

# The Netherlands? What's Over There?

By Captain Shannon W. Shackelford

When I look back on my 18 years of Active Army service, I am reminded that I have had the opportunity to be a Dragon Soldier in a myriad of interesting and exciting places throughout the world. As an enlisted Soldier, I served overseas in Germany and Korea and had the pleasure and honor of being a member of the prestigious 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, Texas. Upon receiving a commission, I was assigned to the celebrated 1st Armored Division, 3d Brigade, Fort Riley, Kansas, and served in Baghdad, Iraq. I am **PROUD** to be a Chemical Soldier and have always been amazed at where and in what capacity Dragon Soldiers perform their duties.

In July of 2006, I began the Chemical Captains Career Course (CMC3) at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. A major topic of discussion among students outside of class was where we would like to be assigned upon completion of the course. As I thought about it, I realized that I was interested in returning to Europe but I was not sure what options were available. However, one day, the branch manager visited and showed us the list of open slots. There was one position in Europe that needed to be filled—a position at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Joint Forces Command (JFC) Brunssum, the Netherlands. As I looked at the list, I thought to myself, “The Netherlands? What’s over there?” Soon, I found that I was not the only student interested in that position; two of my classmates were also interested. I made my wishes known to the branch manager and, fortunately, was selected for the slot. After completing CMC3, I elected to stay at Fort Leonard Wood to obtain a master’s degree in environmental management before heading to my new assignment.

Upon my arrival at JFC Brunssum, I was hit with questions about what I had learned at CMC3 and about topics covered in the master’s program. I was asked how to contain and dispose of various chemicals

and how to manage and remediate small hazardous-materials (HAZMAT) spills. This job was going to be a challenge!

My official job is to serve as the chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN)/force protection officer for a NATO JFC Headquarters Support Group (HSG) with a worldwide deployment contingency mission. I am responsible for all aspects of CBRN operations and force protection for JFC Brunssum and outlying areas. Every member of the 26-nation NATO alliance is represented on the JFC Brunssum installation. It is sometimes difficult to keep up with the multitude of diverse uniforms encountered on any given day! As the CBRN officer, I work with three lieutenant colonels of three different nationalities (American, Belgian, and German) in the Operations and Training (S3) Section of the HSG. I handle CBRN plans, training, equipment maintenance, and evaluations for the JFC and Static War Headquarters (located in Germany). As the force protection officer (and the HSG intelligence officer [S2]), I work with international military police and fire and rescue teams to ensure that proper procedures are followed and to alleviate procedural conflicts in the event of a terrorist attack or natural disaster.

Working in an international NATO headquarters organization is challenging. At times, achieving expectations can be difficult. One significant obstacle is the language barrier. Although English is the primary language spoken in NATO facilities, it is sometimes difficult for host nation employees and authorities to understand precise explanations about how a task is to be executed. A second obstacle is the false sense of security experienced by many citizens and personnel. Inhabitants of the Netherlands simply do not view the country as a target for terrorist activity. When I inquired about the lack of an installation standing operating procedure (SOP) or

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**Brigadier General William Terpeluk speaking at the inactivation ceremony**

After the cessation of major combat operations on 1 June 2003, the brigade was reassigned as part of the Iraq Survey Group (ISG), a Presidentially directed, joint, multinational, interagency organization charged with unveiling the truth about Iraqi WMD programs and the fate of Navy Captain Michael Speicher, who had been missing in action since Operation Desert Storm. Other functions performed by the brigade included taking garrison command of Camp Slayer, Iraq; providing convoy escort security and decontamination support for various WMD teams operating in Iraq; and manning positions in the ISG Survey Operations Center, Sector

Control Point–Baghdad, and Central Media Processing Center. The 455th Chemical Brigade operated in conjunction with the 450th Chemical Battalion (which was mobilized from Houston, Texas) to carry out much of this work.

Elements of the Pennsylvania Army National Guard and Kansas Army National Guard assumed responsibility of Camp Slayer and the ISG in April 2004, and the 455th Chemical Brigade returned from deployment on 28 April 2004. Despite involvement in combat operations, the unit suffered no casualties. The brigade was released from active duty and returned to reserve status on 1 July 2004.

After returning from Iraq, the brigade continued to train—focusing on the Army Reserve homeland defense mission and the mobilization of other brigade Soldiers and units for deployment overseas. One brigade Soldier killed in action, Sergeant Jose Velez, was fatally wounded on 8 June 2006 during the deployment of the 773d Transportation Company. As part of the ongoing Army modernization initiative and transition to a modular force, the 455th Chemical Brigade was selected for inactivation no later than 2011. However, due to Army Reserve restructuring initiatives, the unit was inactivated in 2007.

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CBRN training program, the initial response was, “You’re in the Netherlands—that won’t happen here.” After much discussion, negotiation, and persuasion, I am finally developing an SOP and CBRN plan for JFC Brunssum. I have also begun building an early-response team to respond to any incident that occurs at JFC Brunssum. The team will be comprised of American, Belgian, British, and German soldiers who will work alongside host nation authorities in the event of an attack or chemical spill. Although it has been quite an undertaking, this approach will result in a unified team that follows a plan which incorporates contributions from each nation represented.

The position of CBRN/force protection officer for a NATO JFC HSG is very demanding, but the experience

and opportunities that the job affords (including the opportunity to visit other European countries during downtime) more than outweigh the occasional aggravations. In this position, I work hard but I also get to play hard. In the end, I consider myself extremely lucky to have secured this assignment.

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