

Brigadier General Les Smith, Commandant of the US Army CBRN School, tells Gwyn Winfield about the developments to make sure that Fort Leonard Wood is ready for change

# Aiming high

There is always the concern within any military that you are guilty of "preparing for the last war". There was a hint of this in US forces as they transitioned from warfighting in Iraq, which they did very well, to peace enforcement and fourth-generation conflict, which they did less well. Now the supertanker of US DoD policy has shifted, it is all about small squad tactics, counter-insurgency and close air support... yet no sooner does a comfort zone settle in then it looks like things are changing again. While there is no obvious end in sight for Afghanistan – as there isn't for the Balkans either – strategic changes are underway that suggest that military forces might need to prepare to fight the war before last – the gallons of mustard and (potentially) nuclear paradigm.

It cannot have escaped any reader that the situation in Iran and North Korea continues to be unstable, and US forces must be prepared to face this threat. The good news for CBRN is that the vast majority of the equipment in inventory will work just as well in this paradigm as the last, with the required change being in training. The new threat is much more like the old Cold War threat, but it would be too easy, and too retrograde, a step to go back to the old manuals; skills and technology have moved on, and training must too. "There is a shift in the aim point, and the army is struggling with this concept," agreed Brigadier General (BG) Smith. "We have been doing the counter-insurgency fight for seven or eight years, and now the challenge is how to train forces in counter-insurgency missions – which we do a lot of – but also how to push for the shift – a full spectrum mission. A lot of the skills you have learned before apply across the board – it doesn't matter whether it is Toxic Industrial Chemicals or

Materials TICS/TIMS or CBRN Warfare Agents – but the challenge is supporting the equipment and manning the force to execute that mission. The biggest thing for me is how we portray our thinking to the Chemical Corps, the Army, and how they understand the paradigm shift and so they recognise the battlespace we grew up in; that German [Cold War] mission is now applicable to other places too."

"This shift in the aim point will be our biggest challenge within the CBRN community, the school and the Corps [for the next 18 months]. How do you train soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines for counter-insurgency while also maintaining the high-end capability to respond to the classic threat? That threat is proliferating, and it is imposing itself on our senior leadership along with the significance of the Chemical Corp and the CBRN community. So the challenge will be in transforming the Corp to allow the Army to transform itself in terms of CBRN and operations; ten years ago it was all about NBC defence, now it is about combating weapons of mass destruction (C-WMD), because it makes it so much easier if you can deal with it before they use it.

"How do we raise the level of knowledge of the soldiers and leaders so they are ready for it, should it happen? It really is a paradigm shift of policy and strategy, at the highest level: how do we translate the national policy for C-WMD to the operational and tactical level? Maintaining these skills despite the fact we haven't had a classic CBRN attack in the last six or seven years, even though other things have happened in the battlespace, is a challenge for me as a Commandant and also for DoD as a whole."

Part of this preparation may well be the increase in capability and scope of the Chemical Defence Training

Facility (CDTF) far beyond its current state. The previous "big project" at Fort Leonard Wood (FLW), home to the US Army CBRN School (as well as Manoeuvre Support Centre, the Engineer School, The MP School, etc) was the Lt Terry Facility (see article on P37). Now, some of the skills that were learned at the Terry Facility will be practised in a live agent environment.

"We are going to start to migrate some of the training that we have in the Terry Facility into the CDTF, to try and lose the 'sterile' environment," said BG Smith. "So the plan is that whatever the service members can do in the Terry facility they can do in the CDTF, but in a live format. We can't replicate on the Terry facility an airfield, for example, but there is a deactivated airfield on FLW where they can execute missions. We could also do training on heavier vehicles, so they can execute missions on clandestine labs where they don't have to dismount and walk up to the lab; it is about integration more than training individual soldiers, but also the NCOs and officers. That is the vision. The Terry facility is a great example of Manoeuvre Support Center; you have the MP school which has its facilities and the Engineer school - Counter Explosives Hazards Centre which also has great capabilities. This confederation of schools is the advantage of FLW: it makes it a centre of excellence.

Currently, the jewel in the CBRN School's crown is the Terry facility, yet it is operating at full capacity or could things be done better? "There is the phrase: "If you build it, they will come," said BG Smith. "That is exactly what has happened. Six or seven days a week we have folks here training and they are standing in line for it. It started ten years ago with the Civil Support Teams (CST), and now it has expanded past the CSTs to include

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BG Smith, far left, is trying to prepare his students for the shift in aim point. ©DoD

consequence management and weapons of mass destruction elimination.

The Terry facility has allowed the School to reach far beyond its original purview. Previously the CDTF worked with the German and Dutch MoD, but the opportunities in the Terry have meant it reaches out not only internationally, but nationally too – with organisations such as the US Coast Guard taking advantage of the

opportunity. Is this a two-way street though? Organisations such as the Coast Guard have a wide range of skills that the US Army would find useful – such as interdiction afloat for riverine craft – so is there a mutual exchange of information? “It is a growth industry,” said BG Smith. “Having the Coast Guard coming to the training is great, and that partnership is developing over time. We have also had the CBRN Enhanced Response

Force Package (CERFF) come; the training for that happens on a two-day conference and there is a lot of participation and training there. So the fact that we have young ensigns come in and talk through some of those lessons learned helps with training across the board. The constants are all the same; it is the execution that is different. You may be executing hazmat ops on a boat, or overseas – it is the same process, the difference is in the way you execute it.”

That said, however, there has been a shortage of take-up of the School in general, and Terry facility in particular, from the US Navy. Is this because the scenarios are too different, that large platforms can do their own training, or have they just not seen the light yet? “That is an area for growth, but the Navy does CBRN as its second or even tertiary missions,” explained BG Smith. “Is it more important that they do their permanent training on a ship, or on shore, or send them to another location? The Navy does go through the CDTF; the training is there, but it comes down to what is the biggest bang for the buck in terms of what they need to execute. The School is not, technically, a joint school – the point is that we are developing capability for the nation, not caring who puts the seal on this. So the airmen who attend don’t fall under me for command and control; they come to a lot of our training and they are in the same battlespace as our soldiers, so it is a win-win.”

In the same way that counter-narcotics and CBRN is seen as the coming thing now, when last we interviewed a Commandant of the School (<http://www.cbrneworld.com/pdf/CLASS%20VALUES.pdf>) the big challenge was the convergence of CBRN and EOD/C-IED. How has this bedded down? BG Smith suggested there is still some work to do. “The challenge is getting past the bureaucracy and doing the right thing; inertia gets in and causes the process to slow down. We are not focussed on who owns it; it’s having the capability. The 20th Support Command has that

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mission – it's what it exists for. That CBRNE mission set is being done every day by CBRN and EOD folks embedded in the 22-person team; we are getting on that piece in Iraq and Afghanistan today. So we need to get past the issue of who owns it and whether we train together, and we need to move towards doing things better and use the inter-agency folks to make sure we are pushing in the right direction."

The counter narcotics/ clandestine lab role continues to evolve, and the School is engaging with the issue to ensure US forces can deal with it when it comes up. This is one of the advantages of the "Centre of Excellence" that BG Smith mentioned; with the Military Police school on the site there should be an easy transition of understanding, TTPs and experience, but what do you do with them? Is it a case of transitioning narcotics/forensic skills to CBRN officers so they can do the job in a contaminated environment, or

transitioning CBRN skills to MPs so they can, or preparing CBRN officers and MPs for joint missions together? "Yes to all of them!" laughed BG Smith. "We want to help them in how they do CBRN forensics; for us, it is a case of integrating that in and still being able to do the mission."

"We have done some things with our Captain Career Course and our advanced NCO course, but we can do better. There are a lot of things, including the C-IED fight, that we can do jointly in training; the challenge is to align all the classes, be aggressive to execute and not to allow scheduling of training areas, or start times of courses, to get in the way. We also have the first responders interface with us, with the Civil Support Skills Course which is for CST members, so we train every one of those – airmen and army. They come from every state in the Union, and they are all individual, so the challenge is that we maintain and change as they need us

to, as the threat goes on. We have had to figure out how each county, state and region operates and works through their different tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) to execute missions. I don't want a Captain to meet his opposite number in the FBI for the first time when he gets to the scene; I want him to know those guys through the training environment. So we are trying to bring the community together, and work through DTRA and other agencies to be a C-WMD enterprise and work in the same direction."

An example of this is the Chemical Basic Officers Leaders Course (CBOLC), which had to go through a major revision when the CBRN rece platoons were transitioned down to the Brigade Combat Teams (BCT). "The Officer Training Department has adjusted training with the CBOLC Lieutenants and CBRN3 classes," said BG Smith. "As the rece platoons are now directly assigned to a Special



*Skills learned in the Terry, such as understanding of civilian procedures, will have utility on operations ©DoD*

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