

CBRN Transformation in the IBCT: Too Little Too Late?

By Major Jason G. Anderson

BCTs [brigade combat teams] are the Army's basic tactical maneuver units, [sic] and the smallest combined arms units that can be committed independently. BCTs are designed to conduct offensive, defensive, and SO [special operations]. Their core mission is to close with the enemy by means of fire and maneuver to destroy or capture enemy forces, [sic] or to repel their attacks by fire, close combat, and counterattack.

—Field Manual (FM) 3-90.6

The infantry brigade combat team (IBCT) was meant to be an independent fighting team with all the assets necessary to support victory. FM 3-11 states that “Current US [sic] policy is to deter enemy NBC [nuclear, biological, and chemical] use through a strong nuclear force and conventional capabilities that include counterforce, active and passive defense, and consequence management to enable US [sic] forces to survive, fight, and win in an NBC environment.” However, as the Chemical Corps combines assets to become a truly joint corps, we are directly opposing the intent of the IBCT. During the transformation process, IBCTs have been denied necessary force protection and chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) assets. Light IBCTs were allotted eight-Soldier “platoons” with conventional CBRN equipment and two lightweight, unarmored, high-mobility, multipurpose, wheeled vehicles (HMMWVs) for transportation. To enable IBCTs to win the current fight—and the next one—improvements need to be made in the CBRN reconnaissance section of the brigade special troops battalion (BSTB) and other CBRN assets must be fielded immediately.

Reconnaissance—whether conventional or CBRN in nature—is one of the fundamental tools of a commander. Prior to Army transformation, divisional Chemical company support to a brigade was determined by an assessment conducted by the commander in conjunction with the division Chemical staff. Light divisions included a company with three dual-purpose (smoke and decontamination) platoons that obtained reconnaissance support from corps Chemical companies. Heavy divisions contained a reconnaissance platoon (usually with six nuclear, biological, and chemical reconnaissance vehicles [NBCRVs]), a mechanized smoke platoon, and three decontamination platoons. The reconnaissance platoon was designed to be easily broken into squad configurations (generally consisting of six to eight Soldiers and two

vehicles), as Fox platoons normally operate in squad arrangements.

Although the current IBCT reconnaissance “platoon” manning is confusing, placing one of these reconnaissance squads in each IBCT was the logical way to proceed—even if the appropriate equipment was not available. However, considering the current improvised explosive device (IED) threat, small, eight-Soldier, dismounted, CBRN reconnaissance teams with HMMWV variants provide little value to an IBCT commander. According to the Joint Program Executive Office Chemical and Biological Defense Web site,¹ the Joint NBC Reconnaissance System Increment 2 (JNBCRS 2) continues to be negotiated and procured. Although this system may include the Marine light armored vehicle variant, the Army (specifically, the Chemical Corps) should push for a mine-resistant, ambush-protected (MRAP) variant. This would improve force protection and allow the CBRN platoon to access priority targets without additional security support from already overtasked maneuver elements. An MRAP vehicle, or even a Stryker, could easily solve the problem of force protection and vehicle capability. But what about other equipment, training, and the personnel capability of the CBRN reconnaissance platoon?

If commercial, off-the-shelf (COTS) equipment is available, it should become a permanent part of the platoon equipment package. Unfortunately, the current CBRN reconnaissance platoon vehicles (HMMWVs) do not provide enough storage or space for COTS equipment or occupants of the vehicle. Furthermore, training on COTS equipment is not always readily available. Consequently, COTS equipment may remain in container express, causing the platoon to lack the basic knowledge or understanding of potential new capabilities.

The CBRN reconnaissance platoon should also maintain a Level A personal protective equipment (PPE)

capability (including fully encapsulated suits with self-contained breathing apparatuses), which would allow the IBCT to immediately perform an initial assessment and more accurately describe the situation to higher headquarters. Our current enemies are not using weapon grade CBRN agents but, rather, toxic industrial chemicals and toxic industrial materials (TIMs), which are equally deadly. For example, nitric acid is one of the ingredients used in homemade explosives. According to the National Institute of Safety and Health (NIOSH), nitric acid has an immediate danger to life and health level of 25 parts per million (ppm), based on the development of pulmonary edema at exposures of 100–150 ppm for ½ hour to 1 hour. In 2007, it became apparent that extremists in Iraq were willing to use large, vehicle-borne IEDs laden with chlorine to assert their commitment to unsophisticated weapons of mass destruction. For these reasons, Level A PPE capability is appropriate for CBRN reconnaissance platoons.

The Army funds specialized CBRN training for Soldiers at all levels. The U.S. Army CBRN School increasingly recognizes training issues and constantly improves programs of instruction (POIs). Now, IBCT commanders must allow all members of the CBRN reconnaissance platoon to become qualified technical escorts (TEs) (with the additional skill identifier J5). The additional schooling, which must be approved at the unit level, provides intense training on high-level CBRN problems and solutions. Such training would allow the CBRN reconnaissance platoon to share common knowledge and understanding in the event of an overextended TE team.

While improvements in the type of platoon vehicles used will enhance force protection and additional equipment and training will increase the capability of the CBRN reconnaissance platoon, a crew of only eight Soldiers is inadequate. According to FM 3-20.96, “In the IBCT, CBRN reconnaissance assets are organic to the HHC [headquarters and headquarters company] of the BSTB. Equipped with two HMMWVs and composed of eight Soldiers, this CBRN reconnaissance platoon has the primary responsibility of establishing a CBRN cell that can track all the CBRN action on the battlefield. The platoon is not used to conduct CBRN reconnaissance.”

Did I read that right? Why in the world would we fail to use the CBRN reconnaissance assets for the intended purpose—reconnaissance? And why would we have the CBRN reconnaissance platoon track battlefield assets—the job of the brigade CBRN team? FM 3-20.96 indicates

that heavy brigade combat teams (HBCTs) and Stryker brigade combat teams (SBCTs) have more Soldiers and assets with which to conduct full CBRN reconnaissance. The assumption is that, as the NBCRV replaces the Fox, HBCTs will gain two additional Soldiers, bringing the total to twelve—which is also the SBCT manning requirement. A twelve-Soldier, specialized “platoon” allows for increased opportunity for rotation during long missions. Furthermore, the additional four Soldiers (above the eight IBCT CBRN reconnaissance platoon Soldiers), along with equipment support from the HHC BSTB, may allow for internal platoon decontamination.

The IBCT CBRN reconnaissance platoon has a long way to go to become a truly effective asset. The platoon is certainly needed on the modern battlefield, but additional equipment, training, and Soldiers are required. Training can be locally increased by working with base fire departments and using chain teaching methods (transferring knowledge from one Soldier/noncommissioned officer to

another). However, equipment and additional Soldiers can only be procured through changes to the modified table of organization and equipment, which can take time. As we transform our Army and our Corps, every CBRN reconnaissance platoon should be transformed into a viable asset for the commander—especially the IBCT commander.

Endnote:

¹“Joint Program Executive Office for Chemical and Biological Defense,” <<http://www.jpeocbd.osd.mil>>, accessed on 26 March 2008.

References:

- “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” 3d Infantry Division (Mechanized) after-action report, Fort Stewart, Georgia, June–July 2003.
- FM 3-11, *Multiservice Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Defense Operations*, 10 March 2003.
- FM 3-20.96, *Reconnaissance Squadron*, 20 September 2006.
- FM 3-90.6, *The Brigade Combat Team*, 4 August 2006.
- FM 3-90.61, *The Brigade Special Troops Battalion*, 22 December 2006.
- “NIOSH Pocket Guide to Chemical Hazards,” Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, NIOSH Publication Number 2005-149, September 2005.

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Editor's note: "The doctrinal mission statement for the IBCT CBRN Reconnaissance Platoon (Light) is to provide dismounted CBRN reconnaissance to the infantry brigade combat team in order to protect the force across full spectrum operations. Organizational mission sets include 1) Dismounted CBRN Reconnaissance, 2) CBRN Site Assessment Operations, 3) Hazardous Materials Mitigation Support, and 4) CBRN Consequence Management Support." (FM 3-11.6, Multiservice Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Aspects of Command and Control, DRAFT).

The JNBCRS 2 (HMMWV) variant is not under development for use in the U.S. Army. In 2004, the program was restructured using a dismounted concept to address three areas: sensitive-site assessment, hazardous-site assessment, and enhanced dismounted CBRN reconnaissance. Studies are underway to address future tactical vehicle requirements. The tactical vehicle that is selected to replace the HMMWV is the vehicle that will provide this light capability. The heavy requirement is being addressed by a CBRN variant to the Stryker family (NBCRV).

The JNBCRS 2 program is partitioned into three phases. In Phase I, COTS and government off-the-shelf detection and protection equipment will be fielded in a package that addresses the joint urgent needs requirement to detect and protect against TIM such as nitric acid. Phase I will include new equipment training to support fielding and changes in institutional training to address the new capabilities. The POI for the training is under development. In the meantime, the CBRN School has been providing mobile training team support to the units receiving the Phase I equipment. In Phase II, capabilities will be formalized with a full-featured training and logistics package that will replace Phase I equipment. The equipment will be packaged in modular containers. Improved technologies and added capabilities unique to each service will be introduced in Phase III. They will be configured in a modular package organized as a set, kit, or outfit. This approach is intended to provide a flexible, tailorable package that can be upgraded as more capable equipment options become available.

German Liaison Team Honored

By Colonel Robert Walk

On 26 March 2008, Brigadier General Thomas W. Spoehr, Commandant of the U.S. Army Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear School (USACBRNS) and Chief of the Chemical Corps, presented the German liaison team of Lieutenant Colonel Fabian Bosse and Sergeant Major Uwe Leiner with Orders of the Dragon for their efforts while assigned to the U.S. Army Maneuver Support Center (MANSCEN) and Fort Leonard Wood (Missouri). Lieutenant Colonel Bosse and Sergeant Major Leiner are members of the Atomare, Biologische, und Chemische (ABC)-Abwehrtruppe—the German equivalent of the Chemical Corps. This was the first time that the MANSCEN German liaison team had been composed solely of ABC-Abwehrtruppe Soldiers.

Lieutenant Colonel Bosse, who was assigned to this position in 2005, worked on high-level issues between the schools. He departed on 31 March 2008, returning to Germany for his next assignment with the German equivalent of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command.

Sergeant Major Leiner has worked extensively with trainees at the Chemical Defense Training Facility, Basic Officer Leadership Course, Chemical Captains Career Course, Basic Noncommissioned Officers Course, and Advanced Noncommissioned Officers Course—introducing them to the German Army and, most importantly, the German Army proficiency badge. Sergeant Major Leiner will depart this spring to attend the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas. 



Brigadier General Spoehr presents the Order of the Dragon to Sergeant Major Leiner (left) and Lieutenant Colonel Bosse (right).

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