



20th SUPCOM (CBRNE) on the Road to Full Operational Capability

By Major Joseph Scrocca

Over the past four years, the U.S. Army has transformed to a more flexible, more deployable, and more lethal modular Army. Two of the most monumental changes affecting the Chemical Corps were the activation of the 48th Chemical Brigade in September 2007 and the continued growth and development of the 20th Support Command (SUPCOM) (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and High-Yield Explosives [CBRNE]).

During Operations Liberty Focus II and Agoge Focus II, conducted at Fort Hood, Texas, 14–17 September 2008, the 48th Chemical Brigade, 20th SUPCOM, demonstrated the ability to command and control the full spectrum of specialized CBRNE forces and capabilities in one of the largest CBRNE exercises ever conducted. In addition, the brigade continued to develop and refine the CBRNE battalion task force (TF) and company team concepts and exercise and amend logistical requirements for the brigade TF.

The magnitude of this exercise cannot be overstated. The 20th SUPCOM Headquarters and its partner, the Joint Elimination and Coordination Element, participated in the massive CBRNE operation, serving as the joint task force for the elimination of weapons of mass destruction (JTF-E).

The 48th Chemical Brigade comprised TF 48 of the JTF-E, conducting command and control of battalion TFs that consisted of elements from the 2d, 22d (Technical Escort [TE]), 23d, 83d, and 110th (TE) Chemical Battalions; 79th Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Battalion; and seven Chemical companies. The 180th Transportation Battalion served as the brigade combat sustainment support battalion. In addition, the 20th SUPCOM Nuclear Disablement Team (NDT) and two weapons of mass destruction coordination elements (WMD-CEs) served as advisors to the JTF-E and ground commanders on

weapons of mass destruction elimination (WMD-E) issues and procedures.

As part of Operation Liberty Focus II, the JTF-E conducted a mission readiness exercise during a final major operational rehearsal prior to the full operational capability (FOC) validation in 2009. The 20th SUPCOM has already achieved many key organizational and operational milestones on the road to FOC.

The 20th SUPCOM was activated at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, in October 2004. The 52d Ordnance Group (EOD), its five EOD battalions, and the 22d Chemical Battalion were assigned to the new headquarters. The mission was to provide an operational headquarters for command and control of Army CBRNE operations and to serve as the primary Army force provider of specialized CBRNE capabilities.



Soldiers from the 48th Chemical Brigade clear a bunker during Operation Liberty Focus II.

In June 2005, the 71st Ordnance Group (EOD) was activated at Fort Carson, Colorado. By June 2006, three new EOD battalions had been assigned to the 71st Ordnance Group and the 110th Chemical Battalion had been activated at Fort Lewis, Washington.

The 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review required further alterations to 20th SUPCOM structure, organization, manning, and equipment to meet the new requirement to stand up and serve as the headquarters for the JTF-E. The establishment of the CBRNE Analytical and Remediation Activity (with four remediation response teams, multiple mobile exploitation laboratories, and an aviation section) in May 2007 marked a key milestone in the command's ability to provide the Army with the full spectrum of specialized CBRNE forces and capabilities. The first major operational milestone was the August 2007 demonstration of the initial operational capability, which was validated during Operation Ulchi Focus Lens, Korea. The final major organizational component was completed in September 2007 when the 48th Chemical Brigade was activated and assumed command of three Chemical battalions and the TE units.



Soldiers from the 48th Chemical Brigade conduct decontamination during Operation Liberty Focus II.

Further contributing to the array of CBRNE forces and capabilities at its disposal, the 20th SUPCOM activated an NDT to counter radiological and nuclear threats and conduct nuclear disablement operations. (Another NDT is scheduled to stand up in 2009.) The command also established four WMD-CEs to coordinate CBRNE response efforts with major operational commands on the battlefield. (Two more WMD-CEs are scheduled to stand up in 2009.)

In addition to these internal assets, the 20th SUPCOM assumed operational control of the U.S. Army Reserve Consequence Management Unit in 2008 and has training readiness authority for the Army Reserve 111th EOD Group. Future force structure realignments include the scheduled incorporation of the 1st and 9th Area Medical Laboratories and the assignment of the Asymmetric Warfare Group in 2009.

The 20th SUPCOM continues to look to the future. During Operation Liberty Focus II, the command conducted exercises and continued to test and refine the CBRNE brigade, battalion, company, and team concepts that combine the reconnaissance, smoke, decontamination, and biological detection capabilities of traditional Chemical units with the capabilities of EOD units. The flexible capabilities of this unique force mixture have already been proven in TE units and will continue to be refined and improved, resulting in the most capable counter-CBRNE and WMD-E capability in the world.

The final milestone on the road to FOC for the 20th SUPCOM is a demonstration of the command's ability to serve as the combined joint TF headquarters for WMD-E, scheduled for Spring 2009 at Operation Key Resolve, Korea. ●●●

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