



# The Defender



Vol. 2, Issue. 1

The quarterly newsletter for the 20th CBRNE Command

March 2023

## Master EOD technician becomes 20th CBRNE Command CSM

FORT CARSON, Colo. – A Master Explosive Ordnance Disposal technician assumed responsibility as the command sergeant major for the U.S. Department of Defense's premier all hazards command.

Command Sgt. Maj. David J. Silva became the senior enlisted leader for the 20th CBRNE Command during a combined 71st Ordnance Group (EOD) Change of Responsibility and 20th CBRNE Command Assumption of Responsibility ceremony on Fort Carson, Colorado, March 2.

Command Sgt. Maj. Randall C. Markgraf assumed responsibility for the 71st EOD Group "Raptors" from Silva during the first part of the ceremony.

Originally from Ferris, Texas, Markgraf comes to the 71st EOD Group after serving as the command sergeant major for the 242nd EOD Battalion. Silva assumed responsibility for 20th CBRNE Command during the second part of the ceremony.

Command Sgt. Maj. Jorge Arzabala, the previous command sergeant major for 20th CBRNE Command, relinquished responsibility, Feb. 2.

He currently serves as the command sergeant major for the Maneuver Support Center of Excellence on Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

Commanded by Col. Michael G. Schoonover, the Fort Carson, Colorado-based 71st EOD Group is one of two active-duty Army Explosive Ordnance Disposal groups in the United States and the group commands all EOD units west of the Mississippi River, including three EOD battalions and 18 EOD companies on 11 military bases.

The other EOD group is the Fort Campbell, Kentucky-based 52nd EOD Group, which commands all



Former Command Sgt. Maj. Jorge Arzabala (left) poses with current Command Sgt. Maj. Dave Silva on Fort Carson, Colorado. Silva became the senior enlisted leader for the 20th CBRNE Command during a combined 71st Ordnance Group (EOD) Change of Responsibility and 20th CBRNE Command Assumption of Responsibility ceremony on Fort Carson, Colorado, March 2. Courtesy photo.

EOD units in the eastern United States. Both groups are assigned to the 20th CBRNE Command.

Brig. Gen. Daryl O. Hood, the commanding general of the 20th CBRNE Command, welcomed Silva as his new command sergeant major during the ceremony.

"You're not leaving the Raptor family – you're expanding it," said Hood. "I know that your purpose will not change. You will continue to do what you already have been – to lead, to care for, to train and to maintain those Soldiers who you are responsible for."

A Master EOD technician, Silva has deployed seven times and served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Silva has served on protection missions for presidents and the Pope.

The command sergeant major has also been to all 50 states and five of the seven continents.

Silva earned a bachelor's degree in Liberal Arts from Excelsior College and he is pursuing a master's degree in Business Management.

Silva credited leaders and mentors for his success throughout his two and a half decades in the U.S. Army.

Silva said the enduring competitive advantages of the multifunctional 20th CBRNE Command are the Soldiers, Army civilians and Army families.

"If you're a Soldier, civilian or family member assigned to the 20th, I work for you. I am honored to be your command sergeant major," said Silva.

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# From the Deputy Commanding Officer

When I was younger, I often referenced Army publications for knowledge and understanding, especially about leadership. In November 2022, an updated Field Manual (FM) 6-22, *Army Leadership and The Profession*, was published with much anticipation. I found the publication overwhelming and eventually I created lists of key things to remember. There are cliff notes for leadership publications; however, I do not recommend those overpriced *SMART Books* that are cut and paste from Army publications. As one examines the more than 122 pages of FM 6-22 it is easy to comprehend what the Army requires of a leader and those inherent traits/characteristics.

In a profession where we have more publications and documents than office space to keep them in, the question is what we should retain vs. reference when required. Leaders sometimes must narrow things down and provide focus. It's not realistic to expect every Soldier and Civilian to commit countless publications to memory, but leaders, through counseling, need to identify those key points that define a leader. Simply distill down the hundreds of pages on *leadership* into key areas that good leaders and Soldiers should focus on, the essentials. You may not "capture everything, but as leaders, we should provide achievable standards for success and growth of those we rate or mentor if only for that period we are privileged to serve in a leadership position. I have defined a few basics that I expect of every Good Leader and Soldier to strive for. Let me just be clear, these are my expectations delivered in a way that works for me. Sort of like the famous "General Funk's Fundamentals," but more focused on what I ask of individuals. They don't replace what one may find in ADP 6-22, but compliment the pub. It's only a few, for the entire list shoot me an email or come by for a chat. Caution, my counseling sessions typically go more than an hour, but I have received 4.5 stars on yelp.

Good Leaders and Soldiers...

- Remember the batteries that charge us as Soldiers/Civilians are different than the ones that charge our families; there is a greater risk if we don't put families first.
- Understand effective mission command; focusing organizational energy on a few high-priority activities that the unit can and must do well, knowing that if everything is important then nothing is important.
- Accept the constraints of the mission and resources; work to build a positive and enthusiastic climate regardless of the circumstance.
- Understand the formation belongs not to them, but to the Army and are willing to offer up resources that will help their commanders or peers succeed.
- Realize that their potential as a leader is based on the quality of time invested in others.
- Understand the span of control, and do not create a "Lord of the Flies" mentality; it's all about the commander's intent, guidance, and mission statement.
- Know that honest evaluations that are average or below, are only tough to explain if leaders don't counsel or lack moral courage.
- Strive to communicate most effectively and succinctly; always learn how to write and verbally communicate better.
- Realize that commanders are the only ones with priorities; the rest of us have initiatives that support them.
- Know that the legacy of our profession is our junior Soldiers and Civilians; invest big in them.
- Lastly, have fun every day.

Col. Christopher P. Bartos  
Deputy Commanding Officer



## The Defender

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# Soldiers participate in chaplain-hosted character development training event



Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Daniel D. Kang (right), the chaplain for the 20th Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosives (CBRNE) Command, speaks at the character development training session in Havre de Grace, Maryland, Feb. 2. U.S. Army photo by Angel D. Martinez-Navedo.

HAVRE DE GRACE, Md. – Soldiers recently participated in a training session that was designed to emphasize the importance of “trust” in the profession of arms.

Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Daniel D. Kang, the chaplain for the 20th Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosives (CBRNE) Command, hosted the training session for Soldiers serving at the one-of-a-kind command.

The first courses were conducted on Feb. 2 and Feb. 10 and the chaplain plans to hold the training sessions quarterly. The 20th CBRNE Command supports military operations around the world and domestic authorities across the nation.

Kang said the character development training session focused on the character, competence and commitment needed to honorably fulfill the oath of service and to serve with distinction in the U.S. Army.

“One of the characteristics of an Army professional is character,” said Kang. “Our nation and the American people

trust us that the Army will serve the nation and accomplish missions ethically. We must continue to develop our character to maintain our readiness to serve the nation as an Army professional.”

Held at an offsite location, participants wore civilian clothes to contribute to honest discussions.

Born in Seoul, South Korea, Kang immigrated to the United States when he was 17 years old and he calls Fayetteville, North Carolina, home.

Kang said “spiritual readiness” develops the personal qualities needed to deal with the hardships of life.

“These qualities form the basis for character, disposition, decision-making and integrity,” said Kang, who has served in the Army for 19 years and deployed to Iraq twice. “People develop their spiritual readiness from diverse value systems that stem from their religious, philosophical and human values.”

[Read full story](#)

## Chaplain's Corner

Greeting to all,

In the next couple of months, there are three significant dates ahead of me.

The first one is related to my faith; the second is related to my family; and the last one is related to my country.

On April 9, 2023, remembering the resurrection of Jesus is a way to renew my daily hope that I have victory over sin through his sacrifice and love.

On May 14, 2023, Mother's Day is a reminder of how precious my mother and the mother of my children are. Mother's Day is celebrated in various parts of the world (regardless of religions and cultures) to express respect, honor, and love towards mothers.

Lastly, on May 29, 2023, Memorial Day will commemorate the men and women who died while serving in the United States Armed Forces, particularly those who died in battle or as a result of wounds sustained in battle.

One common theme in all three of these days is sacrifice and selfless service.

The sacrifices of Jesus, mothers, and the men and women who gave their lives are very encouraging.

I don't take their sacrifice lightly. It carries emotional and psychological burdens that prompt me to not waste my life and to live it to the fullest.

If I truly consider their sacrifice for me, I cannot and will not waste their sacrifice in vain by wasting my time and life.

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# Arzabala moves to Army Maneuver Support Center of Excellence



Brig. Gen. Daryl O. Hood (left), the commanding general of the 20th CBRNE Command, presents the Legion of Merit to Command Sgt. Maj. Jorge Arzabala at the Myer Auditorium on Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, Feb. 2. Arzabala completed his 20-month tour as the command senior enlisted advisor during a relinquishment of responsibility ceremony. U.S. Army photo by Angel Martinez-Navedo.



ABERDEEN PROVING GROUND, Md. — The senior enlisted leader of the U.S. Army 20th Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosives (CBRNE) Command departed the command following a relinquishment of responsibility ceremony, Feb. 1.

Command Sgt. Maj. Jorge Arzabala completed his 20-month tour at the 20th CBRNE Command to serve as the command sergeant major for the Maneuver Support Center of Excellence (MSCoE) on Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, a role he assumed on Jan. 6.

Before the ceremony, Arzabala received the Legion of Merit and his wife Vanessa Arzabala received the Public Service Commendation Medal.

A native of El Paso, Texas, and seasoned Chemical Corps Soldier, Arzabala served as the command sergeant major for the 20th CBRNE Command since June 2021.

With Soldiers and Army civilians stationed across the nation, the 20th CBRNE Command is home to 75 percent of the active-duty U.S. Army's Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) technicians and Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear (CBRN) specialists, as well as the 1st Area Medical Laboratory, CBRNE Analytical and Remediation Activity, five Weapons of Mass Destruction Coordination Teams and three Nuclear Disablement Teams.

Part of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), the Maneuver Support Center of Excellence trains and educates service members and develops doctrine and capabilities for the CBRN School, Engineer School and Military Police School.

Arzabala began his U.S. Army career at One Station Unit Training on Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, in 1999.

His assignment at MSCoE gives him the opportunity to pass his experience to the next generation of Soldiers.

Arzabala has served around the world and deployed to Kosovo and Afghanistan. He has also completed the Air Assault School, Airborne School, Jumpmaster School, Combatives Level 3 training, Technical Escort School and the Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape School. He earned a bachelor's degree in Homeland Security and Emergency Management from Ashford University and a master's degree in Leadership Studies from The University of Texas in El Paso, Texas.

Brig. Gen. Daryl O. Hood, the commanding general of 20th CBRNE Command, called Arzabala an extraordinary professional and incredible leader. Hood said that out of the many great senior enlisted leaders he has seen in the Army, Arzabala is the best that he has had the privilege of serving with in command.

"His ability to lead, care, train and maintain is essential to the 20th CBRNE Command and our Army," said Hood. "His character, competence and commitment along with his ability to serve in positions of greater responsibility made this achievement possible. I am confident he will continue to make a difference in TRADOC at the MSCoE."

Arzabala met with Soldiers and Army civilians on 19 bases in 16 states during his tenure at 20th CBRNE Command. The command sergeant major thanked the Soldiers and Army civilians at the 20th CBRNE Command for their service around the world, including the numerous training exercises and deployments.

"This is the essence of what it is to be a CBRNE Soldier — it is the tenacity and core values of our Soldiers, non-commissioned officers, officers and civilians of this outfit. I leave here knowing that this has been an unforgettable journey," said Arzabala. "I am humbled, privileged and extremely proud to have served all of you as your command sergeant major."

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# Retired Army general selected for 2022 Defender of Liberty Award



*Brig. Gen. Daryl O. Hood (left), the commanding general of the 20th Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosives (CBRNE) Command; retired Lt. Gen. Leslie C. Smith; and Command Sgt. Maj. Jorge Arzabala, the command senior enlisted leader, stand together at the Defender of Liberty Award ceremony on Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, Jan. 31. Hood and Arzabala presented the award to the retired general for his impact on the command as its fourth commanding general. U.S. Army photo by Marshall R. Mason.*

ABERDEEN PROVING GROUND, Md. – The U.S. military's premier all hazards command presented its fourth commanding general with the Defender of Liberty Award during a ceremony on Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, Jan. 31.

The 20th CBRNE Command selected retired U.S. Army Lt. Gen. Leslie C. Smith as the 2022 Defender of Liberty.

The Defender of Liberty Award is presented to leaders who have made a significant impact on the U.S. military's only multifunctional and deployable CBRNE command.

In 2019, retired Vice Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. Richard Cody became the first recipient of the award for authoring the memo that led to the creation of 20th CBRNE Command while serving as the deputy chief of staff of the Army for operations and plans.

The command selected retired Maj. Gen. John C. Doesburg as the 2020 Defender of Liberty. As the former commanding general of the U.S. Army Research, Development and Engineering Command and the U.S. Army Soldier and Biological Chemical Command, Doesburg championed the establishment of the command.

The 2021 Defender of Liberty was retired Maj. Gen. Keith R. Wendel. As the second commanding general, Wendel

shepherded the command from initial operational capability to full operational capability during his tenure.

Brig. Gen. Daryl O. Hood, the current commanding general of 20th CBRNE Command, hosted the event during the annual commander's conference. Hood thanked Smith for his role in leading the one-of-a-kind command.

Smith is a pioneer in the U.S. Army Chemical Corps. A veteran of Operation Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom, Smith commanded the 83rd Chemical Battalion, 3rd Chemical Brigade and U.S. Army CBRN School.

Smith was one of the longest serving commanding generals in the 18-year history of the 20th CBRNE Command. He also previously served as the command operations officer. Smith led the 20th CBRNE Command to full operational capability as a Joint Task Force-WMD Elimination Headquarters in 2007. The deployable headquarters was mandated by the 2006 Defense Quadrennial Review.

Smith also championed changing the command's name from the 20th Support Command (CBRNE) to the 20th CBRNE Command to reflect its multifunctional mission more accurately.

Following his tenure at 20th CBRNE Command, Smith was promoted to major general and became the first U.S. Army Chemical Corps officer to command the Maneuver Support Center of Excellence on Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

Smith was later promoted to lieutenant general and served as the 67th U.S. Army Inspector General, another first for a Chemical Corps officer.

After retiring from the U.S. Army, Smith continued to support the 20th CBRNE Command by conducting numerous professional development sessions.

"His efforts have led to a better military, working hard to improve the organization not just for any of us, but for future military leaders as well," said Hood.

Smith encouraged the 20th CBRNE Command leadership to never underestimate the criticality of their mission. He also emphasized the important role that leaders have in forging the Army of 2030.

"It's not about what your branch is, it's not about what your organization is. It's about what difference are you making for our Army and really it's about what difference are you making for our nation," said Smith.

"You, every day, are changing lives and you only get a snapshot of time to do it in," said Smith. "My challenge to you is every day that you take the time to make sure the organizations that I serve in, whether I'm a staff officer or I'm a commander, to make them different, to make them better, because that's what we are called to do."

[Read full story](#)



# Army civilian budget analyst keeps command mission ready

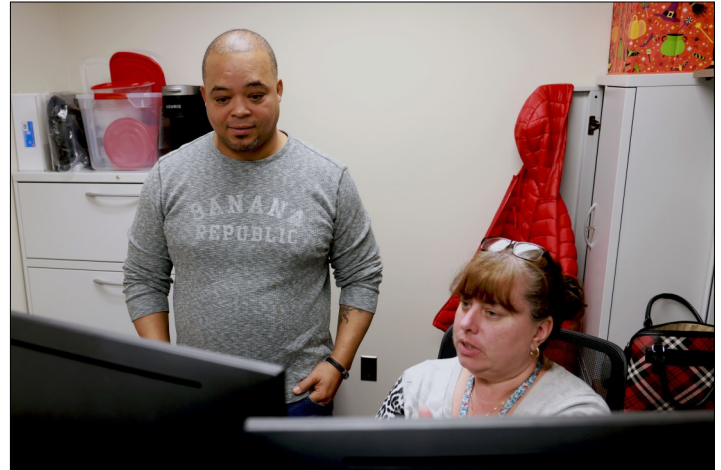
ABERDEEN PROVING GROUND, Md. – A U.S. Army civilian budget analyst helps to keep the U.S. military's premier multifunctional all hazards command funded and ready.

DeMond M. Robinson, a budget analyst with the 20th Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosives (CBRNE), was selected as the Civilian of the Quarter for the 1st quarter of Fiscal Year 2023.

Robinson is originally from Head of the Creek, Maryland, which is close to Salisbury on the Eastern Shore. He has served at the 20th CBRNE Command since 2021 and he started his civil service career at the Defense Intelligence Agency on Fort Meade, Maryland, in 2017. He was later promoted and moved to Joint Base Anacostia Bolling in Washington, D.C.

Wanting to shorten his commute from Washington, D.C., to his home in Bel Air, Maryland, Robinson applied for jobs on Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, where 20th CBRNE Command is headquartered.

"I was fortunate and lucky enough to be hire by the Army's 20th CBRNE Command on Aberdeen Proving Ground," said Robinson. "The mission and capabilities of the 20th CBRNE Command are one-of-a-kind and being able to support our Soldiers and civilians in pursuit of mission success from a resource management standpoint is very rewarding."



*DeMond M. Robinson (left) was selected as the 20th Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosives (CBRNE) Command Civilian of the Quarter for the 1st quarter of fiscal year 2023. U.S. Army photo by Marshall R. Mason.*

Robinson said he likes serving at the 20th CBRNE Command near the Soldiers and U.S. Army civilians he supports.

"I like the proximity of the people you support," said Robinson. "Being able to physically see and talk to people who are affected by the work I do creates a sense of team and real purpose."

[Read full story](#)

## Focusing on health, making New Year's Resolutions count

**By Michael R. Williams**  
20th CBRNE Command G6

Do you do New Year's resolutions much? Exercise more, eat healthier, procrastinate less, be a better person... Here's my "thought" for the year. Health! What does that mean to me, holistically speaking?

**Physical health** – As I mature, I notice the changes in my physical health and the cumulative effects that a life filled with physical activity has on me. The way I move, the speed of my movements, the things I can't or won't do anymore because they cause me pain. The adrenaline junky in me won't let me regret some of the riskier things I've done in my youth. Then there are the "celebrations" that I've partaken in. Let's just say I'm not as good as I once was (you know the song). So, I do things that I thought I'd never do (like Yoga) and I celebrate less hardily.

**Spiritual health** – I have long thought of spiritual health as being happy and at peace with who I am. The things that make me feel good, like doing something for someone that could use the help, going for a hike or bike ride to get away from some of the day-to-day stresses, or thanking God for the people in my life that have en-

riched it so. I am a little more aware of my effects on those around me and, frankly, how I effect my own spiritual health.

**Relationship health** – My wife of 40 years has been "the" biggest influence in my health. I'm sure it hasn't been easy for her, but she has trained me diligently over the years to be the person that I am. I have some things to learn from her yet. From my family to my friends and neighbors to my coworkers, I work to be more patient and try to be a positive influence in their day.

Life stages bring us to adapt our way of thinking and, dare I say, change as we get older. Yup, I said it! You can teach an old dog new tricks. It's one day at a time! But you can always improve so long as you are open to it.

I'm not sure I ever had anyone help me recognize some of these things, as obvious as they seem. We get so wrapped up in what's going on around us. Sometimes we just need someone to point out the obvious. So, this is my New Year's resolution. I will think a little more each day, week and month about how I can improve my health and in turn take a chance at helping others around me improve theirs. You should give it a try. What is there to lose?

# Civilian communications planner retires after 43 years



Elaine Williams (right) puts the retirement pin on her husband Michael Williams (left) at his retirement ceremony at the 20th CBRNE Command Headquarters, Feb. 22. U.S. Army photo by Angel D. Martinez-Navedo.

ABERDEEN PROVING GROUND, Md. — A U.S. Army civilian Senior Communications Mission Planner concluded 41 years of uniformed and civil service during a ceremony on Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, Feb. 22.

Michael R. Williams, who served in the command's G6, was recognized during his retirement ceremony at the 20th CBRNE Command Headquarters.

Williams joined the 20th CBRNE Command in 2008 and worked on communications planning, program management, logistics, records management, the command inspection program and general administration.

Williams went to work at U.S. Africa Command's J6 in 2017 where he focused on interoperability and cybersecurity as a program manager in the Coalition Division. In 2019, he returned to 20th CBRNE Command where he managed headquarters and major subordinate command communications planning and support requirements.

Lt. Col. Anne S. Anderson, the Assistant Chief of Staff for Communications (G6), said Williams had played an instrumental role in supporting the command and thanked Williams' wife Elaine Williams for her support throughout his 41-year career. Monte Dashiell, the deputy G6, served as the master of ceremonies for the ceremony.

[Read full story](#)

## Civil service retirement requires planning, preparation

**By Michael R. Williams**  
20th CBRNE Command G6

Take it with a grain of salt, from someone who is going through the Federal Employee Retirement System (FERS) retirement process now and wishes they investigated all this much earlier. The estimated time it will take to get paid my retirement seems too long but is based on the limited feedback I have gotten from the Army Benefits Center-Civilian. I just hope that their estimates are very conservative so as not to oversell their capability to process packets. Your experience may be vastly different, especially as they work through issues that arise due to the large number of retirement applications currently being submitted. My advice is to do your own research and ensure you are informed, now.

Ever hear the phrase "surround yourself with positive, successful people"? Yes, it can rub off. But you get nowhere without work. Some of that work includes planning your future, all the way into retirement. Planning breeds confidence.

Wanting to succeed is important, but not as important as wanting to plan for success (has been said in many ways). OPM and other agency retirement briefings are no longer considered for those that are on the doorstep of retirement.

They include crucial information that can change a retirement plan and its outcome significantly. Attend one (or more) early in your career.

Three (or more) legged stool. FERS, SS, TSP, other savings, military retirement, real estate holdings (rentals) ... Don't depend on one or two of these to retire on. It is easy to forego saving for ... "The now".

Think about quality of life down the road and strike a balance between living now and planning to be comfortable in later life. With each pay raise, use the additional money in your check to add a little more to savings each month or increase TSP contributions. Strong leadership and the effects on younger (and older) co-workers (technical, relationships, education, retirement planning, investments) cannot be overstated.

Leaders, regardless of supervisory status, must create the environment that enables and motivates team members to seek mentorship. What greater effect can a leader have than helping someone realize their long-term, even retirement goals.

### Resources and other information:

CHRA website [ABC-C - ABC-C \(army.mil\)](#) and the Gov Retirement and Benefits (GRB) platform. The ABC-C website includes a schedule of retirement briefings for the upcoming year in the resources tab. Attend one if you haven't. GRB enables you to estimate retirement benefits, estimate SS income, submit a retirement packet, and more. Retirement estimates show earliest eligibility for retirement, with or without survivor benefit. They also show possible annuity supplements (a type of offset for SS). This applies until eligibility for SS at age 62. You can also request an official retirement estimate, based on a specified retirement date, every three years.

[Read full column](#)

# Command Judge Advocate retires from U.S. Army

ABERDEEN PROVING GROUND, Md. – The Command Judge Advocate for the U.S. military’s premier all hazards command completed his 20-year Army career on Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, Feb. 21.

Maj. William J. Cook III retired from the U.S. Army during a widely attended ceremony at the 20th CBRNE Command Headquarters.

Before enlisting in the Army in 2003, Cook earned his bachelor’s degree in Business Management (Accounting) from Webster University and then went to the University of Missouri-Kansas City for law school.

“I decided to join the Army, get my loans paid off and reassess the job market and my situation,” said Cook. “Turns out I loved what I was doing in the Army and chose to stay. Practice in the military has many benefits that you won’t get in the private sector.”

Cook served at Camp Humphreys in South Korea, where he met his future wife Linda Amarsingh.

“The highlight of my career undoubtedly has been meeting my wife and marrying her, cajoling her to come back in the Army and sharing our careers together,” said Cook, adding that his wife was medically retired as a captain in September 2021.

While serving as a sergeant in Iraq, Cook applied for a direct commission into the Judge Advocate General Corps. He was accepted and commissioned as a 1st lieutenant.

Cook spent more than half of his Army career in military justice, serving as a prosecutor, defense counsel, senior defense counsel and chief of justice.

He tried more than 50 cases at courts martial and earned the JAG Corps Expert military justice practitioner designation.

[Read full story](#)

## Awards

### 20th CBRNE Command

Lt. Col. Drewry L. Brown Jr. – Legion of Merit

Lt. Col. Anterio C. Gainwell – Meritorious Service Medal

1st Lt. Jeremy B. Kilbride – Army Commendation Medal

Staff Sgt. Michael C. Wells – Army Commendation Medal

Sgt. Sylvan S. Louisien – Army Commendation Medal

Sgt. Joshua M. Kamami – Army Commendation Medal

Chief Warrant Officer 2 John I. Hendrick Jr – Army Achievement Medal

Sgt. Julian P. Drayton – Army Achievement Medal

Sgt. Raul Guerrero III – Army Achievement Medal

Spc. Regan M. Shrader – Army Achievement Medal

Spc. Dominic J. Salvatore – Army Achievement Medal

Sgt. 1st Class Robert J. Shaw – Drivers Mechanic Badge-Special Mechanical Equipment

Staff Sgt. Lawrence S. Simpson – Drivers Mechanic Badge-Special Mechanical Equipment

Sgt. Bradley K. James – Drivers Mechanic Badge-Wheeled Vehicles and Drivers Mechanic Badge

Sgt. Jason M. Thompson Jr – Drivers Mechanic Badge

Spc. Evan P. Browning – Drivers Mechanic Badge, Drivers Mechanic Badge-Special Mechanical Equipment and Drivers Mechanic Badge-Wheeled Vehicles

Spc. Logan R. Collins – Drivers Mechanic Badge

Spc. Lamkoun C. Kone – Drivers Mechanic Badge-Wheeled Vehicles

Spc. Keon D. Forbes – Drivers Mechanic Badge and Drivers Mechanic Badge-Wheeled Vehicles

Sgt. Stuart A. Landaverde – Drivers Mechanic Badge, Drivers Mechanic Badge-Special Mechanical Equipment and Drivers Mechanic Badge-Wheeled Vehicles

Spc. Sebastian G. Onate Hernandez – Drivers Mechanic Badge and Drivers Mechanic Badge-Wheeled Vehicles

Spc. Zachary C. Varner – Drivers Mechanic Badge, Drivers Mechanic Badge-Special Mechanical Equipment and Drivers Mechanic Badge-Wheeled Vehicles



# First Army executive officer to serve at CARA promoted to major

ABERDEEN PROVING GROUND, Md. – The first Army officer to serve as the executive officer for a deployable and multifunctional activity that was previously staffed by only Army civilians was promoted to major.

Maj. Fania Gendemeh, the executive officer for the CBRNE Analytical and Remediation Activity, was promoted to major during a ceremony on Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, March 2.

The major said he is grateful for the opportunities the U.S. Army has given him to serve and make a difference around the world.

“I always wanted to be part of an organization that enables people to excel and be all they can be,” said Gendemeh. “The Army was my first choice and I am glad that I joined the greatest Army in the world.”

[Read full story](#)



*Maj. Fania Gendemeh (center), the executive officer for the CBRNE Analytical and Remediation Activity, was promoted to major, March 2. Gendemeh is first Army officer to serve as the executive officer for CARA. U.S. Army photo by Angel D. Martinez-Navedo.*

## Awards

### 48th Chemical Brigade

Capt. Shederick F. Mullgrav – Meritorious Service Medal  
Capt. Nathaniel J. Hinesley – Meritorious Service Medal  
Capt. Shaquita M. Bowdry – Meritorious Service Medal  
Chief Warrant Officer 2 Raymond A. Jones – Meritorious Service Medal  
Sgt. Maj. Crystal D. Irby – Meritorious Service Medal  
Sgt. 1st Class Amber M. Yazzie – Meritorious Service Medal  
Master Sgt. Tantra A. Peyton – Meritorious Service Medal  
Master Sgt. Luz E. Simmons – Meritorious Service Medal  
Master Sgt. Janice M. Pleasant – Meritorious Service Medal  
Sgt. 1st Class Betty Moultrie – Meritorious Service Medal

### 52nd EOD Group

Chaplain (Maj.) Eric L. Light – Meritorious Service Medal  
Chief Warrant Officer 2 Aaron Ellis – Meritorious Service Medal  
Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jeremy R. Nessler – Meritorious Service Medal

Warrant Officer 1 Esan S. Robinson – Meritorious Service Medal

Command Sgt. Maj. Dustin R. Rolfe – Meritorious Service Medal

1st Sgt. Patrick L. Joseph – Meritorious Service Medal

Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Gray – Meritorious Service Medal

Sgt. 1st Class Donald Cribbett – Meritorious Service Medal

Sgt. 1st Class Charlotte A. Lesperance – Meritorious Service Medal

Sgt. 1st Class James K. Thomasontangalin – Meritorious Service Medal

Sgt. 1st Class Derek C. Weisbecker – Meritorious Service Medal

### 71st EOD Group

1st Sgt. Thomas C. Holk – Meritorious Service Medal

Sgt. 1st Class Joshua Anderson – Meritorious Service Medal

Master Sgt. Wade Wagley Jr – Meritorious Service Medal

### 1st Area Medical Laboratory

Lt. Col. William F. McCalmont – Meritorious Service Medal

# Army civilian coaches 17 volleyball teams, nets seven titles

ABERDEEN PROVING GROUND, Md. – A U.S. Army civilian and retired noncommissioned officer has coached 17 volleyball teams and netted seven championships during his 25 years of leading military and high school teams.

Peter R.S. Leon Guerrero from the 20th Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosives (CBRNE) Command has coached eight girls' high school volleyball teams and nine military volleyball teams.

Through his tenure as coach, his military teams have won four championships and his high school teams have won three. During the 2001 – 2002 season, one of his high school teams, the Havre de Grace, Maryland, High School Warriors Varsity Girls' Volleyball Team, made history by competing in the volleyball regional finals for the first time since the school opened in 1959. Some of his players have also been selected for first team and second team all-county.

Originally from Layang, Barrigada, Guam, Leon Guerrero played volleyball for the Mighty Gecko Warriors at George Washington High School in Guam. He later followed in his father's footsteps and joined the U.S. Army. His father served as an infantryman in the Army for three years before becoming a U.S. Navy civilian at Naval Base Guam.

In his early days in the Army, Leon Guerrero focused on a different kind of volley – first as a mortarman and next as a fire support specialist. He later served as an administrative specialist, personnel administrative specialists and intelligence analyst. During his 22 years in uniform, he deployed for Operation Desert Storm and served in



Peter R. S. Leon Guerrero from the U.S. Army 20th Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosives (CBRNE) Command has coached eight girls' high school volleyball teams and nine military volleyball teams. Through his tenure as coach, his military teams have won four championships and his high school teams have won three. U.S. Army photo by Marshall R. Mason.

Germany, South Korea and Tinian in the Northern Marianas Islands.

He has been a U.S. Army civilian in the Intelligence Directorate at the 20th CBRNE Command Headquarters on Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, for 14 years.

Leon Guerrero started coaching while on active duty in the Army. A fellow Soldier asked him to volunteer at a local high school.

He said yes and has been coaching since then.

"With the support of the leadership in the command, my coworkers and my family, I have been able to continue supporting the community by volunteering my time and efforts – giving back and strengthening the community," he said. "Being a volleyball coach has allowed me to support high school students through mentoring and teaching after-school volleyball sports programs."

Leon Guerrero said he welcomes the opportunity to share his knowledge and commitment to the game with students. In addition to passing, blocking, spiking and other volleyball techniques, Leon Guerrero has also worked to teach his players about the Army Values that have guided him throughout his career: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage.

"What I like most about the sport is preparing young athletes physically and mentally to compete effectively, fairly and safely," said Leon Guerrero. "I've found the best way to do that is by building trust, showing you care, communicating effectively, relating to the athletes and providing motivation. These attributes not only make the athletes perform better but also help them to develop as people beyond the sport of volleyball."

[Read full story](#)

## Awards

**FORSCOM Civilian Journalist of the Year**  
Walter T. Ham IV

**Civilian of the Quarter**  
Demond Robinson

### Honorary Awards

Courtney Silva	Certificate of Appreciation
Soraya Albanese	Certificate of Appreciation
Keith Beigel	Civilian Service Commendation Medal
Michel Brooks	Civilian Service Commendation Medal
Keith Brozean	Civilian Service Commendation Medal
Jessica Caldwell	Civilian Service Commendation Medal
Wyatt Guffey	Civilian Service Commendation Medal
William Hart	Civilian Service Commendation Medal
Cordell Mercer	Certificate of Achievement
Nicole Patton	Certificate of Promotion
David Penhollow	Certificate of Retirement
Suree Valenzuela	Civilian Service Commendation Medal
Patricia Waters	Meritorious Civilian Service Medal
Michael Williams	Certificate of Retirement
Michael Williams	Civilian Service Commendation Medal



# Army medical teams helps to protect endangered Red Pandas

FORT DETICK, Maryland – A U.S. Army medical team contributed to an investigation into the cause of death of a Red Panda at the Smithsonian's National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute (NZCBI).

The findings will ultimately help to protect the endangered species.

Maj. Mathanraj Packiam, PhD, from the 1st Area Medical Laboratory and U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID), worked with Maj. Jeffrey R. Kugelman and Raina Kumar from the Center for Genomics; Dr. Janice Williams, Lt. Col. Curtis R. Cline and Col. Paul R. Facemire from the USAMRIID Department of Pathology; and Dr. Neel Aziz, a veterinary pathologist at NZCBI on the investigation.

"Red Pandas are endangered and legally protected in India, Bhutan, China, Nepal and Myanmar," said Dr. Aziz. "Their primary threats are habitat loss and degradation, human interference and poaching. Learning the specific genus and species of pathogens that affect Red Pandas will help conservation medicine at the wildlife domestic animal interface and wildlife human interface."

The USAMRIID's pathology team conducted transmission electron microscopy studies on Formalin-Fixed, Paraffin-Embedded (FFPE) tissue from the Red Panda's brain in an effort to identify and speciate the protozoa in the brain tissue.

The USAMRIID's genomics team extracted the DNA from FFPE brain sections and performed sequencing and identified the protozoa to the species level, said Packiam.

Packiam said the mission was special because of the agent and sample type. "Pathogen discovery or detection of an unknown pathogenic agent in a sample is my passion," said Packiam. "The primary suspected agent at the beginning of the investigation was *Toxoplasma gondii*, for which cats serve as the most likely source of infection in a zoo setting. "After the identification of *Sarcocystis neurona* as the etiological agent, for which opossum is the most likely



*A U.S. Army medical team contributed to an investigation into the cause of death of a Red Panda at the Smithsonian's National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute and the findings will ultimately help to protect the endangered species. Photo by Mathias Appel.*



source of infection, the zoo could take appropriate measures to protect the Red Pandas," said Packiam.

Originally from Trichy, India, Packiam spends his time between the Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland-based 1st Area Medical Laboratory and the Fort Detrick, Maryland-based U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases.

Packiam passed the American Board of Medical Microbiology exam that has a historical 20 percent success rate for non-fellowship candidates. The six-and-a-half hour, computer-based exam has 200 multiple choice questions on clinical lab testing, administration, safety, security and consulting functions.

The 1st AML deploys to perform surveillance, confirmatory analytical laboratory testing and health hazards assessments of environmental, occupational, endemic and CBRNE

threats in support of force protection and WMD missions.

Packiam also serves as the officer-in-charge of Bio-Surveillance at USAMRIID, the U.S. Army's main institute for defensive research into medical countermeasures against biological warfare.

According to Packiam, future collaborations with the Smithsonian's National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute are planned to diagnosis emerging infectious diseases in zoo and wildlife species.

"Identification of unknown etiological agents in the sample plays an important role both as a clinical microbiologist working in hospital as well as a subject matter expert working towards theater-level validation for the 1st Area Medical Laboratory," said Packiam.

[Read full story](#)



# U.S. Army laboratory technician earns Expert Field Medical Badge

FORT BRAGG, N.C. – A U.S. Army medical laboratory technician recently earned one of the most challenging proficiency badges in the U.S. Army.

Sgt. Ariel C. Arroyo qualified for the Expert Field Medical Badge, which has an average completion rate of 20 percent, during a course on Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

Arroyo serves in the Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland-headquartered 1st Area Medical Laboratory, a one-of-a-kind formation that performs surveillance, confirmatory analytical laboratory testing and health hazards assessments of environmental, occupational, endemic and CBRNE threats in support of force protection and Weapons of Mass Destruction missions.

The 1st AML is part of the 44th Medical Brigade and 20th Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosives (CBRNE) Command, the U.S. military's premier all hazards formation.

Soldiers and U.S. Army civilians from 20th CBRNE Command deploy from 19 bases in 16 states take on the world's most dangerous hazards in support of joint, interagency and allied operations.

Arroyo said he has wanted to serve in the U.S. Army since he was growing up in Red Oak, Texas.

"I joined the Army because as a kid I played with the little green Army figurines and it was something I always aspired to do as I grew up," said Arroyo. "One day I walked into the recruiter's office and I would not have done it any different looking back."

The Expert Field Medical Badge qualification course includes a written test of 28 clinic practice guidelines, a physical fitness assessment, day and night land navigation, a 10-task warrior skills lane, a 12-task tactical combat casualty care lane and a 10-task medical evacuation lane.

The culminating event was a 12-mile ruck march in three hours or less.

"The highlight of the qualification was definitely crossing the finish line of the 12-mile ruck," said Arroyo. "There was just a rush of joy and excitement that I felt flowing through my body that came from knowing that all the hard work you put in during these last 19 days paid off."

Arroyo said he decided to compete for the badge because he wanted to challenge himself mentally and physically and to lead by example.



"The biggest challenge I faced during the qualification was myself," said Arroyo. "Self-doubt is a barrier many people have and cannot breach but having confidence in your abilities and in your training will always provide you the necessary tools needed to persevere and having people, such as my wife and strong leaders in my formation being able provide you with motivation really helps too."

Col. Matthew J. Grieser, the commander of the 1st AML, said Arroyo was a great example of the high caliber of Soldiers serving in his one-of-a-kind command.

"By earning this challenging qualification badge, Sergeant Arroyo has demonstrated the grit, intelligence and skill that enable 1st AML to accomplish its missions around the world," said Grieser, a native of Mulino, Oregon, who has deployed multiple times to Afghanistan and Iraq. "Our command is successful because of extraordinary professionals like Sergeant Arroyo."

[Read full story](#)



*Sgt. Ariel C. Arroyo qualified for the Expert Field Medical Badge, which has an average completion rate of 20 percent, during a course on Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Arroyo serves in the Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland-headquartered 1st Area Medical Laboratory. Courtesy photos.*



# Soldiers tackle all hazards during combat training center rotation

FORT POLK, La. – American Soldiers are training to defeat any enemy and overcome any hazard at the Joint Readiness Training Center on Fort Polk, Louisiana.

The 83rd Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear (CBRN) Battalion “Lightning Dragons” are supporting the “Mountain Warriors,” from the 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, during a combat training center rotation.

The Fort Stewart, Georgia-based 83rd CBRN Battalion is part of the 48th Chemical Brigade and 20th Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosives (CBRNE) Command, the U.S. military’s premier all hazards command.

Headquartered on Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, the 20th Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosives (CBRNE) Command is home to 75 percent of the active-duty U.S. Army’s CBRN and Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) units, as well as the 1st Area Medical Laboratory, CBRNE Analytical and Remediation Activity, five Weapons of Mass Destruction Coordination Teams and three Nuclear Disablement Teams.

American Soldiers and U.S. Army civilians from 20th CBRNE Command deploy from 19 bases in 16 states to take on the world’s most dangerous hazards in support of joint, interagency and allied operations.

During the rotation, the 83rd CBRN Battalion is leveraging 20th CBRNE Command units from bases across the nation.

The battalion is working with the Fort Drum, New York- based 59th CBRN Company (Hazardous Response), the Fort Carson, Colorado-based 62nd Ordnance Company (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) and a CBRNE Response Team from the Fort Hood, Texas-based 68th CBRN Company (Technical Escort).

The 83rd CBRN Battalion commands five companies that are stationed across Fort Stewart, Georgia; Fort Bragg, North Carolina; and Fort Drum, New York.



*Soldiers are training to defeat any enemy and overcome any hazard at the Joint Readiness Training Center on Fort Polk, Louisiana. U.S. Army photo courtesy of the Joint Readiness Training Center Operations Group.*

Maj. Derek E. Taylor, the executive officer of the 83rd CBRN Battalion, said the combat training center rotation gives the battalion the chance to hone its mission readiness during tough and realistic scenarios.

“Only a few Combat Training Center rotations each year have a CBRN battalion-sized element supporting the training brigade,” said Taylor, who grew up around the nation in a military family but now calls Walla Walla, Washington, home. “These opportunities help the training brigade and CBRN battalion validate maneuver-enabler integration and interoperability during dynamic and complex CBRN tactical scenarios as well as provide valuable best practices to the larger Army force.”

To prepare for the rotation, the units conducted a deliberate training process on their respective military installations that was primarily focused on honing mission essential tasks. Taylor added that each team, platoon, company and the battalion headquarters was validated prior to the rotation.

“These standardized validations across the 48th Chemical Brigade guarantee competence and enhance trust when working with Sol-

diers you may not have met before,” said Taylor, an Afghanistan veteran who graduated from Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, with a degree in applied physics.

Taylor said the Army’s two Combat Training Centers on Fort Irwin, California, and Fort Polk, Louisiana, provide different terrain, weather and opposing force tactics. He said the current rotation was the first time in several years a Stryker brigade conducted large-scale combat training in the dense vegetation on Fort Polk.

Taylor said the rotation will better prepare his Soldiers to defeat near-peer adversaries in large-scale combat operations.

“The addition of a battalion-size enabler to combat CBRN threats and hazards allows for robust learning opportunities,” said Taylor. “Smoothly integrating enablers on the battlefield and using the same common operating picture provides huge advantages. The Joint Readiness Training Center is one of the few places globally capable of replicating large-scale combat operations and accurately assessing our capabilities.”

[Read full story](#)

# U.S. Army units train at Defense Nuclear Weapons School

KIRTLAND AIR FORCE BASE, N.M. – Units from the U.S. military's premier all hazards command trained together during a radiological course at the Defense Nuclear Weapons School on Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico.

Soldiers from the 20th CBRNE Command's 1st Area Medical Laboratory and Nuclear Disablement Teams both participated in the Applied Radiological Response Techniques Level 2 course, a five-day course is designed to apply radiological hazard theories and develop applied radiological problem-solving methods.

"Approximately 20 percent of the course is conducted in detector labor-

atories while the remaining course time is dedicated to hands-on radiological experiences and the interpretation of survey data," said Capt. David D. Manzanares, a Nuclear Medical Science Officer from NDT 1.

NDTs contribute to the nation's strategic deterrence by staying ready to exploit and disable nuclear and radiological Weapons of Mass Destruction infrastructure and components to deny near-term capability to adversaries.

Tracing its roots to the Manhattan Project, the Defense Nuclear Weapons School provides training on radiological and nuclear weapons, incident command and response and

CBRNE modeling for the Department of Defense and other Federal, state and local agencies.

Col. Matthew J. Grieser, the commander of the 1st AML, and his senior enlisted leader, Command Sgt. Maj. Jackie S. Mims, visited the Soldiers during the course.

"It takes teamwork to tackle the kinds of challenges that we confront and we have many great partners, including the professionals at the Defense Nuclear Weapons School," said Grieser, a former enlisted Army medic from Mulino, Oregon.

[Read full story](#)

## CBRN Soldiers train with Navy SEALs during Exercise Trident

JOINT BASE LITTLE CREEK-FORT STORY, Va. – U.S. Army Chemical Corps Soldiers are training with Navy SEALs during Exercise Trident here, Nov. 28 – Dec. 16.

Soldiers from the 45th Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear (CBRN) Company (Hazardous Response) are honing their lifesaving and mission-enabling skills with Naval Special Warfare Group 2.

Exercise Trident is a U.S. Special Operations Command-sponsored and Naval Special Operations Command-executed certification and validation exercise.

The Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington-based 45th CBRN Company "Phoenix" is part of the 110th CBRN Battalion (Technical Escort), 48th Chemical Brigade and 20th CBRNE Command. Army Hazardous Response companies conduct CBRN reconnaissance, surveillance and decontamination operations with both conventional and Special Operations forces around the world and also provide support to civil authorities across the nation.

Capt. Shederick F. Mullgrav, the commander of the 45th CBRN Company (Hazardous Response), said Soldiers from the 2nd Platoon "Black Sheep" were selected to participate in Exercise Trident because they excelled during a validation exercise on Fort Hood, Texas.

Mullgrav said the platoon provided CBRN planning, site assessment and decontamination for a SEAL team and a 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) MH-47 Chinook during Exercise Trident.

The platoon simulated the challenges that a SEAL team could encounter and mitigated the effects to ensure the team can maintain speed, intensity and violence of action.

Mullgrav, 1st Sgt. Brandon L. Trail and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jose L. Salinas coordinated with many different joint commands in preparation for Exercise Trident.

"The company's capability to meet the needs of the Special Operations community further hones the proficiency of our CBRN tasks," said Mullgrav, who is from Riverdale, Georgia, and has deployed to Kuwait, Turkey and Afghanistan during his 10 years in the U.S. Army.

[Read full story](#)



*U.S. Army Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear (CBRN) specialists from the 45th CBRN Company (Hazardous Response) are honing their lifesaving and mission-enabling skills with U.S. Navy SEALs during Exercise Trident. The company's 2nd Platoon "Black Sheep" provided CBRN planning, site assessment and decontamination for a SEAL team and a 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) MH-47 Chinook. U.S. Army photo by 1st Lt. Brandon Crisp and Staff Sgt. Jonathan Day.*



# EOD technician serves on Golden Knights Parachute Team

FORT BRAGG, N.C. – A U.S. Army Explosive Ordnance Disposal Soldier made a grand entrance into the Army-Navy game at Lincoln Financial Field in Philadelphia.

Staff Sgt. Devin T. Diaz jumped into the stadium during the pre-game activities as a member of the U.S. Army Golden Knights Parachute Team.

A native of Sunnyvale, California, Diaz served in the 47th Ordnance Company (EOD) on Fort Hood, Texas, and the 759th Ordnance Company (EOD) on Fort Irwin, California.

Diaz later served in the Army Asymmetric Warfare Group on Fort Meade, Maryland, as an EOD advisor and he was the first staff sergeant to make it through the Operational Advisor Training Course in the history of the group.

Diaz decided to become an EOD technician while serving with the Military Police in Afghanistan on a Counter Improvised Explosive Device team. He was selected for the EOD program in 2011.

He has deployed to Afghanistan three times, including two deployments with Military Police and one as an EOD team leader. He also deployed with the 759th EOD Company to Syria.

From range clearance operations at the National Training Center on Fort Irwin, California, to defeating Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) in the combat zone, Diaz has honed his lifesaving and mission-enabling skills. In one of many unique missions in Afghanistan, as an EOD team leader with the 47th EOD Company, Diaz conducted post-blast analysis on 15 trucks that had been destroyed by insurgents with Improvised Explosive Devices.

While serving in the 759th EOD Company, Diaz was also a member of the winning Bomb Squad team in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security-hosted competition called Urban Shield that brought together California SWAT teams, Fire and Rescue Teams, Emergency Medical Services and Bomb Techs.

He said it takes perseverance to succeed as an Army EOD technician.

“The more resilient that you can be, the better an EOD tech you can be,” said Diaz.

Earlier this year, Diaz demonstrated this kind of resilience when he tore his patellar tendon. After having surgery in February, Diaz was told it would take six to eight months before he could run or jump again.

He started running again four months later and participated in a half marathon six months later. On Oct. 9, he jumped into the Army Ten Miler in Washington, D.C., and then ran the race. He said he intends to participate in the Miami Marathon and he is preparing for an ultramarathon.

Diaz was picked for the Golden Knights during the 2020 assessment and selection. Any American Soldier can ap-



*Staff Sgt. Devin T. Diaz (right), a U.S. Army Explosive Ordnance Disposal technician and member of U.S. Army Golden Knights Parachute Team, served in the 47th Ordnance Company (EOD) on Fort Hood, Texas, and the 759th Ordnance Company (EOD) on Fort Irwin, California. Diaz was picked for the Golden Knights during the 2020 assessment and selection. Courtesy photo.*

ply to serve in the Golden Knights if they have completed 75 free fall jumps, either in the military or as a civilian.

Since the team's inception, the Golden Knights have participated in more than 16,000 events in 50 states and 48 countries. With 50 jumpers and 50 support personnel, the teams travel roughly 240 days out of every year.

They are one of three U.S. Department of Defense-sanctioned aerial demonstration teams, together with the U.S. Navy Blue Angels and U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds.

As a Golden Knight, Diaz has landed at sports venues and community events around the nation. From landing on the aircraft carrier USS Midway Museum in San Diego to jumping into Yankees Stadium in New York City, Diaz has participated in 40 different events during his two years as a member of the Golden Knights' Gold Team.

The highlight of his jumps so far has been landing on the field before the San Francisco 49ers and Los Angeles Chargers game, Nov. 13.

“I got to jump into my hometown stadium,” said Diaz, who has served in the U.S. Army for almost 17 years. “Not only did I get to do that, but my wife and my father were on the field when I landed.”

Command Sgt. Maj. Dave Silva, said Diaz personifies the high caliber of Soldiers serving in the EOD community.

“He is a consummate professional who never stops seeking and conquering the next challenge. Whether its disarming IEDs in Syria, improving the Army's ability to counter asymmetric threats or now supporting recruiting as a member of the elite Golden Knights, he's an example of what you can achieve if you refuse to get comfortable,” said Silva.

[Read full story](#)

# 1st AML forges relationship with Australian Defence Force

BRISBANE, Australia – American Soldiers from a one-of-a-kind U.S. Army medical laboratory met with their counterparts at the Australian Defence Force Malaria and Infectious Disease Institute (ADFMIDI) in Brisbane, Australia.

Soldiers from the 1st Area Medical Laboratory were hosted by Professor G. Dennis Shanks, the director of the Australian Army Malaria Research Institute, and Australian Defence Force Lt. Col. Brady McPherson, the ADFMIDI commanding officer.

Originally from Atlanta, Shanks was an active-duty U.S. Army officer for more than 20 years and he conducted research and undertook field testing in Southeast Asia, South America and Africa.

Shanks also spent significant time working at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, where the 1st Area Medical Laboratory is headquartered.

Following his retirement in the United States in 2006, Shanks was appointed director of the Australian Army Malaria Research Institute.

Col. Matthew J. Grieser, the commanding officer of the 1st Area Medical Laboratory, said the visit to the ADFMIDI headquarters at the Gallipoli Barracks in the Enoggera suburb of Brisbane, Australia, was a follow-up meeting between the allied commands.

“Previously, representatives from the 1st AML and ADFMIDI had met and conversed both formally and informally at the American Society for Tropical Medicine and Hygiene 2022 Symposia in Seattle,” said Grieser, who is originally from Mulino, Oregon, and has commanded the 1st Area Medical Laboratory since July 2021.

Grieser and his senior enlisted advisor, Sgt. Maj. Jackie S. Mims, visited Australia with Maj. Joshua M. Carmen, the 1st AML Biology Section officer-in-charge, and Maj. Andrew A. Clack, the 1st AML Occupational and Environmental Health Section officer-in-charge. Carmen and Clack are also both U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) Troop 1 leads.

A former enlisted Army medic, Grieser has deployed to Afghanistan four times and Iraq five times. The seasoned veteran has also served in Haiti, Panama and New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. The 1st AML commanding officer said the visit helped to strengthen an important partnership.

“ADFMIDI represents an ally-nation working partner of considerable importance. The organization is Australia’s Department of Defence infectious disease research institute, with long-established relationships and trust with partner militaries in INDOPACOM’s area of operations, including in Papua New Guinea, Malaysia and Vietnam,” said Grieser. “Engagement with the ADFMIDI team in Brisbane was a privilege and there is significant potential for further collaborations and future engagements.”



*Maj. Joshua M. Carmen (right) from the 1st Area Medical Laboratory stands with Dr. Qin Cheng (left), the head of the Drug Resistance Department at the Australian Defence Force Malaria and Infectious Disease Institute. Soldiers from the 1st AML were hosted by Professor G. Dennis Shanks, the director of the Australian Army Malaria Research Institute, and Australian Defence Force Lt. Col. Brady McPherson, the ADFMIDI commanding officer. Courtesy photo.*

Grieser said there was mission overlap between the 1st AML and ADFMIDI that could be leveraged to make both organizations stronger.

“ADFMIDI has a robust program and can share decades of institutional experience in both laboratory procedures and fieldwork,” said Grieser.

He added that they plan to focus on a mosquito-borne zoonotic infection called the Ross River Virus that has previously affected both Australia Defence Force and U.S. service members.

The 1st Area Medical Laboratory is part of the 44th Medical Brigade and 20th Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosives (CBRNE) Command, the U.S. military’s premier all hazards command.

The 1st AML identifies and evaluates health hazards through unique medical laboratory analyses and rapid health hazard assessments of nuclear, biological, chemical, endemic disease, occupational and environmental health threats.

According to Grieser, Soldiers from the 1st Area Medical Laboratory have worked with military medical professionals around the world to strengthen their ability to detect and identify threats to citizens and service members. The 1st AML also regularly meets and trains with South Korean and NATO military medical professionals.

“Together with our allies, our command contributes to our nation’s medical diplomacy by forging and strengthening critical relationships and partnerships that help to save lives and enable mission readiness,” said Grieser.

[Read full story](#)



# Army teams removes chemical munitions at Redstone Arsenal

REDSTONE ARSENAL, Ala. – Highly trained units from the U.S. military's premier all hazards command are removing old unexploded chemical munitions from a former bomb disposal area on Redstone Arsenal, Alabama.

U.S. Army civilians from the Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosives (CBRNE) Analytical and Remediation Activity - Remediation Response West and Chemical Corps Soldiers are working to clear the Gulf Chemical Warfare Depot on the base.

Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear (CBRN) specialists from the Fort Bliss, Texas-based 46th Chemical Company (Technical Escort) are working with CARA civilians during the operation. The 46th Chemical Company (Technical Escort) is part of the 22nd Chemical Battalion and 48th Chemical Brigade. Both units are from the 20th CBRNE Command.

Steven M. Tewhill, a U.S. Army civilian and Senior Unexploded Ordnance Supervisor from CARA Remediation Response-West on Redstone Arsenal, said the current chemical munition clearance operation is part of a long-term effort.

"CARA has been supporting other remediation operations on Redstone Arsenal since 2014 and will probably continue through 2025," said Tewhill, adding that CARA Remediation Response West was moved from Pine Bluff Arsenal, Arkansas, to Redstone Arsenal, Alabama, to be closer to the ongoing clearance operation.

In addition to Tewhill, the CARA civilians involved include Jeffrey Williams from Choctaw, Oklahoma; Donald Jennings from Sheridan, Arkansas; Christopher Crecelius from Soddy-Daisy, Tennessee; Kevin Hanuszczyk from Kaneohe, Hawaii; Christopher Henke from Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin; Taylor Phillips from Sheffield, Alabama; Anthony Pino from Lorton, Virginia; Wende Thornton from Canton, Texas; and Clinton Vandiver from Elizabethtown, Kentucky.

CBRN Soldiers currently involved in



*Spc. Michael Di Mola (left) and Sgt. David Hernandez practice decontaminating the Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus facemask of an Occupational Safety and Health Administration Personal Protective Equipment Level-B. U.S. Army civilians from the Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosives (CBRNE) Analytical and Remediation Activity and Soldiers from the 46th Chemical Company are removing old chemical munitions from a bomb disposal area on Redstone Arsenal, Alabama. Courtesy photo.*



the clearance operation include 1st Lt. Joshua Young from Washington, D.C.; Sgt. 1st Class Leandria Thrasher from Birmingham, Alabama; Sgt. 1st Class Joseph Washington from Miami; Staff Sgt. Patrice Williams from Longview, Texas; Sgt. Andrew Van Deventer from Cary, North Carolina; Sgt. David Hernandez from Cortez, Colorado; Spc. Osvaldo Casterner from Cayey, Puerto Rico; Spc. Michael Di Mola from Bay Shore, New York; Pfc. Guillermo Garduno from Fort Wayne, Indiana; and Pfc. Christian Stough from Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

"This ordnance was either buried intact, burned or detonated during authorized disposal in the 1940s - 1960s," said Tewhill. "Most of the munition residue encountered shows a complete disposal, although occasionally there is liquid residue inside. Then that ordnance will be packaged and stored for further disposal." According to Tewhill, the remediation

effort gives CBRN Soldiers firsthand experience with the CBRN hazards they could confront on the battlefield.

Before supporting the clearance operation, the CBRN Soldiers complete the 40-hour Occupational Safety and Health Administration Hazardous Waste and Emergency Response course that prepares them to work with hazardous materials.

Tewhill said the CBRN Soldiers then occupy positions in the personnel decontamination station, rescue, packaging, life support and Command Post operations.

"No amount of training can simulate the pace of live operations and the unexpected problems that must be solved," said Tewhill. "The Soldiers will benefit in ways they may not recognize for years in the future."

[Read full story](#)



# Units train for nuclear forensics missions at Prominent Hunt

BETHANY BEACH, Del. – Highly specialized units from the U.S. military's premier all hazards command trained for nuclear forensics missions at Exercise Prominent Hunt in Bethany Beach, Delaware.

The 20th CBRNE Command's Nuclear Disablement Team 1 and CBRNE Response Team 1 from 11th Chemical Company (Technical Escort) validated their readiness to serve on National Technical Nuclear Forensics Ground Collection Task Force.

The NTNF Ground Collection Task Force gathers and packages samples

of radioactive fallout that enable partner agencies to determine the source of the radiation.

Maj. Joshua T. Mashl, the deputy team chief for NDT 1, said Exercise Prominent Hunt is unique for several reasons.

Mashl said the exercise gave the units the opportunity to work with joint and interagency partners on the task force.

"The objective is to rapidly yet safely collect nuclear debris after a nuclear explosion in order to allow scientists

in the Department of Energy to conduct analysis and, ultimately, identify the origin of the weapon," said Mashl.

"This is one of the few missions in which we have the privilege of working alongside a large number of incredible professionals," said Mashl, a native of Colorado Springs, Colorado. "We work with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration, U.S. Air Force, Department of Homeland Security and local emergency services agencies."

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## EOD techs destroy unexploded round on Gettysburg battlefield

GETTYSBURG, Pa. – U.S. Army Explosive Ordnance Disposal Soldiers safely removed and destroyed an unexploded round discovered at the Gettysburg National Military Park, Feb. 8.

EOD technicians from the 55th Ordnance Company (EOD) were called by Gettysburg Park Rangers after the unexploded ordnance (UXO) round was discovered during an archaeological dig.

Staff Sgt. Alexander J. Campbell, the EOD team leader, and Staff Sgt. Samarth Sharma, the team sergeant, made the 92-mile trip from the company headquarters on Fort Belvoir to Gettysburg and arrived within an hour and a half after receiving the call. Campbell is originally from Bryan, Ohio, and Sharma is from Omaha, Nebraska.

Campbell identified the UXO round as a 3-inch Burton Case Shot and determined that the item was safe to transport to a local disposal area to be destroyed by detonation. After the area was declared safe, the roads were reopened.

Capt. Matthew D. Booker, the commander of the 55th Ordnance Company (EOD), said the UXO round was probably from the Civil War era.

"This type of munition was historically used during the Civil War and most likely came from the Battle of Gettysburg in 1863," said Booker.

This wasn't the company's first UXO response in Gettysburg. In August 2022, the Army EOD company responded when an unfuzed 3-inch Hotchkiss Shell was lodged in a historic building that was being refurbished.

The 55th EOD Company enables military operations and supports the U.S. Secret Service. The company also covers domestic explosive mitigation missions in most of Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, half of Pennsylvania, part of Washington D.C., and part of West Virginia.

The 55th EOD Company is part of the 192nd EOD Battalion, 52nd EOD Group and 20th Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosives (CBRNE) Command, the U.S. Department of Defense's premier multifunctional all hazards formation.

Army EOD technicians respond when military munitions are discovered, both on and off post. Booker said his company responds to around 50 UXO calls a year.

"The more we support organizations, the more they trust our company's ability to professionally and safely handle incidents," said Booker, a Buffalo, New York, native, who has served in the U.S. Army for 13 years and deployed to Afghanistan. "It also doesn't hurt that Staff Sgt. Campbell enjoys history and got a pretty good summary of the battle that happened there from the Park Rangers."

[Read full story](#)



*U.S. Army Explosive Ordnance Disposal technicians from the 55th Ordnance Company (EOD) were called by Gettysburg National Military Park Rangers after an unexploded round was discovered during an archaeological dig in a rehabilitation area. The 3-inch Burton Case Shot was safely transported to a local disposal area and destroyed by detonation. Courtesy photo.*

# EOD company marks anniversary with largest jump in history



*Soldiers from the 28th EOD Company (Airborne) marked the 11th anniversary of the company's Airborne status with a record-breaking EOD parachute jump. Honoring the service of the one-of-a-kind unit, 175 troops from the U.S. Army Special Operations Command, Joint Special Operations Command, XVIII Airborne Corps, 82nd Airborne Division, 18th Air Support Operations Group and 192nd EOD Battalion participated in the jump. Courtesy photo.*



FORT BRAGG, N.C. – Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) technicians from the U.S. Army's only EOD company solely designed to support Army Ranger and Special Forces missions marked the 11th anniversary of the company's Airborne status with a record-breaking EOD parachute jump.

EOD Soldiers from the 28th EOD Company (Airborne) and other Airborne Soldiers recently celebrated the anniversary with the largest U.S. Army Airborne EOD technician jump in history at the Sicily Drop Zone on Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

Maj. Stephen M. Knudsen, the commander of the 28th EOD Company (Airborne), said 175 jumpers participated in the anniversary jump, with Airborne troops from the U.S. Army Special Operations Command, Joint

Special Operations Command, XVIII Airborne Corps, 82nd Airborne Division, 18th Air Support Operations Group and 192nd EOD Battalion. Among the jumpers were 48 Army EOD technicians from the 28th EOD Company (Airborne) and three other EOD companies that are part of the 192nd EOD Battalion.

"Although this seems like a small number, it was the largest amount of EOD technicians to jump at a single time in Army EOD history," said Knudsen. "The 192nd EOD Battalion supports the 82nd Airborne Division on a constant rotational basis, supporting each brigade and the Immediate Response Force mission year-round."

The jump was originally scheduled to mark the 10th anniversary of Air-

borne status last year but was postponed due to COVID-19 restrictions. Since a German jumpmaster participated in the event, 21 U.S. Army EOD Soldiers also earned German Jump Wings.

In June 2008, the 28th Ordnance Company (EOD) was activated at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and directed by the commander of 20th CBRNE Command to assume all current and future support to the 75th Ranger Regiment, the U.S. Army's premier direct action raid force. In 2012, the 28th EOD Company earned its status as the first ever Airborne EOD company. Knudsen said the Airborne EOD company has a rigorous selection process.

Soldiers from the 28th EOD Company and 192nd EOD Battalion have deployed to hot spots around the world to support military operations at the tip of the spear.

"The 192nd supports Joint Forcible Entry as a member of the Immediate Response Force for the conventional forces, enabling division commanders to choose an airborne entry capability with a full spectrum of EOD technicians," said Knudsen.

Purpose built to support the 75th Ranger Regiment, the 28th EOD Company has quietly earned numerous accolades during decades of combat operations. The unit's EOD technicians have successfully conducted more than 5,200 operations in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan to date. Soldiers from the 28th EOD Company Soldiers have earned 32 valorous awards, including two Distinguished Service Crosses and 21 Purple Hearts.

"The 28th delivers an EOD capability that enables direct action Special Operations raids that consist of seizure of key terrain to include airfields, destruction of strategic facilities and precision no fail operations responsible for capturing or killing of high value targets with strategic importance," said Knudsen. "Members of the 28th maintain a combat presence supporting Special Operations."

[Read full story](#)



# 28th EOD Company 1st sergeant earns SOCOM award

FORT BRAGG, N.C. – The senior enlisted leader for the U.S. Army's only Explosive Ordnance Disposal company that supports the 75th Ranger Regiment earned the U.S. Special Operations Command Excalibur Award for NCO Leadership.

U.S. Army 1st Sgt. Chad O. Staples from the 28th Ordnance Company (EOD) (Airborne) was recognized for his service and leadership at the one-of-a-kind company.

The SOCOM commander established the Excalibur Award of Excellence to recognize enlisted leaders who demonstrate the "Warrior Ethos" with outstanding leadership, gallantry, integrity and moral courage during military operations or training.

Staples earned the award for heroism during a compound clearance operation in Afghanistan. After an improvised explosive device (IED) detonated, he disregarded his own injuries to clear a safe path for 13 wounded U.S. and partner nation personnel. During the mission, Staples also identified three more pressure-plate IEDs and provided first aid to the wounded.

Maj. Stephen M. Knudsen, the commander of the 28th Ordnance Company (EOD) (Airborne), said it was a testament to Staples that SOCOM selected a noncommissioned officer from U.S. Army Forces Command and 20th CBRNE Command for the award.

"The company has hands down the best NCOs I've ever worked with," said Knudsen, a native of Sutter Creek, California. "First Sgt. Staples is not only the company's senior enlisted leader, he's also a phenomenal example of the next-level leadership, mastery of craft and readiness to take the fight to the enemy that you see in every single NCO in this unit."

Knudsen has known Staples since they were students at the EOD school more than 12 years ago when Knudsen was a 1st lieutenant and Staples was a sergeant. "It was apparent then that he has a special, innate leadership quality about him and it's paid huge dividends during his time as a leader at all levels in the 28th," said Knudsen.

"In a unit that has had elements deployed in combat for the entirety of its existence, the NCO leaders are not just the backbone of the unit but the standard bearers who ensure the entire team is ready for war at a moment's notice," said Knudsen. "They provide motivation that keeps EOD techs moving forward to the sound of the guns. I've never seen Soldiers with more loyalty and trust in the first sergeant and it is 100 percent well-placed."

A Cal Poly graduate who has deployed to Iraq once and Afghanistan three times, Knudsen went to EOD school straight out of the Ordnance Corps Officer Basic Course.

Staples initially enlisted as a Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear (CBRN) specialist with the Utah National Guard and served a Chemical Reconnaissance Detachment team leader in the 19th Special Forces Group



U.S. Army 1st Sgt. Chad O. Staples, the senior enlisted leader from the 28th Ordnance Company (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) (Airborne), earned the U.S. Special Operations Command Excalibur Award for NCO Leadership for a mission in Afghanistan. Staples has served with the Fort Bragg, North Carolina-based 28th EOD Company for almost eight years. Courtesy photo.

(Airborne). He decided to become an EOD Disposal technician and joined the active-duty U.S. Army in 2008.

Staples said there were many highlights to earning the prestigious SOCOM leadership award.

"First and foremost, it highlighted the extremely dynamic and dangerous mission set that everyone in the company is tasked with," said Staples. "There is always an air of mystery to the 28th EOD Company due to the classified nature of the mission set. This allowed conventional EOD a chance to see and hear a small snip of what everyone in the company is capable of accomplishing any time they are tasked.

"Along with showcasing the company, the opportunity for my family to attend the award ceremony was paramount," said Staples. "Time and time again my wife and children have watched me leave, never knowing where I was going or what the missions entailed. They have been and always will be the foundation of who I am and why I serve in the military."

[Read full story](#)



# Army EOD officer bonds with Navy working dog on battlefield

FORT BLISS, Texas – An Army Explosive Ordnance Disposal officer developed an enduring bond with a Navy working dog during missions in Afghanistan.

Capt. Jacob S. Rafalson, the EOD officer for the 1st Armored Division on Fort Bliss, Texas, served with a Navy working dog named Bongo during a deployment to Afghanistan in 2019.

As a part of the 749th EOD Company, Rafalson led an EOD platoon that worked out of Kabul International Airport and Bongo served on bomb detection missions.

Rafalson's EOD platoon in Afghanistan served on numerous joint and allied operations.

"In Afghanistan, we worked with every branch of the military and multiple partner nations," said Rafalson, a Lake Zurich, Illinois, native who deployed once to Afghanistan and three times to Africa for humanitarian demining training missions during his seven years in the U.S. Army.

Rafalson had Czech Republic Armed Forces and U.S. Air Force EOD teams attached to his EOD platoon that responded to suspected Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) sites and conducted presence patrols, route clearance and reconnaissance missions.

Rafalson said Bongo and other working dogs like him save lives on the battlefield.

"Military Working Dogs like Bongo can serve multiple roles downrange," said Rafalson. "When working in conjunction with EOD, they can provide critical early warning detection for explosive hazards, enabling operators to avoid or neutralize a threat."

The operations Military Working Dogs support are often dangerous and difficult. During a mission with another unit in Logar Province, Bongo, his handler, Navy Master-at-Arms 1st Class Derek Olson, and their team were struck by a vehicle borne IED.

"Fortunately, nobody was severely



*Capt. Jacob S. Rafalson served with U.S. Navy working dog Bongo during a deployment to Afghanistan in 2019. Rafalson commanded an EOD platoon at Kabul International Airport that Bongo and his handler, Navy Master-at-Arms 1st Derek Olson, supported. U.S. Army photo by Capt. Jacob S. Rafalson.*

injured and both Bongo and his handler were able to continue serving," said Rafalson.

A sable German Shepherd, Bongo serves on Naval Station Great Lakes, Illinois, the U.S. Navy's largest training base and home to its only boot camp.

Master-at-Arms 3rd Class Miranda G. Webb is the current handler for 8-year-old Bongo, the oldest working dog at the Naval Station Great Lakes Kennel.

"You wouldn't know he was eight though," said Webb. "He doesn't show or act like it."

The U.S. military has approximately 1,600 Military Working Dogs that serve in every branch of the United States Armed Services.

Rafalson said that Bongo not only protected his EOD platoon from Improvised Explosive Devices but also kept them motivated during the long deployment.

"A good Military Working Dog can have a huge boost on morale and help to provide some much-needed

emotional relief in high stress environments," said Rafalson.

His most memorable mission with Bongo came during an extended route clearance operation outside the wire. Bongo and his handler helped the EOD team leader clear a route for a dismounted reconnaissance patrol.

"We were on what was supposed to be a three-hour reconnaissance mission that turned into an overnight mission when one of our partner force trucks accidentally drove off the road on the narrowest part of the route," said Rafalson. "It took us about eight hours to recover that vehicle. Bongo was in the truck with us and was well-behaved the whole time."

Rafalson said that even highly disciplined and well-trained Military Working Dogs like Bongo still like to play sometimes.

"He has a playful but reliable temperament," said Rafalson. "One of his particular quirks was that he loved water bottles and would frequently try to run off with your water bottle if you weren't paying attention."

[Read full story](#)

# Retired colonel helped to forge CBRNE Command, WMD task force

ABERDEEN PROVING GROUND, Md. — A retired Chemical Corps colonel helped to launch the U.S. military's premier all hazards command and establish the joint task force designed to locate, identify and eliminate Weapons of Mass Destruction.

Retired Col. Ray Van Pelt was one of the principal architects behind the establishment of the U.S. Army's 20th Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosives (CBRNE) Command and Joint Task Force Weapons of Mass Destruction-Elimination.

Van Pelt served in the Army for 30 years before spending another eight years as an Army civilian at the 20th CBRNE Command, the U.S. military's premier all hazards command.

Growing up in an Irish Catholic family in Staten Island in New York City, Van Pelt was inspired to join the Army by his father and four uncles who served in World War II.

He attended college and married his wife, Dianne Van Pelt. After three years of service as an enlisted Army medic, he attended Officer Candidate School on Fort Benning, Georgia, and branched into the Chemical Corps. Van Pelt commanded the 14th Chemical Detachment, 10th Chemical Company, 83rd Chemical Battalion and the Deseret Chemical Depot in Utah.

"I found being a young leader in the Chemical Corps to be demanding, important and meaningful," said Van Pelt. "But it was years later on 9/11 that the importance of the Chemical Corps really came into focus for me."

Van Pelt was in the Pentagon on 9/11 and evacuated the building with everyone from his office.

"From that moment on, the threat of asymmetrical attacks against our nation and operating forces became paramount to our national security," said Van Pelt. "In the years following 9/11, countering the nexus of terrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction became one of our highest national priorities."

While serving as a military planner for



*Ray Van Pelt and Diane Van Pelt are recognized at his Army civilian retirement ceremony on Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, Feb. 27, 2018. Van Pelt was one of the principal architects behind the establishment of the U.S. Army's 20th CBRNE Command and Joint Task Force Weapons of Mass Destruction-Elimination. U.S. Army photo by Angel D. Martinez-Navedo.*



counter proliferation policy in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Van Pelt was instrumental in standing up the 75th Exploitation Task Force that was given the mission of exploiting and eliminating WMD during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"After 9/11 and the invasion of Afghanistan, the DoD and U.S. Central Command began building the force package required for Operation Iraqi Freedom," he said. "Our two highest strategic objectives were Iraqi regime change and the elimination of WMD. As planning developed, it became very apparent that the DoD lacked a capability that would be able to find, exploit and eliminate Iraq's WMD program, munitions and materials."

Van Pelt was selected as a Distinguished Member of the U.S. Army Chemical Corps in 2013.

Following a four-year formation program, Van Pelt was ordained as a Catholic Deacon in the Archdiocese of Baltimore in May 2015.

In Feb. 2018, when Van Pelt retired from civil service with the U.S. Army, he went from serving his nation to serving in his church full time at St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church in Aberdeen, Maryland, where he focuses on parish and school programs.

"I suppose in many ways serving in the military and serving the Lord has a lot in common," said Van Pelt. "It's about serving others, putting the mission and others first, treating others with dignity and respect, leading by example, committing yourself to a higher purpose, taking the challenge, and striving toward excellence, or in this case holiness."

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# Retired sergeant major paved way for Special Forces EOD techs



*Sgt. Maj. Mike R. Vining, one of the founding members and first Explosive Ordnance Disposal technicians in U.S. Army Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta, places a charge on a dud AT-4 rocket in Saudi Arabia in March 1991. Vining served in Operation Desert Storm. Courtesy photo.*

SOUTH FORK, Colo. — If you have spent much time on military-related social media platforms, you’ve probably seen some of the memes featuring a seasoned U.S. Army sergeant major with a Master Explosive Ordnance Disposal Badge and Combat Infantry Badge.

The Army EOD technician behind those memes is retired U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Mike R. Vining, one of the founding members of the 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta (Airborne) and one of the unit’s first EOD technicians.

The reason his Army career has gained so much attention is because Vining has participated in many of the American military operations that defined the latter part of the 20th century, as an Explosive Ordnance Disposal technician and an elite Special Forces Operator.

Growing up in Howard City, Michigan, Vining was interested in science and mountain climbing. He received chemistry sets for Christmas every year and earned the Grand Prize in a High School Science Fair for a Wilson Cloud Chamber. Vining was also a member of the Science Club and Chess Club and participated in wrestling and track.

Vining then watched a movie that changed the trajectory of his life.

“I saw a World War II movie about a British soldier disarming a large German bomb in an underground chamber in London, England,” said Vining. “I thought, wow, that must take a lot to disarm a large ticking bomb.”

At 17, not long after the Tet Offensive in the Vietnam War, Vining went to an Army recruiting office and signed up to be an Ammunition Renovation Specialist with the plan of volunteering for EOD as soon as possible. After graduating from basic training camp at Fort Knox, Kentucky, he went to Ammunition Renovation School on Redstone Arsenal, Alabama, where he learned how to destroy unserviceable Code H ammunition during a course that was taught by EOD technicians.

He attended EOD training on Fort McClellan, Alabama, and Indian Head, Maryland, and graduated in May 1969.

While serving with the Technical Escort Unit at Edgewood Arsenal, Maryland, he volunteered to serve in Vietnam and he spent 11 months with the 99th Ordnance Detachment (EOD) in Phuoc Vinh, Vietnam, in an

operational area west of Saigon and near the Cambodia border.

Two of the most memorable operations of his career happened in 1970 when he participated in the destruction of the Rock Island East and Warehouse Hill enemy weapons and ammunition caches in Cambodia.

Vining was part of the seven-man Army EOD team that supported the 1st Cavalry Division mission to secure and destroy the largest weapons and ammunition cache discovered during the U.S. military’s involvement in the Vietnam War.

Named “Rock Island East” after the Rock Island Arsenal in Illinois, the enemy weapons cache had 932 individual weapons and 85 crew-served weapons as well as 7,079,694 small arms and machine gun rounds. The enemy cache also contained almost a thousand rounds of 85mm artillery shells that were used for the D-44 howitzer and the T-34 tank.

Vining and the EOD techs had to dodge enemy fire and endure biting red ants while working on the cache. After setting up “scare charges” to keep enemy forces out of the security perimeter, Vining made it on the helicopter in time to watch the explosion and see the mushroom cloud that was visible from 50 miles away.

The seven Army EOD technicians at Rock Island East used 300 cases of C4 explosives to destroy 327 tons of enemy munitions.

During the operation to seize the cache site, 10 American Soldiers died and 20 were injured.

Later at the Warehouse Hill operation in Cambodia, the EOD team had to disarm booby traps and crawl into underground tunnels to place C4 explosives on 14 cache sites. Vining had to contend with large cave crickets, poisonous centipedes, spiders, bats and scorpions in the narrow tunnels. The teams used 120 cases of C4 explosives to destroy hundreds of thousands of enemy rounds.

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# Retired Special Forces operator led charge to create elite units



*Then Capt. James E. Bonner (left) and Sgt. Maj. Dennis E. Wolfe stand on a catwalk near the flight deck on the aircraft carrier USS Enterprise (CVN 65) during an exercise. Wolfe and Bonner served together at the Joint Special Operations Command. Today, Bonner is a major general and serves as the commanding general of the Maneuver Support Center of Excellence. Courtesy photo.*

LAURINBURG, N.C. – A retired U.S. Army Explosive Ordnance Disposal sergeant major, elite Special Forces operator and U.S. Army civilian led the charge to create the EOD companies that combat Weapons of Mass Destruction and support special operations missions.

Retired Sgt. Maj. Dennis E. Wolfe championed the establishment of the 21st Ordnance Company (EOD WMD) and 28th Ordnance Company (EOD Airborne) while serving as the civilian deputy special plans officer at the U.S. Special Operations Command.

Often called the “father of EOD in Special Mission Units,” Wolfe knows from firsthand experience the importance of having trained, equipped and ready EOD technicians to support Special Operations missions.

Wolfe is one of the founding members of the U.S. Army's premier Special Mission Unit and one of the first two EOD techs to pass Operator Training Course I. The other EOD tech was retired Sgt. Maj. Mike R. Vining.

As a civilian at the Special Operations Command, Wolfe was instrumental in the creation of the 21st Ordnance Company (EOD WMD) “Blackjack.”

The company named its Kirtland Air Force Base rapid deployment building “Wolfe’s Gate” in honor of his role in its establishment.

Wolfe took point on the creation of the airborne EOD unit to support special operations missions. Often operating on hostile terrain, U.S. Army Rangers and Special Operations units needed a dedicated airborne EOD special mission unit to take on the explosive devices

Maj. Gen. James E. Bonner, the commanding general of the Maneuver Support Center of Excellence and senior mission commander for Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, served with Wolfe and retired Sgt. Maj. Mike Vining at the Joint Special Operations Command.

Bonner said that Wolfe had made a lasting impact on the Explosive Ordnance Disposal community.

“Dennis had the vision to analyze what was in the realm of possibilities and create a national strategic capability,” said Bonner, an Anna, Illinois, native, and U.S. Army Chemical Corps officer who also previously served as the commanding general of the 20th CBRNE Command.

Retired Gen. Peter J. Schoomaker commanded the Joint Special Operations Command when Bonner, Wolfe and Vining were in the JSOC J-3 Plans Office.

A former commander of the premier Special Mission Unit, Schoomaker also commanded U.S. Army Special Operations Command and U.S. Special Operations Command before retiring in November 2000.

Schoomaker was recalled to active duty and served as the 35th U.S. Army Chief of Staff from 2003 to 2007.

“Forty-five years ago, Sgt. Maj. Dennis Wolfe volunteered for duty with the nation's premier Special Mission Unit during its formative period,” said Schoomaker. “Over his multi-decade career, he did it all ... special operations leader and operator, thinker, innovator and mentor ... both in and out of uniform.

“He was, and still is, a national asset,” said Schoomaker. “His legacy is the unique national interagency community that he was instrumental in building, which includes his role in the creation of the Army's two elite special mission EOD companies, the 21st Ordnance Company (EOD WMD) and the 28th Ordnance Company (Airborne).”

Wolfe said the key to success during his 48-year career of uniformed and civil service was being ready to accept the challenges that came his way.

“I was always curious and adventurous and volunteered for everything even when I had little idea what lay ahead. Every assignment brought me new experiences. I volunteered for everything and felt obligated as a Soldier to do so and never regretted it,” said Wolfe.

“My advice is to not understate your capabilities. You can do much more than you realize, step up to the plate, volunteer,” said Wolfe. “I believe the military offers the best environment to do this and to serve your country as well. No greater service.”

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