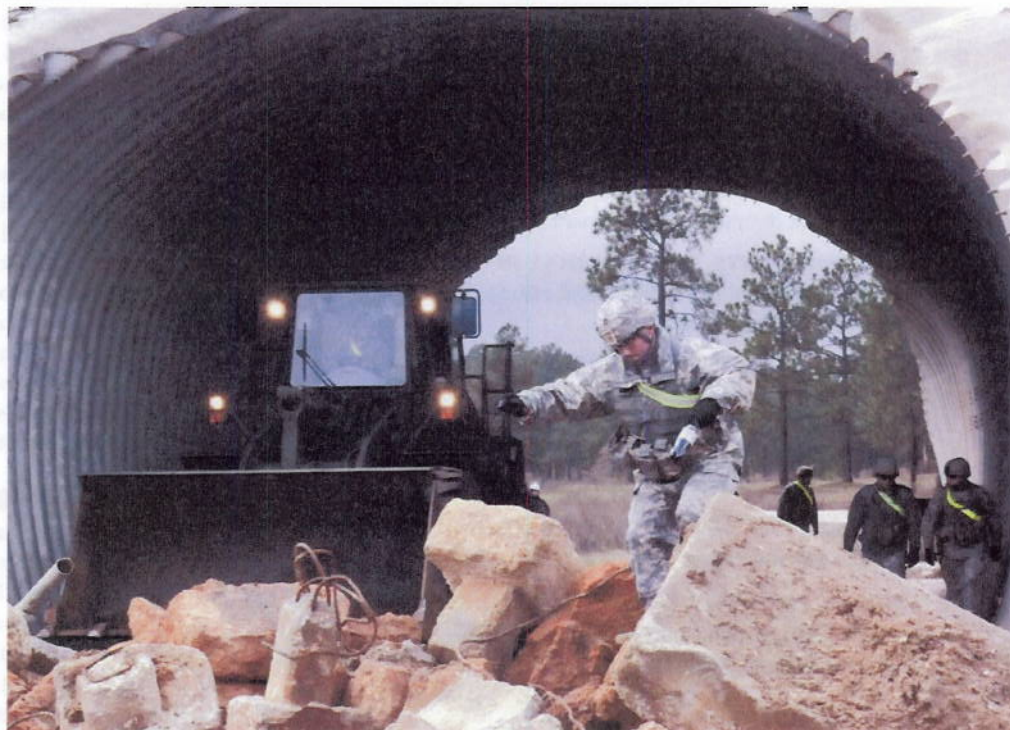
When disaster strikes, the Soldiers of the 46th Engineering Battalion, 1st MEB, are prepared to bring in the heavy equipment.

“We are a construction battalion, and we have the tech rescue company,” said Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Tate, an operations NCO in the 46th Engineer Battalion. “Tech rescue entails anything from shoring up buildings to helping in recovering of persons or casualties. Our teams specialize in cutting concrete, rappelling and assisting in search and rescue extractions.”

Tate said the 416th Engineer Battalion’s

Soldiers from 178th Engineer Company, 46th Engineering Battalion, 1st Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, perform rubble-removal training during a weeklong exercise in December at Fort Polk, La. The Soldiers used specialized equipment to remove rubble after a simulated earthquake.

PHOTO BY CAPT. MARTIN MEINERS



job is to work with the incident commanders in designing and developing what needs to be accomplished and then pushing it out to the units to execute. One such unit is the 178th Engineer Company. In the event there is a CBRNE disaster, the 178th Engineer Company has the resources and Soldiers who have been specially trained to tackle the toughest of environments.

"The tech rescue mission is about going into a hazardous environment where the normally qualified tech rescue people cannot go into," said Sgt. 1st Class Joshua Horton, a structural engineer with the 178th Engineer Company. "We go in, help rescue people and give the quickest assistance

we can to get out of that event so that our Soldiers are not exposed to that chemical agent or other biological-type agent."

The Soldiers of the 178th Engineer Company are specially trained to work with hazardous materials and in contaminated environments. Other units outside of the DCRF mission are not certified in hazmat operations, he said.

"We also have some additional training in that we can be exposed to 5 rads (an amount of absorbed radiation) a year. For everyone else, including the civilian side, they cannot be exposed to more than 2.5 rads a year," Horton said. "It's a safety factor, and it is all within the limits. But because we are certified to work in that

environment, we can be exposed to more."

With that special training, Horton said the company can respond to any disaster.

"We also work in confined spaces, which is any area that is not designed to be worked in on a regular basis, like an elevator shaft, a sewer or collapsed structures," Horton said. "The building or structure would be assessed, and then we would go in and shore it up and make sure nothing can move while we are in there."

As the first sergeant of the 178th Engineer Company, 1st Sgt. Jamie Cosey said he has learned a lot about the tech rescue mission since joining the unit in March.

"Tech rescue is probably the most important mission that this battalion has," Cosey said. "I know it is the most focused. We have other companies in the battalion that are DCRF-sourced, but none of them have the mission that we have. I have had the opportunity to observe their training and see them do their trench rescue, confined-space and rope training. It is a lot of hard work."

Cosey said that if a major disaster were to happen, his Soldiers would "play a vital role in getting in there, saving lives and getting people out of situations — keeping people out of harm's way."

To obtain many of the specialized skills needed to perform its mission, the unit trains at the Florida State Fire College in Ocala, Horton said. There, the engineers spend 70 days learning how to work in confined spaces, shore up buildings, work with concrete and wood, rappel and work in trenches.

"This really is a dangerous thing we do," Horton said. "But we do everything we can to eliminate the danger. That is why it is crucial for NCOs to know exactly what is going on and really know their stuff. It takes a lot of work to get to the victims. All it takes, especially in a confined space or a collapsed structure, is something to move, and everything starts crumbling all around you. So it is really crucial that they do everything right."

### Getting the job done

If it has to be moved, repaired or communicated, the units of the 88th Brigade Support Battalion provide the Soldiers and equipment to get the job done.

Part of Task Force-Logistics, the battalion's 41st Transportation Company has the role of getting equipment and supplies to

## THE CIVIL RESPONSE PROCESS

- 1. DISASTER OCCURS** A disaster of major consequence — including any involving chemical, biological, nuclear or high-yield explosive threats, or a major hurricane or earthquake — affects an area in the United States.
- 2. LOCAL FIRST RESPONDERS REACT** Local fire, police and emergency management teams respond to the event and determine the breadth of community impact.
- 3. CITY OR COUNTY REQUESTS STATE AID** The disaster is considered a major event; officials ask the governor for aid.
- 4. NATIONAL GUARD RESPONDS** The governor activates the National Guard, which responds with its assets, including its own CBRNE forces.
- 5. GOVERNOR REQUESTS A PRESIDENTIAL DISASTER DECLARATION** The disaster has consumed all the resources of the state's response force, and the situation is deemed beyond the state's capabilities to contain or mitigate.
- 6. PRESIDENT DECLARES A MAJOR DISASTER OR EMERGENCY** The president directs the Department of Homeland Security to respond.
- 7. DHS IMPLEMENTS THE NATIONAL RESPONSE FRAMEWORK** This is a tiered, scalable, flexible and adaptable national response effort through a unified command.
- 8. DHS REQUESTS DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE SUPPORT** U.S. Northern Command officials are notified of the need for disaster assistance, and they send out an initial warning order. Joint Task Force-Civil Support in turn sends out a warning order to DCRF's Task Force-Operations, and units begin preparing for mobilization.
- 9. SECRETARY OF DEFENSE AUTHORIZES DOD SUPPORT** JTF-CS issues movement orders.
- 10. JTF-CS RESPONDS WHEN DIRECTED** U.S. Northern Command notifies JTF-CS to respond with appropriate units — Task Force-Operations, -Logistics, -Aviation and -Medical.

Soldiers in the 204th Military Police Company, 519th Military Police Battalion, 1st Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, move mock casualties on a stretcher during a simulated mass-casualty evacuation in December at Fort Polk. PHOTO BY SGT. IDA IRBY

where DCRF units need them to function, and feed and care for their Soldiers.

"We pretty much load out the brigade, pick up [shipping containers], water tanks, and supplies," 1st Sgt. Robert Dodd said. "Whenever they are ready to go, we go get it from the different battalions, and then we move it to wherever we are going."

Training for the 41st Transportation Company is rather routine, Dodd said. But it gives his Soldiers an opportunity to get some "road time."

"It's an opportunity to get out and actually burn some diesel, and it gives the Soldiers an opportunity to be in highway convoys," Dodd said. "It also allows us an opportunity to see the NCOs in charge of convoys — actually going to pick up different stuff at different places and moving that stuff out, making sure the load is tied down properly, and obtaining lessons learned from it."

Dodd said the training is important because he has so many young NCOs. It gives them an opportunity to shine, learn from their mistakes and prevent accidents.

Keeping the fleet running is the job of the 546th Maintenance Company.

"My company provides three maintenance support teams that support the different entities within the DCRF mission," 1st Sgt. Curtis Johnson said. "Unless the vehicles are up to par, the DCRF mission doesn't go anywhere."

Johnson said the company conducts a quality assurance and quality control process on all of the 1st MEB DCRF vehicles to ensure they are roadworthy.

"We make certain there are no leaks, no transmission or engine issues, and we certify that each vehicle is capable of driving long distances," he said. "That is a possibility with the DCRF mission. These vehicles can leave Fort Polk and go to Texas, California, anywhere they are needed. So



we have to make sure they are ready to be put on the road."

Because his Soldiers have had an extensive history with many of the vehicles in the fleet, Johnson said, it would take only a few days for his maintenance support teams to certify the fleet for deployment.

"We have a lot of senior NCOs who have been doing this for a long time," Johnson said. "These guys can actually look at a vehicle and say what the problem will be because of their experience and history with these vehicles."

Nothing happens without communication, and the 337th Signal Company provides that vital link.

"We are the brigade's signal asset and provide voice and data communications as well as FM communications to tie into the civilian authorities, the first responders," said 1st Sgt. Everett Gardner, the 337th Signal Company's first sergeant. "[We] ensure that any communications that come down from the task force commander can be shared with other task force commanders as needed. This is what we do normally, so training for us is not that different."

Gardner said that his company ensures that their Soldiers are ready to help people affected by an incident who are displaced or in distress.

"We have teams that go out to remote sites, and if people see a military unit, they will go to it to seek assistance," he said.

"We are prepared to provide some first aid and what food and water we have."

### Standing at the ready

"The DCRF mission is one that we hope we never have to exercise," said Command Sgt. Maj. LaMarquis Knowles, command sergeant major of the JRTC and Fort Polk. "It is one of those contingencies that, when things like [Hurricane] Katrina or the earthquake in Japan [happens], that we hope is resourced, and we don't have to exercise it. But we are prepared to do so."

Like many of the Soldiers he has talked to, Knowles said the DCRF mission brings it home in a special way.

"Unlike going off to war, where success or failure will benefit another country, success or failure here will impact the United States, save lives, reduce suffering of our own and maybe [our] own family members," he said. "So I think our Soldiers are exceptionally happy to be a part of this, because they get to contribute to the success of their own country."

At the end of its two-year DCRF mission, the 1st MEB will hand over the reins in late 2013 to the 4th MEB at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo. It will have the new mission for two years before it returns to the 1st MEB. ♡

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