

# Dragonsong

**GW:** Last time we spoke to you was about rolling out the French Army's bio detection programme, DetecBio (see *CBRNe World* Spring 2010), and the last time we spoke to the Regiment (see *CBRNe World* Spring 2008) they were expanding and looking forward to Detecbio. It would seem a good place to start, to close the loop: how has the Regiment evolved and received DetecBio?

**MC:** Currently we are in the process of educating teams to use this system. The Army CBRN Centre developed a specific bio course to educate soldiers in the bio threat and its developments; part of that course is how to use the future Detecbio system. Unfortunately the system has a six-month delay, so due to that we are currently educating a lot of people without the system, but we are still improving. I have three teams being

educated and there are four levels in this course. Some of my officers and NCOs are on level 2.

**GW:** The last time I was in Fontevraud the Regiment was one of the few in the French Army that was expanding and getting new resources: building new accommodation blocks, for example. Has that finished now, will there be a further increase?

*What CBRN capability will future French soldiers have? ©CBRNe World*



*Fall in! Army saw the inception of the Bundeswehr's new 2011 Defence Command ©CBRNe World*

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*Now all French CBRN Troops will have a decon skillset, and everything else will be layered on top ©CBRNe World*

**MC:** When we arrived in Fontevraud in 2005 the barracks were very old, they belonged to a tank regiment that was scheduled to disappear. Today we are quite modern; we miss some CBRN facilities for Detecbio (due to the postponement of the program), but all the parts for soldiers and technical facilities for decon, training, the Light Role Teams (LRTs), are new or modernised. The last barracks we received will be open in four days. These will be for personal decon. The next facility, the

technical facility, will be the barracks for Detecbio when it arrives.

**GW:** **Colonels Lefebvre and Perrin were happy with the 2008 White Paper that consolidated the position of the CBRN Regiment (CBRNe World, Winter 2008). Does the increasing competence of the Regiment, the deployment level of the troops as well as the strategic situation mean that the politicians and brass look at the Regiment and still understand the need, or – as the**

**economy continues to slide – are they starting to look at cuts?**

**MC:** The current White Paper is not so pragmatic: I cannot say today if our battalion will increase or decrease. This White Paper states that the threat is still here, which we are quite comfortable with. It also focuses on the capability of the armed forces to commit for the defence of the national territory. We are dual capability and are therefore in the centre of this debate. I have no doubt that this White Paper, and its consequences, will reinforce the

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role of the 2nd Dragon Regiment in the future organisation, but...

**GW: France, partly because of its colonial history, has an interest in the strategic situation in Syria. Does this particularly French link increase the need for an improved CBRN regiment?**

CM: It is true that the situation is particular, especially in terms of CBRN devices which make the politicians take us into account, this need for a CBRN regiment. At the same time there is also the terrorist threat, and that means that we have to keep this CBRN Battalion.

**GW: Another big change in the interim was the move of the CBRN school from Draguignan (in the South of France) to Saumur (sort of mid-France). Apart from shortening your lines of communication and logistics what are the other benefits?**

CM: We are seeing a return to what it was historically. Before 2005 we were all in Draguignan, with two companies and the CBRN defence centre. What is new is the stronger cooperation between the school and the Regiment. We are working with the Centre so that the officers and NCOs who come here are the right men in the right place, and it will be normal to give my best officers and NCOs to the Centre; they will work for me through here. We are the main customer for the Centre, 60% of their lessons are developed for us, with 40% for the other regiments to develop their capability to do CBRN self-defence. One of the difficulties that we had before 2005 was that we had GD NBC and CD NBC, NBC Defence Group and NBC Defence Centre, and it is quite the same letter in France and a lot of people were not able to make the difference between the two organisations. Due to the fact that we have got 15km between us it is sufficient to be clear to everyone that we have the school AND the Regiment.

**GW: One of the latest things that was happening in 2008 was the deployment of the LRTs. What is the next step in this capability?**

MC: We created two companies, one in 2007 and one in 2009, but up until 2011



*Suiting up for Syria? Will conflict in the Middle East have implications for the Dragon Regiment? ©CBRNe World*



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we had three decon companies, two multi-role companies and one reserve. The reserve company didn't change; they only fulfil decon missions, but in 2011 a reorganisation decided to change this to five multi-role companies: but the number of specialists didn't change. We increased from 12 to 15 LRTs, with three LRTs, one recce platoon and two decon platoons in each company. This gave us five companies with the same structure which is easier for me as I can commit one company or another on a mission. Before this if I wanted to commit a multi-role company I was obliged to mix it from different units. This summer will see the five companies fully operational. I have reinforced the number of people in the LRT and the recce platoons, as previously the LRTs were not totally full, so now I have decided to have 15 full LRTs.

**GW: If you have 15 full LRTs where have those people come from? Has it been to the loss of decon, out of decon and into LRTs, or have you seen an increase in numbers with new people?**

MC: We did have some new people join the Regiment, but that is incidental; what I am developing is multi-competence. Often you find that after a person has been in CBRN for 12 years they can do decon, recce or LRT missions. There is a lot of knowledge to develop and maintain, so it is as easy as saying I carried out decon missions ten years ago, I can do it now, but we are developing this career path, to move between LRT, recce and decon. We will implement a career beginning with decon, and after, when the NCO has spent three years in decon, he will be able to train to work in LRT or recce platoon. Why three years? This is because our NCOs have an important exam after six years, so we try and have two specialities during this six-year period. It will differ between foreign and homeland operations. In foreign operations, in support of armed forces, we would have a force corresponding to the structure of the Regiment, with one recce, one LRT and two decon platoons. For homeland security it would be different, as firemen will ask us to reinforce them, which is more likely to

be decon, though we can offer LRT, so in that case I would take people from recce or LRT and commit them to decon.

**GW: The trouble with multi-role individuals is the fact that they need to know a lot about a lot of things, whereas most people like to specialise. How do you balance people having an aptitude and interest in one thing, with your need for them to be outside this comfort zone? The last thing you want on operations is someone who is really into decontamination being the one that discovers the BW cache, and because he never paid enough attention and doesn't follow the chain of custody etc?**

MC: At the beginning I was not sure that everyone would agree with this multi-role point of view. I explained that it will develop opportunities for them to be committed, now the challenge is not to convince my men to have a career between the three specialities, the challenge is to be clear on what we want. We have to keep a main speciality for each individual, and it will be necessary for him or her to return to this

speciality, even if they are also trained in other elements.

**GW: The Dragon Regiment is not the only specialist force inside the French military, there is also the French Air Force, which has specialist SIBCRA teams, for example. Can you see them being brought inside the wire, as is happening in other forces (such as the German *Bundeswehr*) and having a Joint Dragon Regiment?**

MC: We wondered about this when I was working at the Joint level. I don't think in the near future we will have a Joint Dragon Regiment; we coordinate closely, we have common doctrine, processes and equipment but there is no will to have a joint regiment. The Air Force, their LRT and Decon capability, are designed from the perspective of being able to commit to an air base permanently, and this is linked to nuclear security and other sites. They have two LRTs, we have 15, and these 17 LRTs could be committed via a decision at the Joint level. With the White Paper every possibility is imaginable, but up to now there is no will for a joint regiment.

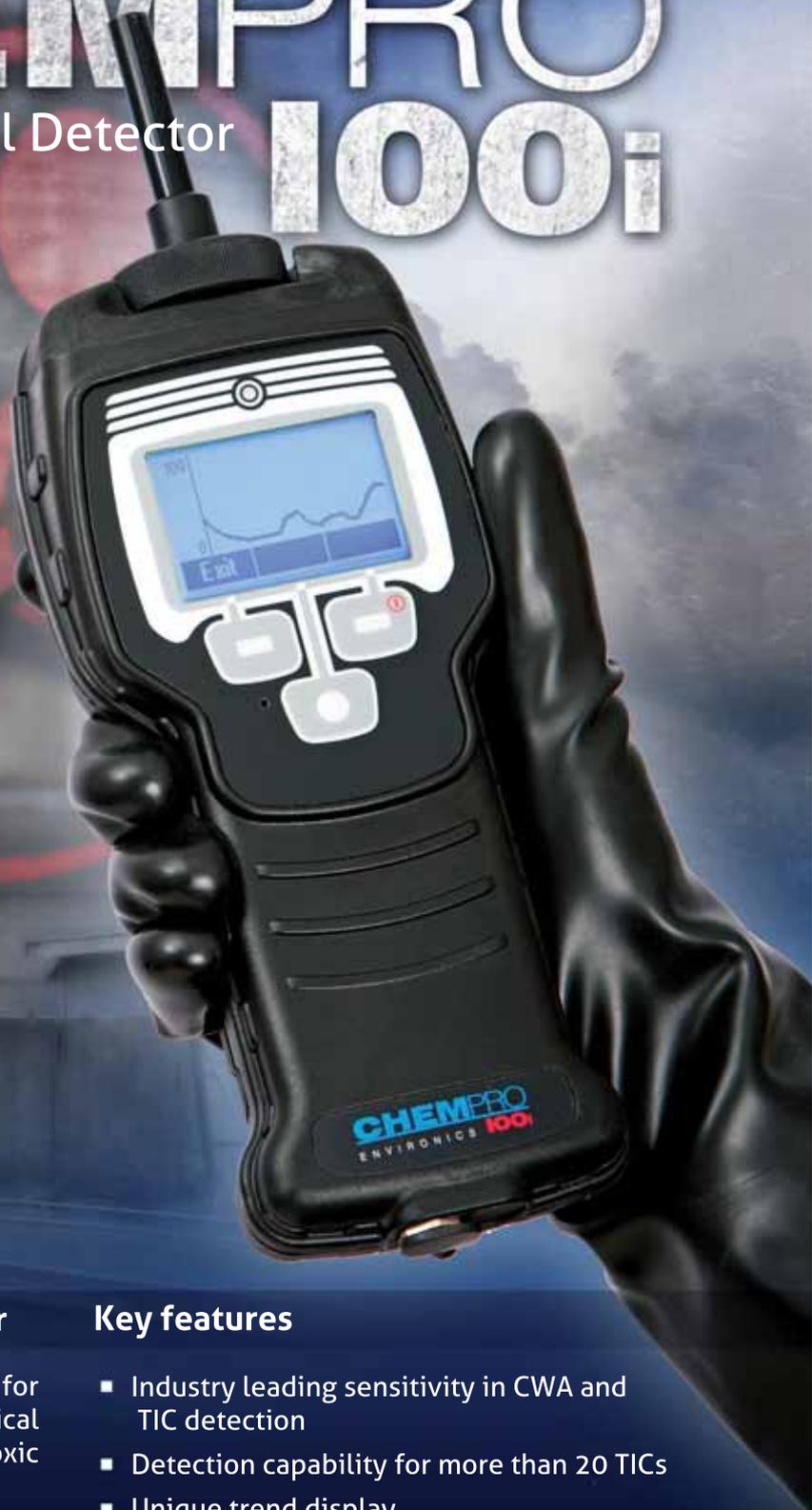


*Each individual will have one major skill: recce, LRT or decon. ©CBRNe World*

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