

Brigadier General Kevin Wendel,
Commander 20th Support Command, talks to Gwyn Winfield
about the continuing transformation of the force

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GW: In a previous interview you mentioned that the synergies from bringing EOD and CBRN together had brought in some core competencies faster than would otherwise have been the case. Is this still happening, or was there just an initial bow wave of improvement and then business as usual?

KW: We have continued to integrate our EOD and CBRN capabilities over the past year. We have added additional capabilities such as an enhanced staff to co-ordinate all our efforts, formed a Joint Task Force for WMD Elimination, worked closely with a number of combatant commands, and increased the capacity of our operational forces.

Recently we activated the 48th Chemical Brigade and a number of other organisations, and we have continued our aggressive transformation efforts. This increased capability and capacity has allowed for better integration before deployment, proper integration while deployed and increased operational effectiveness.

GW: Was the inclusion of Joint Task Force Elimination (JTF-E) another bow wave that will settle, or is 20th Support always going to be hectic?

KW: Two points: one that is that you are fairly familiar with the CBRNE Response Team who have provided a great deal of insight into when and how to do this at a larger and more complex level. In addition, activating the 48th Chemical Brigade has given us another headquarters to further develop our concepts. We are moving towards a combined arms approach at the company through brigade level and you will see us continue on this path of transformation with the combined arms of EOD and CBRN ability.

GW: Can you see an end to this transformation, or is it the nature of the threat that 20th Support has to confront that, as the red force continues to evolve their asymmetric

ability, so 20th Support Command will always be at the cutting edge of transformation?

KW: I agree, we believe asymmetric threats, and the emergence of other devices that might have CBRN threats embedded in them will continue to proliferate. Inevitably that will drive us to continue to adapt, both in the long term and in the short term. Within our force, but also generally within the US military, you are seeing a dramatic shift in building capabilities to work in asymmetric environments and to combat insurgencies and unconventional threats. Our efforts will remain relevant as we continue to deal with these threats.

GW: While there may have been a drop off in IED attacks in Iraq recently, it has still been a phenomenally busy time. How do you get the lessons back from downrange into the training programmes quickly enough to make sure they are still relevant?

KW: Our forward-deployed units provide real-time feedback on the latest enemy threats, tactics, techniques and procedures. They also advise us on employment options for our Counter IED forces. This information is rapidly provided to the training base here in CONUS to ensure we create the most realistic training scenarios available to deploying units. Integration of all the CIED enablers allows rapid reporting, faster exploitation and intelligence fusion, and enhances all our capabilities. This streamlined effort, combined with dynamic partnerships with organisations like the Joint IED Defeat Organisation, our training centres of excellence, combat training centres and other Services significantly improves all our operations. We have a robust communications network that allows the quick turn of key information into the training base within days. Great ideas and battlefield experiences by the leaders and

servicemen and women on the ground influence and drive all our efforts.

GW: But part of the difficulty, as you get larger and the lessons remain dynamic, is remaining agile in the same way that the red force is. This comes back to something Brigadier General Spoehr spoke about in Panama City: the difficulty of large training organisations being able to adapt quickly, to identify which are the "real" lessons learned, developing tactics and trickle these down to the people on the ground.

KW: That is a hazard of very large organisations. However, our unit is exclusively focused on the operations side; we can see the adaptation of what the enemy can do a lot faster. Now that we have formed and organised the command we can move more quickly to transform and adapt. We have grown, but the organisation is flexible enough to shift effort, and integration with our partners. What you saw in the brief I gave at Panama City – the headquarters, the joint support from SSC WMD and STRATCOM, two EOD brigades and a chemical brigade – is about the size of the force we will work with for the foreseeable future.

GW: You mentioned in our previous interview that you had hoped to build up enough capability to support operations and have a balance left to support Nato or other operations. Has that happened, or has the surge in OIF and OEF soaked all this up? Is the desire to support two combatant commanders and the homeland a hostage to fortune?

KW: Across the Army and the other Services we have significantly increased capabilities and capacity over the past 12 months. The plus-up of forces to Iraq did have an impact, but did not affect our ability to support our NATO partners, nor degrade our support to other combatant commanders.

First notification, 23-25 September 2008.
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This is just the first notification – we appreciate how important it is to get into your diary early. More information will become available soon on www.cbrneworld.com

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Something wicked this way comes ©20th Support Command

GW: How much innovation are you seeing in the IEDs? Has the arrival of explosively formed penetrators (EFPs) posed a greater or lesser challenge in terms of RSPs and response? How effective has JIEDDO been in supporting your C-IED mission and what is the next technological step that will transform the force? What one piece of kit holds the key?

KW: The increased use of explosively formed penetrators has required the refinement of our tactics, techniques and procedures, and the development of other innovative capabilities. Our ability to quickly adapt, shift focus, and influence emerging capabilities is considerable. This is exactly what we have done as the enemy has adapted the types of IEDs they have used over the past four years. We constantly seek capabilities to detect these devices, provide enhanced protection and leverage existing technologies. As important is how we train all our units to operate in these complex environments. This continues to be a combined arms effort.

We have also made extensive progress in developing synchronised and integrated efforts to defeat the systems and eliminate the environments that allow IEDs to be proliferated. This tactical, operational,

and strategic focus creates the conditions so units on the ground can actively and offensively attack and defeat the networks that supply, build, and employ these devices. Operating effectively in these environments is more than just defeating the device with technology. Technology can enhance our effectiveness, but I see no single item on the horizon that promises to be a panacea to deal with all these threats.

The Joint IED Defeat Organization has been very effective in supporting the entire CIED effort. They have provided exceptional support by providing advanced equipment, assisted in bringing enhanced training to our Combat Training Centers, assisted staffs in organising their efforts and by providing an effective reachback system so all who are working on these problems have quick access to vital information. They can rapidly influence all our efforts through streamlined processes and integration of all the partners working this initiative.

GW: While no one area of technology can be a panacea, where is the greatest need for improvement? There was the increase in jamming and protection; will we see a move to ground-penetrating radar or forensics, for instance? Where is the next drive?

KW: Good point... detection is the area we will benefit from the most, either in new technology or innovative ways to use existing technology. The ability to have a device, or detector, with greater range and stand off – to sense a device or threat at extended ranges – is one place where we technical innovations could make a dramatic difference.

GW: This is something that travels throughout CBRN; the more swept up and capable the detector, the more intelligent the user needs to be. In terms of explosive detection, do you want something that gives a bronze level for the common soldier – this individual has handled something suspicious – or something higher that needs to be used by a specialist – this individual has handled C4?

KW: You are aware of some of the existing technology to detect residues and other things that are being deployed in-theatre, and we are seeing lots of positive results from employing law enforcement-type techniques and devices. We will be expanding that to a greater capability across not only the specialised teams, but also to infantry, engineer, recon, military police, and many other units who operate on the ground. The toughest part is ensuring the technology you bring forward is lightweight, rugged, effective, easy to train and can be sustained in battle.

GW: In terms of detection, is this an EOD operative's job? This is something that the UK's Joint CBRN Regiment have been working on with UK EOD; that the BDO will hand off detection and sampling to the CBRN officer. Is this the US model too, or does explosive detection belong to explosives specialist?

KW: It is interesting that you bring that up. We have expanded our search capability in conventional units, armoured forces, mounted recon, dismounted recon, and others to do exactly what you are describing; many of our efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan have been modelled on the UK's search force capability. Units conduct combat patrols, route recon, clearance,

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security, and search missions and when they find something suspicious they can do an initial identification, deal with those threats with their embedded capabilities, and maintain operational maneuver. If necessary, more specialised elements come in and continue with the exploitation or elimination tasks.

GW: How is the integration of the force going? How have the Joint Response Teams developed? What further benefits have been driven out?

KW: We are continuing our transformation and integration efforts, improving our employment concepts and creating effective operational CBRNE capabilities. The CBRNE Response Teams in the Chemical Technical Escort battalions were a good first step. They have been a great model to build on. We will continue to fuse EOD, technical intelligence, CBRN and others together into larger company, battalion, and brigade teams. The benefits of integration allow us to rapidly adapt new technology, train the force more effectively and deliver cohesive CBRNE capabilities to supported commanders.

GW: How has the need for forensics/legal sampling skills that operations are imposing been developed?

KW: We have state-of-the-art sampling capabilities for many of these threats. Effective exploitation of IEDs, other high-yield explosives, chemical and biological weapons, or nuclear and radiological materials demand we fully integrate collection, sampling and escort to ensure all of the requirements for any mission are met. We continue to refine our existing procedures and protocols to maintain proper chain of custody and appropriate record keeping. We are in partnership with many of our other governmental agencies and organisations which are expert in these disciplines. This integration is necessary to meet our exploitation and elimination mission requirements.

GW: You have split the roles of JTF-E into Find, Fix, Finish and Transition. The role of the others is fairly straightforward but how does the Find element work? Potentially this is an enormous role, and Iraq generated lots of lessons about this. It needs a different range of assets and skills and requires a lot of troops. How is that going to work – will new assets and training be acquired for full operational capability (FOC)?

KW: In terms of JTF-E, we are clearly going to need access to a wider range of intelligence, sensors, platforms and organisations. I suspect and believe that it will also require additional training; it needs a wider range of units that understand tactical, strategic and operational exploitation. I think, however, that they are complementary to what we have been accomplishing in the counter IED fight; a lot of the TTPs and many of the technologies currently in play are transportable to the larger effort.

GW: The 20th Support Command has always prided itself on live agent training. Is this focused solely on US facilities, or have other international ones, such as Canada or the Czech Republic, been tried?

KW: Much of our live agent training is done at world-class facilities here at Edgewood, other sites within the US, and at the US Army Chemical School at Fort Leonard Wood where the newly commissioned Lieutenant Terry CDTF is a state-of-the-art complex designed to train CBRNE soldiers in realistic scenarios. The Technical Escort battalions also do extensive training at the Defense Research and Development Canada (DRDC) training centre six-to-eight weeks a year. DRDC offers the battalions a variety of training venues to develop collective level CBRNE Response Team skills. The benefits of training in a live open air environment are essential to maintaining a high degree of competency.

GW: What is happening with the development of the Asymmetric

Warfare Regiment and the Analytical and Remediation Directorate?

KW: We re-named our Analytical and Remediation Directorate to the CBRNE Analytical and Remediation Activity (CARA). The CARA now includes our remediation response teams, mobile munitions assessment systems, an aviation detachment and our mobile laboratories. The CARA has monitoring platforms to provide near real-time air monitoring of chemical warfare agents, mobile labs that can identify and quantify chemical warfare agents, toxic industrial compounds and toxic industrial materials, biological agents and explosives. This rapidly deployable capability is a critical part of our Joint Task Force Elimination capability and we have partnered with the Joint Program Executive Office for Chemical/Biological Defense to assist in our efforts.

The Army's Asymmetric Warfare Group continues to develop operational capabilities and provides exceptional support to all our ongoing efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq. I see opportunities where their work will complement and integrate with our future capabilities and operational employment methods.

GW: How is the work on your mobile labs developing?

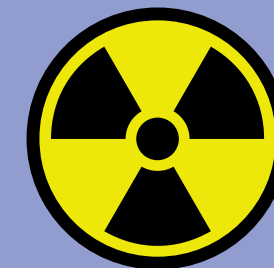
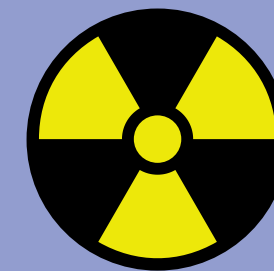
KW: We are getting great support from our partners to rapidly field our labs. We already have a lightweight deployment package, and we continue to add capability. Recently we deployed this unit to Korea as part our continuing partnership with the Republic of Korean Chemical Defense Forces. In 2008 we will complete fielding and certifying all our labs; when complete, they will provide a rapidly deployable capability able to conduct confirmatory analysis of the full range of CBRNE threats. These labs will also be linked directly back to our federation of national labs which support us.

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