

Do We Need a CBRN Operations Warrant Officer Corps?

By Colonel Robert Walk and Chief Warrant Officer Two Charles McKnight

The Army warrant officer is a “self-aware and adaptive technical expert, combat leader, trainer, and advisor. Through progressive levels of expertise in assignments, training, and education, the WO administers, manages, maintains, operates, and integrates Army systems and equipment across the full range of Army operations. Warrant officers are innovative integrators of emerging technologies, dynamic teachers, confident warfighters, and developers of specialized teams of soldiers. They support a wide range of Army missions throughout their careers.”

—Department of the Army Pamphlet (DA Pam) 600-3

The U.S. Army Chemical Corps is a combat support branch that provides the Army with highly trained chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) experts. But it is also a technical branch in that officers are needed as technical experts on CBRN hazards and operations. Currently, the Corps is composed of officers, noncommissioned officers (NCOs), and enlisted Soldiers. There are not, nor have there ever been, warrant officers in the Chemical Corps. This article explains the duties of the warrant officer and discusses the benefits and costs associated with creating a CBRN Warrant Officer branch.

Chemical Officers, NCOs, and Enlisted Soldiers

The Army warrant officer is a technical expert on the use and maintenance of Army systems. So why have we never had warrant officers in the Chemical Corps? In the early days of the Chemical Warfare Service (CWS), most Chemical Officers had a degree in chemistry. Personnel were recruited for their laboratory skills. There was little perceived need in the CWS for warrant officers other than the maintenance warrant officers in the chemical mortar battalions. At the time, no one expected warrant officers, NCOs, or enlisted Soldiers to have the same background as officers.

Chemical Corps officer, NCO, and enlisted Soldier positions have been reclassified as CBRN positions. As we move farther into the new century, Dragon Soldiers must become more knowledgeable in hazardous material (HAZMAT) operations to fully support the combatant commander. These Soldiers will contribute

a value-added function; that is, they will be able to find and/or mitigate industrial hazards in the theater of operations. Chemical platoons will be hazard response ready—capable of conducting HAZMAT reconnaissance missions, traditional CBRN missions, and mass-casualty decontamination operations. And these new duties call for an entirely new skill set. The knowledge of detection and decontamination equipment will no longer be limited to the reasonably straightforward improved chemical-agent monitor (ICAM) and M22 Automatic Chemical-Agent Alarm (ACADA). Chemical Corps personnel will be required to perform HAZMAT operations using self-contained breathing apparatus units, fully encapsulating

Army warrant officers “possess a high degree of specialization in a particular field in contrast to the more general assignment pattern of other commissioned officers. Warrant officers command aircraft, maritime vessels, special units, and task organized operational elements. In a wide variety of units and headquarters specialties, warrants provide quality advice, counsel, and solutions to support their unit or organization. They operate, maintain, administer, and manage the Army’s equipment, support activities, and technical systems. Warrant officers are competent and confident warriors, innovative integrators of emerging technologies, dynamic teachers, and developers of specialized teams of Soldiers. Their extensive professional experience and technical knowledge qualifies warrant officers as invaluable role models and mentors for junior officers and NCOs.”

—Field Manual (FM) 6-22

Chemical Officers must be “technically proficient with branch and mission-unique equipment, tools, and systems. Chemical mission success requires the proper balance between technical skills and the ability to understand and apply the appropriate tactical skills at the right moment. These skills must be gained and developed through repetitive operational assignments and continuous professional study and self-development. Chemical officers must not only know their own unique branch skills, tactics, techniques, procedures, and specialized equipment; but they must also know the uniqueness of the units to which they are assigned or are supporting.”

—DA Pam 600-3

protection equipment, and detection equipment. In this role, Dragon Soldiers will provide assistance to civilians, first responders, other services, and other nationalities.

Emerging Equipment

There are 24 manuals that cover HAZMAT command and control operations. A recent review and update of an Army Reserve battalion hand receipt, performed by the U.S. Army Reserve Command, reflects the changes in emerging equipment related to increased HAZMAT operations (see *gray box*, right). The items listed are just a few of the items needed by the CBRN Soldier. Each detection kit is for a different hazard, so Soldiers must be experts on a variety of equipment types. With the increased mission load and specialized requirements, the need for nonstandard certification increases.

As the Chemical Corps makes the transition to a more technical branch, we must focus energy on developing technical specialists trained to operate CBRN equipment and expert trainers prepared to train and certify Corps Soldiers. From a larger perspective, officer training is becoming more generalized, but technology continues to march forward—creating an increased need for technical specialists.

Branch Outlook

As the Army transitions to the future force concept, the Chemical officer as we know it will disappear. The first change: eliminating the need for branch insignia on uniforms. All officers attend the same basic leadership training (Basic Officer Leader Course [BOLC] I and II). While BOLC III remains branch-specific, it will transition to common materiel, particularly with our brethren schools (Military Police and Engineer) at the Maneuver Support Center, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. The Chemical officer is in danger of losing his specialized training as he is transformed into a military pentathlete.

If Chemical Corps Officers lose their specialized training, what will happen to Chemical NCOs? NCO leadership training is also transitioning to common skill levels. More and more, leadership, the common military decision-making process, and computer training are interfering with the technical training requirements of Chemical NCOs. We have some outstanding technical NCOs in the Corps and in the Army, but how do you tell the difference between the technically gifted and the technically challenged? At the NCO level, you can't. You can pretty much figure that lieutenants are busy learning

The emerging equipment listed on an Army Reserve battalion hand receipt included—

- A consequence assessment tool set.
- An F-350 prime mover vehicle with a 35-foot HAZMAT trailer.
- A Cascade Systems multibottle cylinder set (6,000 pounds per square inch) with a booster and a refill station.
- A portable, public-address system.
- Personal-protection systems, including—
 - Level A, B, and C mission-oriented protective posture (MOPP) gear.
 - Powered, air-purifying respirators.
 - Self-contained breathing apparatus units.
 - QUESTemp° Series heat stress monitors.
 - Disposable coveralls.
 - Cooling vests.
 - Respirator and Silver Shield® gloves.

For detection operations during HAZMAT operations, the hand receipt included—

- Draeger HAZMAT and civil defense kits.
- An International Organization of Standardization (ISO) 9001 sampling kit.
- AN/VDR-2, AN/PDR-77, and AN/UDR-13 radiac sets.
- ICAMs.
- ACADAs.
- Chemical-agent monitor simulators (CAMSIMs).
- HAPSITE® portable, gas chromatograph and mass spectrometer units.
- BioCapture® air sampler units.
- HAZMAT identification systems.

To extract and transport casualties during HAZMAT operations, the hand receipt included—

- Patient litters.
- HAZMAT Decontaminable Sked® stretchers.
- Multipurpose carts.

their trade, but by the time they become experts in their field, they are promoted and trained in general leadership roles to fill higher-level positions. With a Soldier who wears the rank of a warrant officer, you have the balance of validated equipment expertise, technical skills, and leadership ability.

CBRN Warrant Officer Authorizations

We need CBRN warrant officers. We need leaders who are experts in platoon level CBRN operations and who know the limitations of their equipment. The Chemical Corps needs them, the Army needs them, and the Nation needs them! And as tragic or dramatic as it may seem, our families need them to provide protection from the threats in our world today.

CBRN specialists will “conduct CBRN reconnaissance and surveillance; perform decontamination operations; conduct obscuration operations; conduct CBRN sensitive site exploitation; and operate and perform operator maintenance on assigned CBRN defense and individual CBRN protective equipment. Additionally, in non-chemical units, the CBRN NCO plan, conduct and evaluate individual and collective CBRN training, and provide technical advice on all CBRN operations and hazards for company and higher-level organizations. Duties for MOS 74D at each level of skill are:

(1) MOSC 74D10. Perform as a team member in support of CBRN reconnaissance, surveillance, detection, decontamination and obscuration operations; serve as company CBRN specialist.

(2) MOSC 74D20. Supervise CBRN reconnaissance and surveillance, detection, decontamination and obscuration operations; serve as company CBRN NCO.

(3) MOSC 74D30. Lead CBRN reconnaissance, decontamination and obscuration squads, and biological detection teams; serve as battalion CBRN NCO who supervise and train company level CBRN NCOs/specialists and inspect company level CBRN readiness.

(4) MOSC 74D40. Supervise CBRN reconnaissance and surveillance, detection, decontamination, and obscuration platoons; manage operations of a chemical company; serve as the CBRN staff advisor at battalion level and higher who supervise and train subordinate level CBRN NCOs/specialists and inspect subordinate unit CBRN readiness.

(5) MOSC 74D50. Serve as first sergeant, MSGs, and SGMs; provide staff supervision; coordinate, supervise and conduct group, division, Corps and Army level CBRN operations.”

—DA Pam 611-21

Revision found at <<https://perscomnd04.army.mil/MOSMARTBK.nsf/>>

In the Army, trade-offs must be made when a change in force structure is needed. In this case, given the no-growth policy in personnel for the Chemical Corps, we can expect to lose officer slots to gain warrant officer slots. Since a significant portion of lieutenants in the Corps are in branch-detailed positions and will be lost in two years, there is an easy answer: Replace some or all branch-detailed, lieutenant positions with warrant officer positions and, therefore, replace a known loss with a career Soldier. Of course, this is easier said than done due to the shortage that will be created in other branches down the road. But the option should be considered.

Where would warrant officers be authorized? In a perfect scenario, they would be authorized where CBRN expertise is needed: overseeing equipment in technical escort battalions; conducting covert operations with Special Forces Chemical reconnaissance detachments; operating labs in National Guard units with weapons of mass destruction–civil support teams (WMD-CSTs); training and certifying Soldiers at the U.S. Army Chemical School, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, or in the field; and supervising the use and maintenance of domestic-response equipment at Reserve Chemical companies and National Guard CBRNE enhanced-response force units. Unfortunately, the scenario is not perfect. The authorizations would have to come from current officer slots. Positions to consider for conversions might include one officer position per company, one or two positions per technical escort battalion, and one lieutenant position per battalion. Also, consideration should be given to adding one position to the table of distribution and allowances for WMD-CSTs.

The Trade-Off Consideration

What officer authorizations is the Corps willing to sacrifice? We would lose intelligent, hard-working Chemical officers. Though we value these officers, we acknowledge that they are known losses to the Corps when they finish their branch detail and return to their basic branch. What would we gain from Chemical Warrant Officer authorizations? We would gain Soldiers who will lead and specialize in CBRN operations and training. We would provide our enlisted Dragon Soldiers with an alternative career path than that of the traditional NCO. The optimal warrant officer candidate would be a Chemical Soldier with 8 to 10 years of experience in mid-level NCO positions. Some college level education would be beneficial, although it would not be required. To minimize additional training requirements, Soldiers with technical backgrounds would be preferred.

Conclusion

This article has outlined how the warrant officer and the Chemical Soldier can be combined to create the CBRN warrant officer. The decision to create a CBRN Warrant Officer is a major undertaking—one that requires in-depth study. This article is not based on an in-depth study, but merely submits some thoughts for consideration. With changes ongoing in the Army, all bets are off. Our leadership should consider all alternatives. Will there be warrant officers in the future Chemical Corps? 🗨️

References:

- FM 6-22, *Army Leadership*, 12 October 2006.
- DA Pam 600-3, *Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management*, 28 December 2005.
- DA Pam 611-21, *Military Occupational Classification and Structure*, 22 January 2007.

Proposed CBRN Warrant Officer Description

The CBRN Warrant Officer is a self-aware and adaptive CBRN expert, combat leader, trainer, training certifier, and advisor. Through progressive levels of expertise in assignments, training, and education, the warrant officer administers, manages, maintains, operates, and integrates CBRN systems and equipment across the full spectrum of Army CBRN operations. Warrant officers are innovative integrators of emerging technologies, dynamic teachers, confident warfighters, strict training compliance certifiers, and developers of specialized CBRN teams of Soldiers.

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