

Spartans Make Their Home in Texas

By Mrs. Cathy Kropp

They call themselves “Spartans.” “As the Spartans of the past, we too are trained and ready to respond when our Nation calls,” said Colonel Vance P. Visser, commander of the 48th Chemical Brigade.

The 48th Chemical Brigade was activated in September 2007, marking the first time since World War I that a brigade level headquarters has been available to command and control Chemical forces in support of a war. Headquartered at Fort Hood, Texas, these modern-day Spartans consist of nearly 2,800 chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) Soldiers in 5 battalions, with 27 operational companies spread out across 9 military installations.

While fully supporting operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the brigade is simultaneously preparing to demonstrate its initial operational capability during a September 2008 exercise. And the brigade may experience additional growth and reorganization in the future, as it supports the overall modularization of the Army and the revolutionary transformation of chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high-yield explosives (CBRNE) assets.

As part of the overall modularization of the Army, the 20th Support Command (CBRNE) (the higher headquarters for the 48th Chemical Brigade) is

initiating a comprehensive review of its subordinate Chemical and explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) organizations and evaluating strategies that combine CBRN and EOD capabilities within standardized, multicable, expeditionary CBRNE brigades and battalions. This valuable mix has already proven effective in the 48th Chemical Brigade technical escort (TE) battalions.

Of the five battalions in the brigade, two are TE battalions. These battalions are designed to quickly mitigate or eliminate CBRNE hazards at home and overseas. TE battalion assets are strategically responsive and rapidly deployable. They can also be tailored to a specific mission. Each specially trained and equipped CBRNE response team can detect, sample, and monitor CBRN hazards. The teams can mitigate initial hazards, package hazardous materials for transport, decontaminate themselves and their equipment, and escort transported packages. They can also render unexploded ordnance safe and, when necessary, disable or eliminate CBRNE hazards or production facilities. The analysis, munitions assessment, and CBRNE advice provided by the TE battalions are invaluable to the supported decision makers.

The remaining three conventional Chemical battalions are outfitted

with various arrays of specialized reconnaissance, smoke, Biological Integrated Detection System (BIDS), or decontamination companies to support the operational force. The primary mission of these conventional units is to improve the survivability and mobility of ground forces.

Using CBRNE vehicles and equipment (such as Fox and Stryker CBRN reconnaissance vehicles), reconnaissance units are able to detect, identify, and mark areas of chemical and radiological contamination. Reconnaissance units also collect and transport air, water, and ground samples to identify nuclear, biological, and chemical contamination and convey real-time, detailed hazard information to supported commanders.

Smoke units are employed to protect assembly areas and other high-priority targets and to increase the maneuver time for friendly



BIDS



Fox CBRN reconnaissance vehicle

forces. With equipment such as M56 and M58 Smoke Generation Systems, smoke units can generate vast amounts of obscurants to create camouflage or decoys or to counter new-generation smart weapons.

The BIDS consists of biological detection, identification, and sampling equipment. BIDS units are capable of detecting biological attacks, providing presumptive identification of biological agents, and producing samples for detailed laboratory analysis.

The work of decontamination units allows for the return of units to

the field for combat operations. With decontamination equipment such as the M12A1 and M17, vehicles can be decontaminated rapidly and returned to the fight. Decontamination units are undergoing a significant modernization, which will enable them to conduct hazard response operations.

Impressive equipment and technology are not the sole indicators of success. As Colonel Visser points out, “Humans are more important than hardware, quality is better than quantity, CBRNE forces cannot be mass-produced, and competent CBRNE forces cannot be created after emergencies occur.”

With a full-time focus on countering CBRNE threats at home and abroad, the Spartans of the 48th Chemical Brigade are using lessons learned in today’s operations to combat the weapons of mass destruction and CBRNE threats of tomorrow.

“We stand ready with sharp swords and polished shields to deploy



Stryker CBRN reconnaissance vehicle

on short notice anywhere in the world to provide CBRNE support to protect the Nation,” said Visser. “Spartans, leading to victory!”

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(“Homemade Explosives and Hazardous Materials” continued from page 32)

environmental hazards presented by the emergency disposal of HMEs. Increased training and awareness will ensure the continued safe mitigation of explosive hazards and proper site turnover to HAZMAT personnel for final clearance.

Most likely, the number and complexity of HMEs will grow as we win the war against the supply of conventional ordnance used in improvised explosive device construction. The education, training, and protection of all personnel involved in the search and reduction process can only enhance combat readiness in the field. Efforts to coordinate the mitigation of the HME precursor hazard with the Chemical Corps will continue to pay big dividends.

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Editor’s Note: *The U.S. Army Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear School (USACBRNS) recognized this gap in capabilities and collaborated with the Edgewood Chemical Biological Center to develop training material that will allow Soldiers to recognize situations where they should notify EOD. The training material will be validated this summer in the Chemical Captains Career Course, and the training will be integrated into other courses during Fiscal Year 2009.*

The USACBRNS and the Maneuver Support Center are currently working on a chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear dismounted reconnaissance and surveillance capability (Joint Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Reconnaissance and Surveillance [JNBCRS] Increment II) that includes HAZMAT sensors capable of detecting HME compounds. The JNBCRS Increment II will enable units to enter unknown environments using protection and detection technologies similar to those found in many HAZMAT response teams.