

Purple Dragons: Should the Chemical Corps Become Joint?

By Colonel Robert D. Walk



As military operations become more joint in nature, the following questions naturally arise: Should certain branches of each Service be severed from their parent Services to become “purple” branches? Should a joint service be created to handle functions that are required by all Services—functions such as supply, movement, security, engineering, finance, information, legal, missile defense, intelligence, human resources, acquisition, protection, communications, and health? Should the chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) defense mission be unified as a joint branch? This article examines that possibility through a discussion of doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, and facilities (DOTMLPF)—beginning with personnel since everything stems from the basic Soldier, Sailor, Airman, or Marine.

Personnel

The Army has the largest number of uniformed personnel tasked with the CBRN defense mission, totaling at least 22,000 across the Regular Army and Reserve Components. It is the only Service with a separate branch specifically designated for the job. The military occupational specialty (MOS) for Soldiers is 74D (CBRN specialist), and the area of concentration for officers is 74A (CBRN, general). The MOS for warrant officers (due to be added in 2010) has not yet been designated. The vision of the U.S. Army Chemical Corps is: “A Corps and Army capable now of countering the entire range of CBRN threats and effects to protect our Nation, operating seamlessly with military and civilian partners, while conducting simultaneous operations from civil support to war.” CBRN personnel may work in the area of traditional CBRN defense; or they may perform reconnaissance, technical escort, smoke, decontamination, or special forces CBRN duties. National Guard personnel may also perform civil support team duties.

There is no pure CBRN specialty in the Navy. Enlisted CBRN capabilities are covered under Navy Enlisted Classification 9598 (disaster preparedness operations and training specialist). These specialists focus on preparing for major accidents, natural or manmade disasters, and CBRN operations. Officer specialties, which fall under the “security and police” group of the “sciences and services” field, include Navy Officer Billet Classification (NOBC) 2715 (disaster preparedness officer) and NOBC 2765 (nuclear, biological, and chemical [NBC] defense officer).

The corresponding Air Force specialty is 3E9X1 (emergency management specialist). As the duty title indicates, these specialists are not purely CBRN specialists, but are expected to cover all aspects of emergency management.

The corresponding enlisted Marine specialty is 5711 (CBRN defense specialist), and the warrant officer specialty is 5702 (CBRN defense officer). There is no CBRN specialty for commissioned officers. The duties of Marine enlisted personnel and warrant officers are roughly analogous to those of Army Soldiers and officers. Marines are assigned to traditional CBRN defense duties as well as CBRN reconnaissance, technical escort, and chemical-biological incident response force duties. Warrant officers are drawn from the enlisted ranks, with sergeants and above who have 8 to 16 years of service eligible to apply. Marine CBRN warrant officers have an outstanding reputation.

Doctrine

For the most part, CBRN doctrine is already joint in nature. Twenty-one of the twenty-three CBRN doctrinal elements have been jointly approved. The remaining elements are Service-specific, addressing issues such as platoon operations. However, there are some areas of disagreement among the Services—most notably a disagreement between the Army and Air Force regarding the fate of chemical contamination on buildings and the ground.

Organization

There are three major organizations at the joint level that work on overall CBRN defense operations, and their capabilities overlap somewhat:

- Joint Requirements Office for CBRN Defense develops requirements based on Service and combatant command needs.
- Joint Program Executive Office for Chemical and Biological Defense develops materiel capabilities to meet those requirements.
- Defense Threat Reduction Agency provides intellectual, technical, and operational capabilities to meet the needs of the warfighter.

Operational-level joint task forces (JTFs) include the joint task force–civil support (JTF-CS), Fort Monroe, Virginia, and the 20th Support Command (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and High-Yield Explosives [CBRNE])—an Army unit prepared to serve as a JTF for CBRNE. The focus of the JTF-CS is domestic, while that of the 20th Support Command is primarily overseas—although subordinate units and capabilities of the 20th also support JTF-CS. Additional JTFs include U.S. Northern Command JTF–Consequence Management (East) and JTF–Consequence Management (West), which are on call for consequence management operations. Finally, each state and U.S. territory has a National Guard weapons of mass destruction–civil support team; several states also have a CBRNE enhanced response force package. These state level response elements include Army and Air National Guard personnel.

Of the Services, the Army has the largest units (up to brigade-size) focused on CBRN operations. There is one large Marine unit with a CBRN mission—the mighty Chemical-Biological Incident Response Force located at Indianhead, Maryland. The next largest CBRN Marine units are platoon-size. Neither the Navy nor the Air Force has any dedicated assets above the team level.

Training

All Service schools are colocated—but not necessarily integrated—at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. The most integrated CBRN training takes place at the Chemical Defense Training Facility, where instructors from each Service are specifically assigned for use by their respective Services, but where they end up working and training together. Some integrated training also occurs at the First Lieutenant Terry CBRN Weapons of Mass Destruction Response Training Facility, where Army and Air Force hazmat classes are conducted by the same instructors. In addition, all Army and Air Force weapons of mass destruction–civil support team training is integrated and some Navy and Marine personnel occasionally join the classes.

The Army has the most focused CBRN schoolhouse—the U.S. Army Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear School (USACBRNS). All CBRN MOS training and many

other CBRN courses are conducted at USACBRNS. Some of the USACBRNS offerings include Operational Radiation Safety, Joint Senior Leader, Fox Scout (Additional Skill Identifier [ASI] L5), NBC Reconnaissance (ASIL6), Biological Detection Systems (ASIL4), CBRN Responder, Mass Casualty Decontamination, Technical Escort (ASI L3), Dismounted Reconnaissance, and Civil Support Skills Courses.

Navy disaster preparedness operations and training specialists and officers attend their own Disaster Preparedness Operations Specialist Course and Shipboard Chemical, Biological, and Radiological Defense Operations and Training Specialist Course at Fort Leonard Wood.

Air Force emergency management specialists also attend training at Fort Leonard Wood. Their training includes Emergency Management Apprentice, Craftsman, Advanced Emergency Management, Flight Officer, and NBC Cell Operations Courses.

All Marine CBRN defense specialists and officers receive training at the Marine CBRN Training and Education Center of Excellence, Fort Leonard Wood. In addition, Marines also attend the Army CBRN Captain’s Career Course, Biological Integrated Detection System Course, Fox Scout Course, and various courses held at the First Lieutenant Terry Facility.

Materiel

The Army is the executive agent for the CBRN Defense Program. The Joint Program Executive Office for Chemical and Biological Defense is responsible for the research, development, acquisition, fielding, and life cycle support of CBRN defense equipment, medical countermeasures, and installation and force protection in support of *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America*.¹ Although some Service-only operations are included (such as smoke operations for the Army), the program is mostly joint in nature.

Leadership and Education

The most advanced Army CBRN-specific courses are the CBRN Senior Leader’s Course for noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and the CBRN Captain’s Career Course for officers. There are also some CBRN-focused electives available to officers attending Army Intermediate Level Education or the Army War College. Marine warrant officers often attend the Army CBRN Captain’s Career Course. There is no CBRN-specific course for Navy senior NCOs or officers. The Advanced Emergency Management Course serves as the Air Force senior leader’s course for NCOs, but there is no professional development course for officers since they are considered generalists rather than CBRN specialists. Because senior leaders must have some knowledge of the use and hazards of CBRN and how it can affect the Nation’s strategic aims, all intermediate and senior level Service schools include some form of curriculum insert or elective that covers the strategic impact of CBRN. All Services welcome attendance and participation from members of other Services as long as space permits.

Resident and distributed learning CBRN courses are also available to members of all Services. In addition, CBRN topics are addressed in Joint Professional Military Education, Phase II, and included in the course capstone exercise, ensuring that CBRN hazards are viewed from a joint perspective.

Facilities

As previously stated, all Service schools are colocated—but not necessarily integrated—at Fort Leonard Wood. Each Service maintains its own facilities for its own training. Most integrated training takes place at the Chemical Defense Training Facility or the First Lieutenant Terry Facility. There are no purely CBRN-focused facilities for senior level education courses, and joint courses are conducted at available facilities.

Discussion

While the idea of a truly joint service branch is laudable, it is unlikely. It would require the creation of an entire joint personnel system, which would be infeasible for just the CBRN force structure. However, if all of the personnel/medical/financial/logistical structure were included, the resultant joint force might be of sufficient size to justify its creation. Another point to consider, though, is that Navy and Air Force CBRN personnel perform more than just CBRN operations; therefore, their extraction from the pool of trained Service specialists would be problematic for their respective Services. A third problem with the creation of a joint Service branch is that, during this time of constrained budgets, the cost of creating a new, “purple” branch from scratch would be incredible. It would divert large amounts of money from other more or less worthy programs. Consequently, without concurrence from all Services, the possibility of a joint service branch remains impractical for now.

A (slightly) better alternative might be to combine all Service capabilities into one service, such as the Army. This would make the CBRN vision pertaining to a “. . . Corps and Army . . .” somewhat more appropriate than it is now. Alas, the unforgiving budget process causes individual Services to be less likely to provide support to the other Services. And the problem with extracting Navy and Air Force CBRN personnel from the pool of trained Service specialists would remain. Therefore, this solution is also impractical.

Path Forward

Ultimately, continuing along the current path—with each Service primarily supporting itself—is best for now.

Terminology can be standardized so that all CBRN personnel speak a common “CBRN tongue” and can train and interoperate jointly. This will improve the ability of the Department of Defense to carry out its duties to the Nation.

Jointness should be promoted through common training at the CBRN specialty training center. Where appropriate, common skills should be taught by joint instructors through joint classes. A great first step would be to combine the new Army CBRN warrant officer technical training with the Marine CBRN defense officer training program, adding “green” training as needed. Further, Army students in training for MOS 74D might share classroom space with Navy 9598 personnel, Air Force 3E9 personnel, or Marine 5700-series personnel. All Services could benefit from such cooperation; as a result, every aspect of DOTMLPF could be improved. Imagine a world where CBRN personnel from the various Services know each other and speak a common language!

The Chemical Corps Regimental Association (CCRA) might also be used to break down barriers between the Services and encourage cross-service cooperation. While the CCRA is open to all Services, it is clearly geared toward the Army. A thorough rewrite of the CCRA bylaws, making the organization less Army-focused and more joint-oriented, might attract members from other Services. The broader CCRA customer base resulting from such a transition would benefit the CCRA and the military in general. A representative from each Service could also be appointed to the board of directors. And, the color of the CBRN dragon could be changed from green (the “Army color”) to purple to signify jointness. A specifically joint CCRA award (possibly named the “Order of the Purple Dragon”) could even be established.

Remember . . . a Purple Dragon is made, not born! Let us make the first Purple Dragons! 

Endnote:

¹*The National Military Strategy of the United States of America: A Strategy for Today; A Vision for Tomorrow*, Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2004.

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