



 @ChemicalFire 15 October 2020

## With branch selection time upon our young cadets, it's time for my take on why Chemical should be in your Top 3. This thread is hereby labeled: Dr. X-Love, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Chemical Corps.

Back in 2013, when I found out I was branching Chemical, I felt pretty bummed because of the reputation the Chemical Corps had. I had an engineering degree and a solid slot in the OML, and I wasn't excited that I was going to be stuck being a damn Chemo for my entire career but as time has gone, I realized branching Chem was really a blessing in disguise.

As a Chemo I've served in a Stryker Infantry Battalion, a Brigade Engineer Battalion, a Division Artillery Brigade, and supported Armored units galore as a CBRN Company CDR. I've experienced first-hand so many different types of Army units and how my job fits into the big picture. Every maneuver unit has a CBRN slot, including aviation, and the diversity of experience among my peers is huge. It's really awesome to know that every time I PCS, or even just change jobs as a Chemo, I have the ability to learn a completely different side of the Army and develop my CBRN capacity.

Everyone jokes about only doing USR, but that's been an infinitesimally small part of my eight years of experience. If you are interested in science, especially forensics or exploitation, the Chemical Corps has a ton of unique opportunities you won't get anywhere else. As a LT, I trained with the Mexican Army and helped teach them how to take down and exploit drug labs. I also was taught to understand industrial level chemical processes and learned so much about some of the most savage weapons mankind has ever produced (and the science behind making them). You literally won't find those experiences outside of SOF or INSCOM.

If you're into Ranger School and/or want to back door into the SOF community, CBOLC always has open slots for Ranger School. Also, the Ranger Regiment has CBRN

Teams led by Lieutenants, and every SF Group has its own CBRN Detachment led by senior LTs and CPTs. That means you can work with SOF units doing cool-guy s\*\*t very early in your career.

The plus-side of Chemos having bad reps is that it can be very easy to stand out from your peers, within and outside the Chem Corps. If you work hard, actively learn your unit, and act like a normal human being, you WILL make a name for yourself. As a LT, I was literally offered both an infantry platoon and an Infantry BN HHC XO slot because of my reputation as a Chemo and CBRN Recon Platoon Leader.

Finally, despite the jokes you hear or see, CBRN is relevant today. In the past 10 years, we've seen an increase towards more and more explicit use of chemical weapons, the Fukushima Daiichi reactor incident, and living through a literal biological incident. The threats are real and we need smart, capable officers serving our Maneuver Commanders and leading the future of the Chemical Corps.

Hit me up if you want to know more, and Choose Chem!

(Did I forget to mention that a small Corps means you have connections everywhere? Old BC? Branch Chief. Old BDE Chemo? Personnel Dev Office for the Commandant. CDR I took command from? Futures Command rep here at FLW. Sister CDR/best friend? US Forces Japan Chemo.)

<https://threadreaderapp.com/thread/1318716602448314371.html>

**USACBRNS**  
**14030 MSCOE LOOP, SUITE 1314**  
**FORT LEONARD WOOD, MO 65473-8966**  
[usarmy.leonardwood.chemical-schl.mbx.proponent-office@mail.mil](mailto:usarmy.leonardwood.chemical-schl.mbx.proponent-office@mail.mil)



# X Factor: The Force Multiplier

#BranchSeries - Chemical Corps

by Alberto Rios

[LINK to original article](#)

Congratulations, you have been selected to serve in the Chemical Branch. That is great news for leaders with science degrees that listed the Chemical Corps in their top preferred branches. To Bachelors of Arts leaders, getting this news can be intimidating. Newly selected Chemical officers will immediately reflect back to how they felt after their last mask-confidence (“gas”) chamber or after their last chemistry exam. But, fear not! There is good news. There is a lot more leadership than science when becoming the ***X Factor*** for your unit.



This is the tenth of 14 posts in #BranchSeries. To start back at the introduction, click [HERE](#). [The Company Leader](#) and [Lopez on Leadership](#) are teaming up to bring you 14 Video Interviews with Colonels and 14 Articles from Captains and Majors, all covering 14 Branches. Stay tuned!

Chemical officers are typically assigned to a maneuver battalion or a Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear (CBRN) battalion. But first, they will complete the Chemical Basic Officer Leadership Course (BOLC) at the Maneuver Support Center of Excellence in Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. Like any young officer, a Chemical officer's perception of their branch and the profession is shaped by their first duty station. Experiences may vary.

Officers assigned to an installation with a CBRN battalion (e.g. Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA, Fort Hood, TX, Fort Bliss, TX, Fort Stewart, GA, Camp Humphreys, Korea) often get greater opportunities to compete for leadership positions. But, don't fret if you go to a maneuver unit. The future of warfare is increasingly CBRN-focused. Long gone are the days of inventorying your pro-mask and putting it back in the NBC Cage to collect dust until the next CTC rotation or inventory. The future is yours and your commanders need you!

## Life in a Maneuver Unit



Welcome to the S3 Shop (Operations Section) “Chem-O”. As a Chemical Lieutenant, your primary duties include advising the Battalion Commander on all CBRN-related matters, managing the Battalion’s CBRN equipment, and assisting in the CBRN readiness training of the Battalion.

You are also a Staff Officer. As such, your leaders expect you to contribute in ways you would never imagine pertain to your job. You will consolidate slide decks for meetings and serve as an action officer for the S3, all working toward the Commander’s intent. You are the utility infielder, able to play any position and expected to perform as a leader in them all. Flexibility, leadership, critical thinking, and a great attitude are all musts.



### Utility Player

Chem-O’s, in maneuver units, perform a variety of additional duties. Some of these duties are obvious and related to your chemical expertise (e.g. Radiation Safety Officer and HAZMAT Handling Officer). Others are common to lieutenants of any branch (e.g. Financial Liability Investigation Officer, 15-6 Investigating Officer, and Sensitive Item Inventory Officer). Others you would never imagine could possibly relate to your area of expertise (e.g. Digital Training Management System Officer and Environmental Compliance Officer).

These extra duties will have you working closely with officers across the battalion, especially the S1 (personnel) and S4 (logistics). Subsequently, Chemical officers know more about the overall readiness of the unit than most other junior officers. This will make you, if you embrace it, an invaluable asset to the Battalion Commander. One opportunity you will have to wrap both arms around this title and squeeze is serving as the Tactical Operations Center (TOC) Battle Captain.

### Battle Captain



Whether it is during a Command Post Exercise (CPX) in the Motor Pool, at a Combined Training Center (CTC) Rotation, or in Combat – serving as the Battle Captain is a BIG deal. You are the synopsis firing and connecting the signals sent from nerve centers (the line units) to the brain (the Command Group). As Battle Captain, you will help manage and synchronize assets, ranging from aviation to fires, across the battle space.

Chem-Os assist in intelligence fusion and monitor sustainment operations throughout the operating environment. They execute well-rehearsed battle drills, with their team, to facilitate reporting and response coordination to a variety of unpredictable situations. If a suspected CBRN hazard is found in the area, Chemical officers are responsible for planning the operation to mitigate the hazard. They also ensure exposed units execute the appropriate level of decontamination. When there is a CBRN threat – it's your show!

## **Earn and Maximize Opportunities**

If you have a fixed mindset, the above responsibilities will sound daunting. But, if you have a growth mindset, they sound like a plethora of opportunities to prove your worth. Maximize every job and do it to the best of your ability! That isn't just advice for a Chemical officer, that is life advice. Approach every task, from sweeping the floor to planning a decontamination mission, like it is worth doing right and with all your might.

You never know when a maximized opportunity will earn you another. Chemical officers in maneuver units can earn opportunities not available to those in Chemical units. As a result, you could serve as a Platoon Leader in an Infantry, Armor, Engineer, or Logistics unit. You could even be the CBRN Reconnaissance Platoon Leader in a Stryker Unit, leading 3x NBCRVs (Stryker) as a brigade asset. Chemical officers are sought after as headquarters & headquarters company/troop/battery executive officers because of their exclusive knowledge of the unit and its equipment. Excellent performance will also lead to unit support in attending schools such as Ranger, Airborne, Air Assault, L6 (NBCRV Mounted Reconnaissance), and L3 (Technical Escort).

Bottom line, there are opportunities no matter where you go and every unit needs good leaders.

## **Life in a CBRN Unit**

Welcome to the CBRN Battalion, where all of your CBRN hopes and dreams can come true. Chemical Lieutenants can serve as a Hazard Assessment PL (Dismounted Reconnaissance), NBCRV PL (Mounted Reconnaissance), CBRNE Response Team (CRT) leader (Technical Escort with EOD), Chemical Company XO, or on staff. They hone their technical training in preparation to support tactical operations during combat training center exercises as part of a [CBRNE Task Force](#).

## **The Mission**

Chemical officers train to enhance Defense Support of Civil Authorities (DSCA) through Defense CBRNE Response Force ([DCRF](#)) operations. They go to CBRNE Analytical [Remediation](#) Activity (CARA) sites across the world and partner with EOD to remove buried chemical hazards. Chemical officers also support the National Technical Nuclear Forensics ([NTNF](#)) Ground Collection Task Force (GCTF) by enabling them to determine attribution in the event of an improvised nuclear

device (IND) detonation. They support multinational exercises throughout the Pacific, Europe, and Canada to enhance multinational interoperability. Additionally, Chemical officers provide Counter Weapons of Mass Destruction (CWMD) support for special operations theater security cooperation exercises and deployments. These mission requirements extend beyond the conventional fight and into the world of Special Operations.

## Chemical in Special Operations Forces

Each Special Forces Group has a CBRN Reconnaissance Detachment (CRD) and CBRN Decontamination Detachment (CDD). Their core mission is to provide CBRN enabler support to Operational Detachment Alphas (ODAs). The Chemical Soldiers also have the directed mission of providing forensic exploitation support through the entire Special Operations Force (SOF) spectrum. This extends from unconventional warfare to direct action.

In addition to working with SOF, these chemical units work closely with interagency partners and are critical to facilitating targeting cycles for future operations. Lieutenants serve on the battalion staff and receive opportunities to attend multiple schools only offered in the SOF community.

## It's All Leadership

The best leaders lead by example. They create a climate of authenticity and teamwork. Leaders value each individual, but prioritize the collective. They operationalize their unit and balance intense training with family time and recovery. Finally, leaders encourage creative thinking and use mistakes as teachable moments to develop confidence. Some of the best leaders with whom I have served were from maneuver units. It is important for Chemical officers to be exposed to maneuver leaders early in their careers. This exposure builds a foundational understanding of the maneuver fight and adds to the leader's metaphorical tool kit. Once assigned to a chemical unit, new leaders should quickly find a successful Chemical mentor to help them navigate the CBRNE enterprise.



## The X Factor

In conclusion, Chemical officers are the “X factors” in their units and are known to be force multipliers. Additionally, they are the technical CBRNE subject matter experts and they seek to understand how to best integrate with their partners. The difference between a good unit and a great unit can be determined by the effectiveness of the CBRN officer. A unit that can do their mission at

night, wearing the appropriate Mission Oriented Protective Posture (MOPP) in a hybrid threat environment is a great unit and more than likely had an X factor that helped to make it happen.

—

No matter where you start, Chemical unit or Maneuver unit, this profession is more about how you finish. What will you do with the opportunities? Your branch doesn't determine your contribution to the team. Your attention to detail and work ethic does. Do your best each day and seek opportunities to improve yourself and your organization. Don't be intimidated to compete for nominative assignments and don't be afraid to fail.

**Captain Alberto Rios is a Chemical Officer with 10 years of experience and two deployments to Iraq/Afghanistan. He has experience on staffs from the tactical to operational levels in support of CENTCOM and PACOM AORs. He also served as an Armor Platoon Leader, CBRN Reconnaissance Detachment Commander in a Special Forces Group, and as CBRNE Company (Technical Escort) Commander.**

[LINK to original article](#)