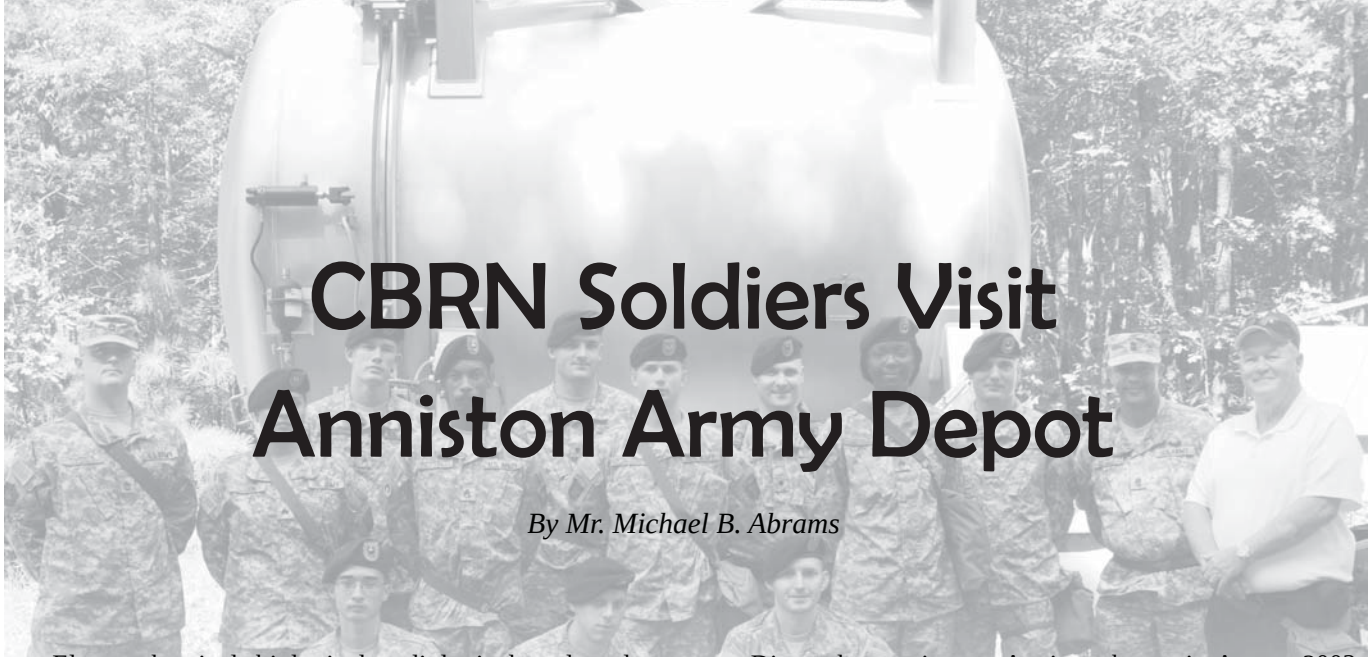


CBRN Soldiers Visit Anniston Army Depot

By Mr. Michael B. Abrams

Eleven chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) Soldiers went on a summer trip—not to a beautiful beach for rest and relaxation, but to a military facility to see something that they had never seen before. Soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) traveled from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, to Anniston Army Depot, Alabama, to take a look at chemical agent-filled munitions. The munitions are stored at the Anniston Chemical Activity (ANCA) and demilitarized at the Anniston Chemical Agent Disposal Facility. The weapons that the Dragon Soldiers saw were 4.2-inch mortars filled with mustard blister agent.

At one time, more than 31,500 tons of nerve and mustard agents were stored in nine locations throughout the United States. There are now six sites across the country where chemical munitions are stored for the U.S. Army Chemical Materials Agency, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland. Chemical munitions have been stored at ANCA since 1963; hundreds of thousands of chemical munitions containing about 880 tons of mustard agent are now stored there.

The storage of chemical munitions presents a risk to the Army civilian work force and surrounding communities. Legislation and an international treaty mandate that all munitions be safely demilitarized. Provisions of the treaty, known as the Chemical Weapons Convention, are managed by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, which is headquartered in the Netherlands. Internationally, 188 countries have ratified this treaty.

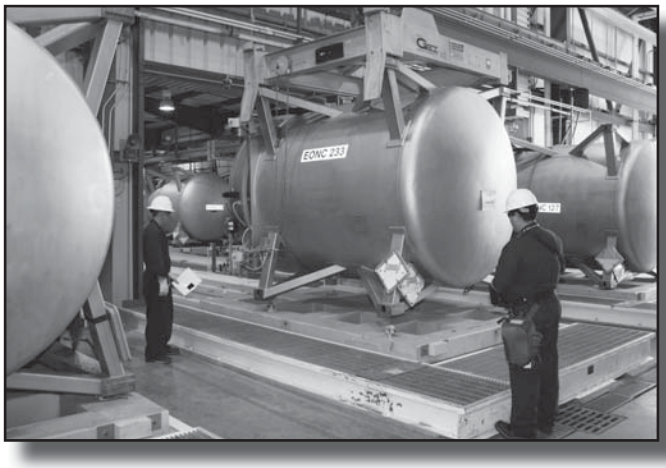
Since 1990, more than 21,068 tons (about 67 percent) of the agents in over 2,228,636 munitions and containers have been safely demilitarized. In addition to the demilitarization facility at Anniston, there are facilities in Arkansas, Oregon, and Utah that are currently operating to safely eliminate chemical munitions stockpiles. Two storage and disposal facilities have closed—one at Aberdeen Proving Ground and the other on Johnston Atoll in the Pacific. A third facility, located at Newport Chemical Depot, Indiana, is undergoing closure. However, additional demilitarization facilities are under construction at Blue Grass Army Depot, Richmond, Kentucky, and Pueblo Chemical Depot, Pueblo, Colorado.

Disposal operations at Anniston began in August 2003. Since then, more than 60 percent of the local stockpile (about 403,237 munitions) has been safely processed.

First Lieutenant Matthew S. Hacker is the chemical officer, 2d Battalion, 502d Infantry Regiment, 2d Brigade Combat Team. He led the Dragon Soldiers on their mission to Anniston.

According to First Lieutenant Hacker, "All except two of the eleven Soldiers that visited Anniston entered the Army after the Chemical Weapons Convention came into effect, so most of us never considered how different our jobs might be with the addition of CBRN offensive operations."

Hacker stated that "In general, Army Chemical Corps Soldiers are trained to protect the force and allow the Army to continue to fight in an environment in which the threat of weapons of mass destruction is ever-increasing. I think the job of the Chemical Corps Soldiers is unique in that we all are trained to protect the force. But, we all hope that we never have to do our job." He went on to explain that, while Dragon Soldiers are trained and prepared for the worst, they hope and pray that the force is never attacked with weapons of mass destruction.



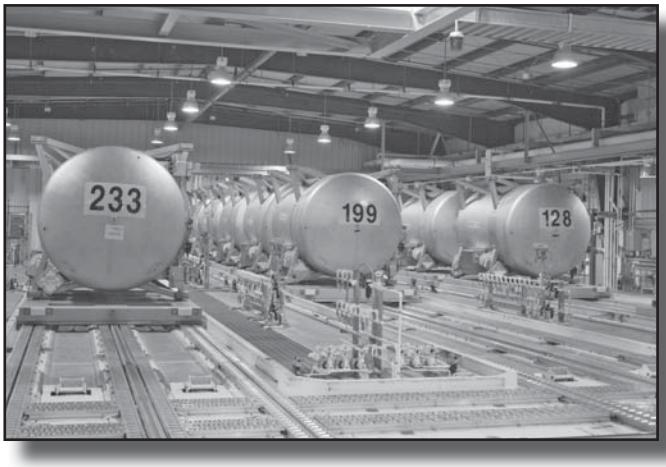
Anniston Army Depot employees use an overhead crane to safely place an enhanced on-site container.

During the tour of the storage facility, the door to the storage igloo was opened, revealing the chemical munitions stockpile inside. One of the visiting Soldiers exclaimed, "Stock and awe!"

Mr. Phillip M. Trued Jr., the chief of staff of Anniston Army Depot and a retired Army Chemical Corps officer, discussed other activities that take place at the depot. In addition to its use as a chemical munitions storage and disposal facility, Anniston Army Depot is designated as the Center of Industrial and Technical Excellence for tracked and wheeled combat vehicles; self-propelled and towed artillery; bridging systems; and individual and crew-served, small-caliber weapons. Trued pointed out that Anniston employees perform depot level maintenance on vehicles, ranging in size from the Stryker to the 70-ton, M1 Abrams tank and a variety of vehicles in between (such as the M113 armored personnel carrier, M88 recovery vehicle, and M9 armored combat earthmover). Major components of these vehicles are overhauled and returned to stock.

The Soldiers' trip to Anniston was short, but worthwhile. First Lieutenant Hacker was impressed with the visit and tours. He said, "We were privileged to witness ongoing operations at the Anniston Army Depot. The Anniston trip was a great addition to our training. Seeing live chemical munitions is a chance that most Chemical Corps Soldiers will never have the opportunity to witness—especially in that amount." He added,

A forklift operator lifts a pallet of mustard-filled, 4.2-inch mortars.



Enhanced on-site containers are staged during normal demilitarization operations.

"At the battalion level, we train on protecting the troops against the CBRN threat as well as operations in a CBRN environment. We were able to take away information that will help us in our operations."

"As the world changes, so does our mission," continued First Lieutenant Hacker. "Some of the Chemical Corps Soldiers may even one day find themselves stationed at one of these facilities. We were surprised to learn that few Soldiers were stationed at the facility, so we were honored to have been allowed this experience."

During the visit, Anniston officials suggested that similar visits could be arranged for other Dragon Soldiers. First Lieutenant Hacker indicated, "While all Chemical Corps Soldiers may not have the opportunity to make a similar trip, it is something that all should consider. I am glad that we created this relationship for future Chemical Corps Soldiers at Fort Campbell."

Following the tour, Hacker said, "At facilities like Anniston, chemical Soldiers have the opportunity to witness CBRN demilitarization operations. At Anniston, we learned there is still a long way to go before we demilitarize all of the Nation's stockpile. Even though it may not affect most chemical Soldiers' daily operations, it is certainly something that we all should understand."

For more information, visit the following Web sites:

- Anniston Army Depot: *<http://www.anad.army.mil/about.shtml>*.
- U.S. Army Chemical Materials Agency: *<http://www.cma.army.mil/>*.
- Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons: *<http://www.opcw.org/>*.

Mr. Abrams is a public affairs officer for the ANCA and the Anniston Chemical Agent Disposal Facility, Anniston Army Depot. He holds a bachelor's degree in radio-television from Southern Illinois University–Carbondale.