

# Alternatives for the Distribution of CBRN Soldiers in an HBCT

*By Captain Rush Williams*

There are a limited number of Chemical Corps jobs that are actually sought by Soldiers. These jobs (which are strictly chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear [CBRN] in nature) allow Soldiers to demonstrate their abilities within the CBRN realm. One of the reasons that these jobs are so attractive is that they include opportunities for additional schooling and interaction with other Chemical Corps personnel. However, I believe that a more significant reason these jobs are so highly desired is the lack of respect and opportunity associated with a large number of other CBRN slots—such as those within heavy brigade combat teams (HBCTs).

Several Soldiers with a 74-series military occupational specialty are assigned to an HBCT, but only a few are assigned to the HBCT chemical reconnaissance platoon. The rest fill company level CBRN slots or serve as battalion CBRN noncommissioned officers in various staff positions. While these are technically CBRN slots, there is no CBRN-related work associated with most of these positions. Rather, a significant number of them involve working as company level training room personnel, in battalion tactical operations centers, or in other required capacities. And, given the lack of CBRN work within the HBCT mission, commanders are not easily convinced that CBRN training is necessary.

The current method of HBCT slotting is actually harming the Chemical Corps for several reasons. First, it requires that Soldiers spend several years at a post in which they receive little to no CBRN training and they experience little to no interaction with other CBRN Soldiers. Secondly, the lack of respect for the jobs and abilities of CBRN Soldiers within the HBCT causes many to harbor feelings of animosity toward the Chemical Corps and the Army. Lastly, the fact that the Chemical Corps appears to be doing little about the problem reinforces the belief of many CBRN Soldiers that the Chemical Corps doesn't really care about them all that much. Fortunately, there are several easy courses of action that would allow HBCTs to retain the present number of authorized Soldiers, but at the same time, positively impact the HBCT and the Chemical Corps. These courses of action would allow CBRN Soldiers to interact with other CBRN Soldiers, and they would provide for better training and education of CBRN Soldiers.

## **Course of Action 1**

The first possible course of action involves designating one E-7 as the brigade CBRN noncommissioned officer

and consolidating the other HBCT CBRN Soldiers into one platoon. Given the size, the platoon could perform multiple functions, focusing on reconnaissance and decontamination. The brigade would contain the same number of CBRN Soldiers and would have the same reconnaissance assets that it currently possesses, but decontamination capabilities would be added. In addition, a unified platoon would allow CBRN Soldiers to receive noncommissioned officer-led training, resulting in a better-trained Chemical Corps. Furthermore, it would foster a tightly knit Chemical Corps by promoting a sense of belonging among CBRN Soldiers.

This course of action could also spawn several subcourses of action. The Soldiers could be tasked to serve on sensitive-site assessment or sensitive-site exploitation teams. Or they could be used as a large security element. While their use as a large security element may not have a significant positive impact on the Chemical Corps like the other two subcourses of action, simply keeping the CBRN Soldiers together in one platoon would improve their chances of obtaining CBRN training, which in turn, would further serve to bring the Chemical Corps together. And, more importantly, the HBCT commander would possess a significant new asset.

Regardless of how the platoon were to be used, CBRN Soldiers would be more valuable if they were consolidated, rather than spread throughout the HBCT.

**Disadvantages:** The unified platoon would be extremely large and semi-inflexible. Furthermore, because the HBCT would lose CBRN Soldiers at the lowest level, changes would need to be made to the current HBCT task organization. Finally, the HBCT would have an additional platoon to do with as it may—which could actually be worse for CBRN Soldiers, as they could potentially end up performing tasks even further removed from the CBRN arena.

## **Course of Action 2**

A second possible course of action involves consolidating the HBCT CBRN Soldiers into one platoon and sending them out to various units to perform required tasks. This is similar to the process already in place for several types of platoons (including medic, fire, and maintenance platoons) in the HBCT combined arms battalion. Under this course of action, the current HBCT task organization would remain essentially the same. No changes would be required in the way that companies operate within the HBCT, and CBRN

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Soldiers would be allowed at the lowest levels within maneuver elements. Many of the same Chemical Corps improvements that would be realized under the first possible course of action would also be realized under this one.

Given that the platoon would consist of CBRN Soldiers, platoon members would enjoy a much greater sense of belonging. They would generally be able to train as a unit. And under this course of action, CBRN Soldiers would do the same work within the HBCT and—at the same time—provide the HBCT commander with an additional asset. If necessary, the HBCT commander would also be able to use the consolidated platoon for alternate tasks—with very little impact on the HBCT companies.

**Disadvantages:** This course of action would provide the HBCT with a legitimate means of denying CBRN Soldiers the opportunity to perform CBRN jobs. In addition, although organized together, the platoon would still be separated; therefore, some of the benefits of unit cohesion would diminish.

### **Course of Action 3**

A third possible course of action involves consolidating the HBCT CBRN Soldiers into two separate platoons. In addition to the same training and cohesion benefits described under the first two courses of action, this course of action would offer the Chemical Corps additional platoon

leader and platoon sergeant slots. This, in turn, would allow the further development of Chemical Corps leadership. Under this course of action, one of the platoons could focus on reconnaissance and the other could focus on decontamination. This would offer the HBCT commander additional flexibility by providing two, smaller consolidated units with which to do as he pleased.

**Disadvantages:** The creation of two platoons, as opposed to one, would result in less unit cohesion for CBRN Soldiers. In addition, it would also be much easier for the commander to use the smaller units for any desired purpose—even if that purpose is not CBRN-related.

### **Conclusion**

It is clear that the consolidation of CBRN Soldiers within the HBCT would be good for the Chemical Corps and the HBCT commander. Of the possible courses of action presented, I believe that the first is the best choice for the Chemical Corps. However, I believe that the second is the best choice for the HBCT commander; the second would also likely be the easiest to “sell” to the Army. The benefits of better training, greater flexibility, and improved unit cohesion greatly outweigh any manpower loss at the lowest levels. Therefore, the HBCT CBRN Soldiers should somehow be consolidated. 

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*At the time this article was written, Captain Williams was a student in the CBRN Captain's Career Course at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.*