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# Leadership Opportunities for CBRN Officers— Within and Outside Skill Sets

*By Captain John Busuego*

Local, state, and federal agencies and foreign governments are becoming more aware and concerned about their ability to respond to events involving weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Civil authorities routinely turn to the military for expertise and assistance with WMD issues because military personnel receive the best available chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) defense and consequence management training. And because the U.S. Army Chemical Corps leads the Army's effort to address homeland security and the threat of WMD, CBRN officers have the tools and skills necessary to deal with these WMD issues. The various units that provide expanded leadership opportunities within the Chemical Corps are identified in this article. In addition, the article describes how versatile CBRN officers might also be suited for leadership positions outside the CBRN world.

Due to the pervasive nature of CBRN threats and the accompanying need for CBRN defense, CBRN officers have the opportunity to contribute to the fight at the tactical and strategic levels. Chemical units at division and corps levels play vital roles in CBRN defense, ranging from providing protection for key seaports and power projection facilities to defending and protecting tactical warfighting units on the battlefield.<sup>1</sup>

Many changes in the availability of leadership positions for CBRN officers have taken place, primarily due to the force structure change and the establishment of units that support the CBRN missions of defense and WMD mitigation.

For example, the 20th Support Command (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and High-Yield Explosives [CBRNE]) was established at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, on 16 October 2004. The mission of the 20th Support Command is to integrate, coordinate, deploy, and provide trained and ready CBRNE forces. The 20th is a rapid, robust response force that exercises command and control of specialized CBRNE operations to support Army and joint force commanders—primarily in overseas contingencies and warfighting operations, but also in the area of homeland defense. The 20th also maintains technical links with appropriate Army, federal, state, and joint CBRNE assets and the research, development, and technical communities to ensure CBRNE response readiness.<sup>2</sup> The establishment of the 20th Support Command has expanded leadership roles and responsibilities within the Chemical Corps. And because the previous commandant of the U.S. Army CBRN School is now the commander of the 20th, the vision of the Chemical

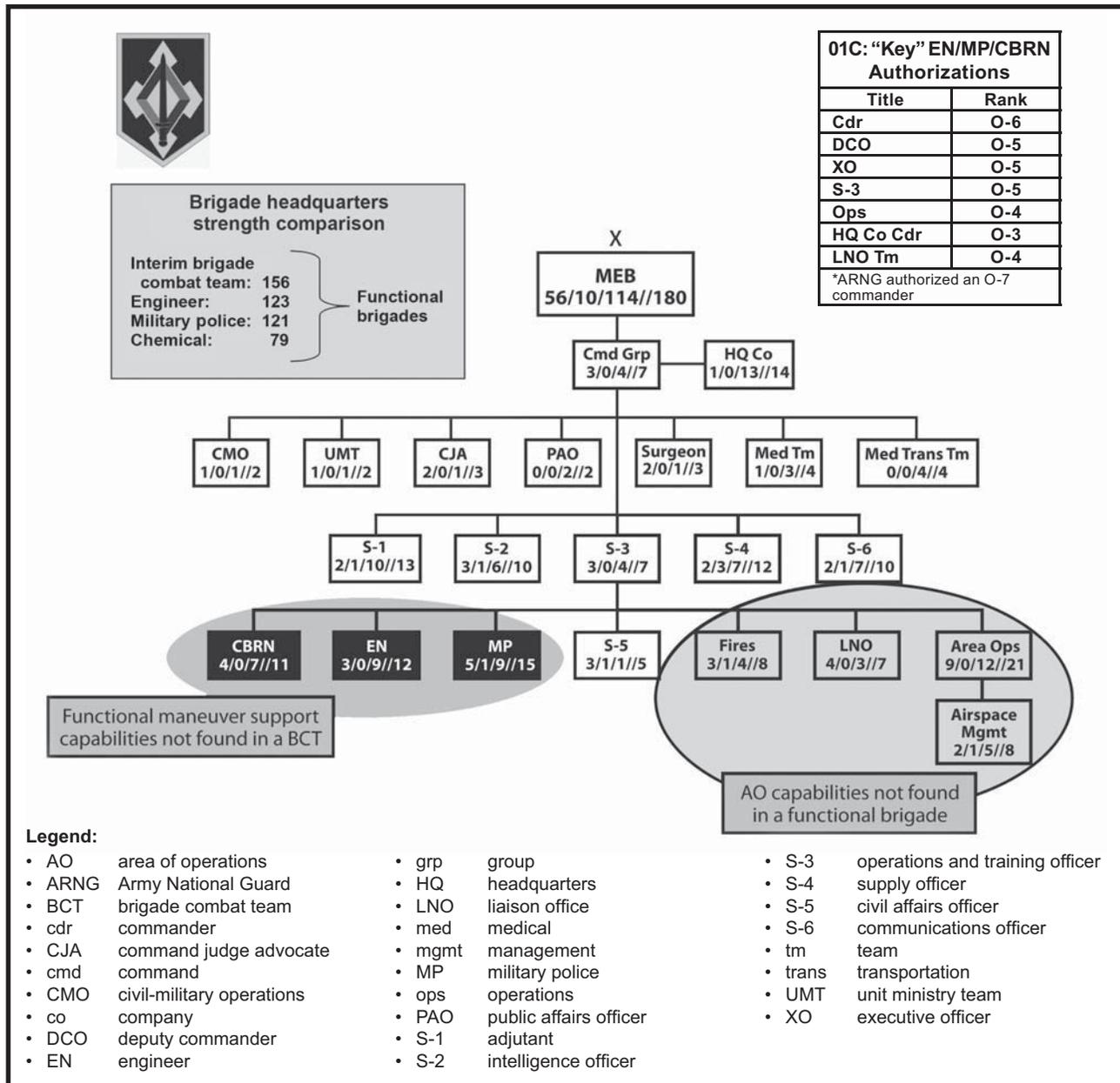
Corps is now a reality for pioneers of the Chemical Branch. This inevitably opens doors for CBRN officers who continue to broaden their professional military education.

Another unit that has been established is the maneuver enhancement brigade (MEB), which was designed to be joint (to operate with coalition or joint forces, such as the Marine Corps) and structured to command chemical, military police, engineer, and civil affairs units.<sup>3</sup> Available MEB positions are shown in the chart on page 18. A CBRN staff section provides an added functional maneuver support capability that does not exist in a brigade combat team. There are currently four MEBs in the Active Army: 1st MEB, Fort Polk, Louisiana; 2d MEB, Fort Drum, New York; 3d MEB, Fort Richardson, Alaska; and 4th MEB, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

Finally, on 16 September 2007, the 48th Chemical Brigade was activated at Fort Hood, Texas, and designated as the CBRN brigade to provide combatant commanders and government agencies with the ability to counter CBRNE threats. The 48th Chemical Brigade and its subordinate units provide additional CBRN-relevant company/field grade level officer leadership opportunities.

Although the Chemical Branch is focused primarily on training and warfighting operations in support of CBRN defense, smoke employment, and programs that protect the civilian population and military forces against WMD, it is also a branch of diversity, opportunity, and challenge. CBRN officers hold various jobs and perform various duties, including those of platoon leader, company executive officer, battalion/brigade staff officer, and company commander—and not necessarily within CBRN-specific units. Many junior CBRN officers acquire different skill sets through experiences gained by filling positions in infantry, armor, special forces, and aviation battalions; chemical companies; Stryker brigade combat teams; or brigade combat team reconnaissance platoons.

Most lieutenants who complete the Basic Officer Leader's Course head to units where CBRN defense and training are not priorities. However, the proximity of junior officers to primary staff and the command group affords junior officers the opportunity to excel at the most basic staff functions. After successfully "grinding" as the operations and training officer (S-3) "jack-of-all trades," CBRN officers who aspire to serve in leadership positions may become platoon/patrol leaders or be assigned to primary warfighting function positions.



Source: Williams and Crider<sup>4</sup>

### MEB staff organization

It is important that officers hold a variety of positions—whether staff functions or “green tab” leadership positions—to gain the experience and flexibility necessary to command positions that oversee other branches and agencies. The skill sets learned and the leadership qualities gained from a spectrum of experience make for flexible, resilient, adaptable leaders who will carry on the CBRN mission and maintain the established homeland security partnerships.

### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup>“Enlisted and Officer Opportunities in the Chemical Corps,” U.S. Army Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear School Web site, <[http://www.wood.army.mil/wood\\_cms/usacbrns.shtml](http://www.wood.army.mil/wood_cms/usacbrns.shtml)>, accessed on 9 March 2011.

<sup>2</sup>U.S. Army 20th Support Command Web site, <<http://www.cbrne.army.mil/leadership.htm>>, accessed on 9 March 2011.

<sup>3</sup>Charles A. Williams and Joe Crider, “Maneuver Enhancement Brigade,” *Army Chemical Review*, Summer 2009.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

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