

From Russia with love

A senior Russian Military Officer gives his opinions on the future of their CBRN defence forces as they reach their 90th birthday

THIS year represents 90 years since the formation of Russia's chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (RKHB) troops. Officially, the CBRN protection unit was formed on 13 November 1918, but military specialist chemists appeared in the Russian army during the First World War. From the summer of 1916, officers were placed in divisions known as "gas shields", while the regiments were completed by chemical and meteorological

observation for the command element, which defended against German gas attacks and trained personnel in the use of the simplest means of protection – anti-gas rag bandages and carbonic anti-gas Zelinskiy.

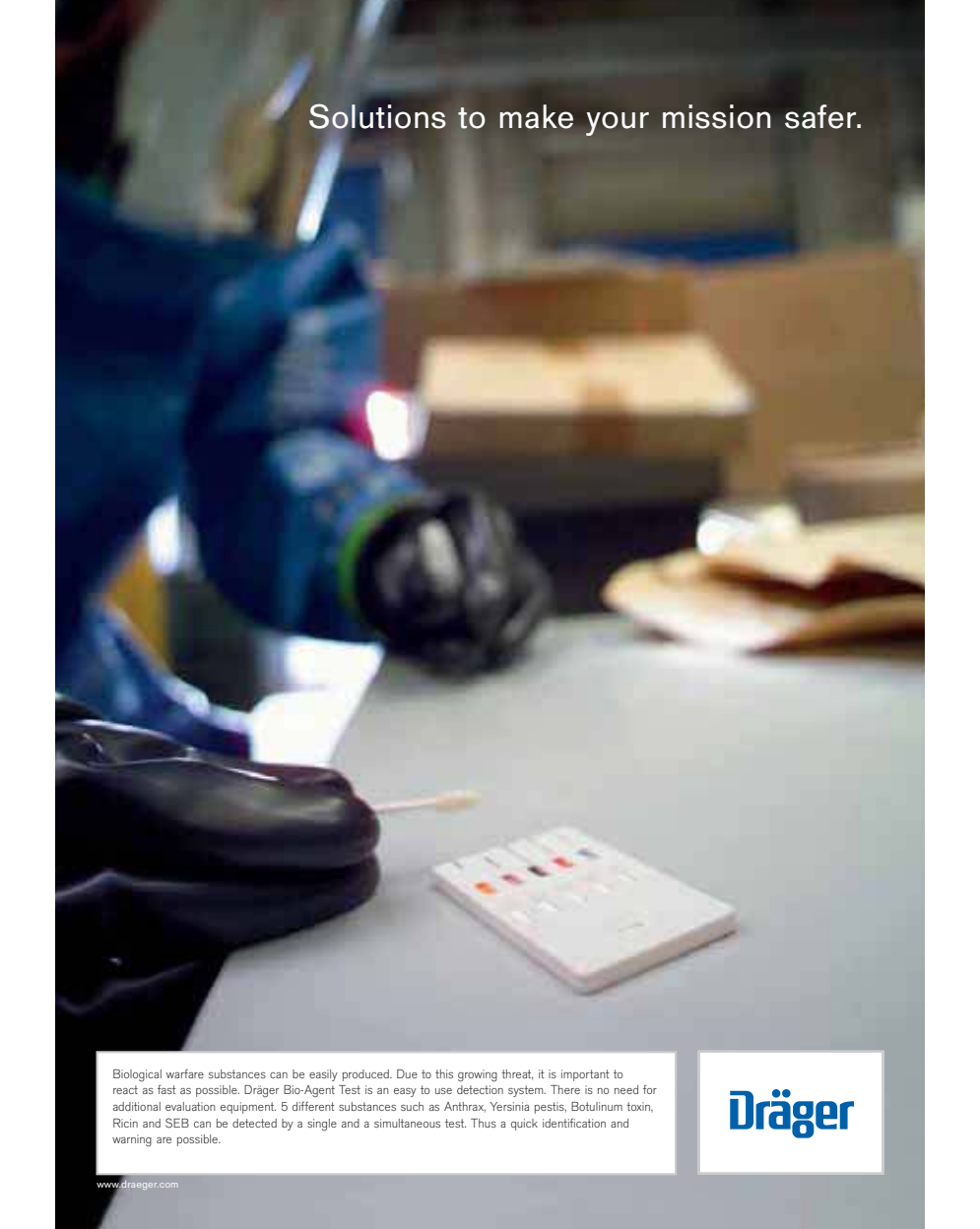
Views on the scale and the application of safeguard measures changed over time, which was reflected in the name. In 1921 "gas shield" became "chemical defense", in 1941 it became "chemical protection", and at the beginning of the Cold War, when

the USA and USSR began constructing nuclear weapons, it became "protection from weapons of mass destruction". Now this is "RKHB protection". Chemical troops found a variety of practical uses and underwent development during World War II. Specifically, during August 1944, chemical units were renamed to reflect their destination. The special multipurpose chemical protection battalions were expanded, with a very similar organisational structure to that



The Russian military continues to give great emphasis to CBRN ©DoD

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used today. They undertook the basic tasks of chemical troops of that time: chemical reconnaissance, setting the aerosol curtains around friendly troops and objects at the rear, and the defusing of live weapons.

Chemical troops accomplished large tasks in Afghanistan, where incendiary and aerosol ordnance were most effectively used. The experience in Afghanistan led to significant changes in the tactics of chemical troops and the improvement of their organisational structure. Many large-scale catastrophes and emergencies in the chemical industry and at atomic power plants gave impetus to the reconstruction of chemical troops. An enormous amount of hard work was carried out by the chemical troops during the operations surrounding the emergency at Chernobyl atomic power station (APS). It suffices to say that, of the 30,000 people who worked on the emergency operation, 44 per cent was made up of soldiers from the chemical troop. They had basic tasks: to evaluate the radiological situation; to monitor the radiation; deactivation and dust-suppression in the populated regions and on sections of road surrounding the APS; and also to provide troops with the instruments for radiation reconnaissance and monitoring, such as means of protection and decontamination solutions.

On the basis of the experience obtained during this operation and other emergencies, and in accordance with the government policy concerning radiological incidents, mobile subdivisions were added to the troops, equipped with tools for dealing with the most dangerous radiological incidents. During August 1992, the chemical troops were renamed the RKHB protection troops to reflect the expanding tasks they carry out. RKHB troops are intended to provide protection not only to troops but also to the population in cases of radiological, chemical and biological threats in peacetime. At present the RKHB system of protection can be subdivided into several interconnected subsystems. The first is the development and the evaluation of the RKHB situation; the second is the



Storm clouds lifting: Russia's military is coming out of the shadow of Soviet times ©DoD

guarantee to protect troops and vital command-and-control elements from damaging agents; the third is the obscure role – the reduction of the 'distinctness' of troops and objects from means of reconnaissance and guided weapons. The troops are ready to solve any of these problems. The scientific sections within the RKHB protection troops are on constant alert, ready to overcome the consequences of emergencies and catastrophes.

As a whole, the RKHB protection troop is a mixture of military units, higher educational institutions, scientific research establishments and bases for the production, repair and storage of armaments. RKHB task are undertaken by personnel who are highly qualified in the fields of technology and armaments, which makes it possible for them to accomplish the tasks entrusted on them. The RKHB brigades are located near APS, nuclear engineering facilities and industrial production sites. These brigades include subdivisions for RKHB observation in extraordinary

situations, especially in cases of industrial emergencies and natural catastrophes. The brigades also have subdivisions which are specialised in rescue operations and special treatment, as well as engineering subdivisions. They are considered mobile, and can be moved by air to any place at any time as they are located near airports which can take heavy aircraft.

The experience of contemporary armed conflicts gives grounds to assume the destruction (both accidental and intentional) by conventional armaments of industrial, energy, transport and other objects with different dangerous components is inevitable, with similar results to the release of a weapon of mass destruction. Therefore intensive combat training, goal-directed work on the expansion of military craftsmanship and the strengthening of morale-psychological state will guarantee the Russian Federation's RKHB troops will be able to deal with any problem which might occur.