Protective Clothing Carrier

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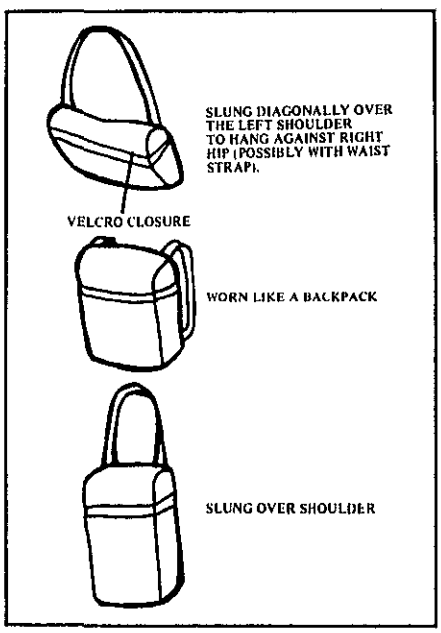
Chemical agents are the most psychologically devasting and physically horrible weapons known to mankind. Artillery-delivered chemical munitions can saturate a large area within seconds. To survive in a chemical environment, therefore, a soldier must have protection readily available. The required technology is on hand to provide this protection, and the equipment has been issued to units. Unfortunately, this equipment is often treated as just another item to be packed away in a rucksack and stashed back at the patrol base or stowed in a personnel carrier or truck until instructions are issued to increase MOPP (mission-oriented protective posture). If this attitude continues, we may find ourselves, as an army, caught with our "chemical" pants down in the opening battle of any future war.

All of us, as leaders, understand the need for chemical clothing, yet we allow our soldiers (and ourselves) to stand around or ride around on our simulated battlefields without protection from the very weapon the Soviet bloc nations diligently plan to employ.

When I was a mechanized infantry company commander, I felt at times that this was a deficiency in my unit's operational capability and survivability. On too many occasions, I saw the members of a squad, when ordered to suit up, dive to the bottom of a carrier to search for their rucksacks, and then to search again within the rucksack to find each of the required items of clothing. Valuable time was lost before they were able to don the protection they would need to stay alive and continue the mission.

One might say that the carrier should be better organized. But this is not always possible, considering that ten men ride and operate in a vehicle that has an interior space equal to that of a Volkswagen van. In a space already full of ammunition and equipment, each man may not always know where his own rucksack is in the pile.



The options currently available to a soldier are not totally satisfactory. Wearing the clothing all the time is, of course, not practical, especially during warm weather. Even when a new lightweight protective suit is fielded, constant wear would shorten its life significantly. And the rucksack, even the medium ALCE issued to most infantry units, is too bulky for a soldier to keep with him all the time. Besides, items other than the chemical gear must also be put in the rucksack.

Another option is for a soldier to carry a separate waterproof bag or even a laundry bag with the chemical clothing in it, but such a bag has obvious drawbacks as well, such as being bulky and difficult to carry.

In addition, dismounted or light infantry operations create numerous situations in which an infantryman must travel light — reconnaissance patrols, observation posts, and antitank ambushes, for example.

What is needed, then, is a small carrying bag made of lightweight cloth and similar in design to an enlarged ammunition bandolier. Several possible designs are shown in the accompanying illustration.

The protective mask itself is a standard and integral part of the field uniform in the Army today, but this is only one component of a system. Carrying it without the rest of the protective clothing is analogous to carrying a handset without a radio.

Chemical protective clothing must become as much a part of the field uniform as the protective mask is now if the soldier is to have the protection his overgarment was designed to give him.

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