

Chemical School Hosts Worldwide Communication Conference

By Ms. Allison Choike

Recently, the U.S. Army Chemical School (USACMLS) hosted a conference for chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) commandants and commanders. This conference enabled leaders to establish relationships and, most importantly, opened a line of worldwide communication and interaction among personnel from various nations.

More than 15 nations gathered in Panama City, Florida, 15–18 October 2007 to discuss CBRN issues—from learning about each nation’s force capabilities to recognizing rank and responsibility equivalents in each country. “[The conference] let everybody come together and gave them the opportunity to talk about whatever they wanted to talk about,” said Mr. Dale Chapman, USACMLS International Programs director.

Mr. Chapman said that school commandants from countries such as France, Germany, Poland, Bulgaria, and the Czech Republic spoke about doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, education, personnel, and facilities issues. “The key thing was communication between nations and also for commandants to meet their counterparts from other nations . . . we really achieved that. There was so much talk [and] discussion and [many] great briefings,” Mr. Chapman said.

Brigadier General Thomas Spoehr, USACMLS commandant, was thrilled to be a part of the international conference and said that he learned a lot from the other nations. With conference attendees being strictly limited to commandants and commanders, they were able to focus on each other and their jobs. “This conference was commandant- and commander-pure, so we could talk about what it is like to be a commandant in your country

and what it is like to command the chemical forces in your nation,” Brigadier General Spoehr said. Many of the nations realized that there are many similarities and differences in training. Some of the learning proved to be humbling. “In the CBRN world, there are some people with some good capabilities, like the Czech Republic. Ever since World War II, they have always taken a lot of pride and had a great ability. And they are ahead of us in some things. The U.S. takes a lot of pride, but we are not the top in everything. Some nations have pushed along further than we have, and we can learn from them.”

Mr. Chapman agreed with Brigadier General Spoehr, believing that the USACMLS left the conference with a lot of information that will help shape the future Army and Chemical Corps. “We came out of there with a vast amount of knowledge that we plan on passing on to the students in the Captain’s Career Course. The consolidated briefings will be used to help train the captains in the course on the different international capabilities and what they have to offer to the war fight,” Mr. Chapman said.

Brigadier General Spoehr and Mr. Chapman want the conferences to continue (and the Czech Republic agreed to host the conference in 2008). “It [the conference] has helped set the stage for everything in the years to come,” said Mr. Chapman. “This year was a great start to new relationships and lines of communication with other countries’ commandants. . . . I hope that it gets mission-related [topics] on what we are doing in the current fight and what we can do for the current War on Terrorism.” 

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