



## Editor's Note: Practice disconnection

BY BRADLEY PETERSON, EDITOR

When U.S. forces plunged into Iraq in 2003, chemical weapons were much on the minds of leaders and troops alike. Countless alerts sent privates and generals alike scrambling into bulky, hot MOPP suits. Yet the invasion forces rolled on, confident in their ability to fight through even this type of debilitating counterattack. Why?

Innumerable hours of NBC drills, performed to a training regimen honed over years — a deliberate and concerted effort to overcome an adverse condition of war — provided that confidence.

Over the past decade, U.S. forces have grown nearly as reliant on fast network connections as on breathable air. The defense of those networks has become a multibillion-dollar effort that has spawned new specialties, new acquisitions, and new commands.

Yet prudence demands that our fighting forces prepare for the minutes and hours and days (and weeks?) when the network dies, and such preparation has been sorely lacking. That's the contention of Army Lt. Col. Michael Lanham, an infantryman turned computer scientist, who argues that the U.S. needs to develop the kinds of battle drills for loss of connectivity that it did for chem-bio warfare.

If you don't want to take Lanham's word for it, perhaps you'll listen to Marine Corps Gen. James Mattis. Neither a Luddite nor a button-twiddler, "Mad Dog" Mattis drew a standing ovation a few years back when, as head of Joint Forces Command, he told a joint war-fighting conference that troops need to practice more "with the radios turned off."

"We must be able to operate when systems go down," Mattis said. "It is much more important for officers to get comfortable operating with uncertainty rather than to keep grasping for more certainty."

The general recalled just these sorts of drills during the Cold War, when units severed their wired radio links just so they could train incommunicado for a while.

"What are we creating today with our command-and-control systems?" Mattis said. "I don't think we have turned off our radios in the last eight years. What kind of systems are we creating where we depend on this connection to headquarters? While we want the most robust communications, we also want to make sure we can operate with none of it."

There's another potential advantage to training without the electronic safety net. Recall that in the 2002 Millennium Challenge exercise, retired Gen. Paul Van Riper (another Marine — coincidence?) outfought a networked joint force by, among other things, dispatching messengers on motorcycles. Unplugging for a while just might remind us that our adversaries have never forgotten that there is a different way to fight.

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