



The Combat Capabilities Development Command (CCDC) Chemical Biological Center, formerly known as the U.S. Army Edgewood Chemical Biological Center, is the Army's principal research and development center for chemical and biological defense technology, engineering and field operations. The headquarters of the CCDC Chemical Biological Center is located at the Edgewood Area of Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland.

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DEVCOM CBC Brings in New and Diverse Talent During the Pandemic



Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD -- The Combat Capabilities Development Command Chemical Biological Center (DEVCOM CBC) recently welcomed three new employees to its ranks at the organization's Rock Island site. The new hires were recruited at the 2020 Black Engineer of the Year Award (BEYA) Conference held in the nation's capital in mid-February 2020. They began working for CBC in August and were smoothly onboarded despite the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Milmani Bynum (left) is a graduate of Virginia Commonwealth University with a B.S. in chemical and life science engineering. Isaac Ghobrial (center) is a graduate of Florida International University with a B.S. in biomedical engineering. Mohammadou Njoy (right) is a graduate of University of the Maryland with a B.S. chemical and biomolecular engineering.

The BEYA Conference, founded in 1986, is a globally recognized

event that celebrates the achievements of people who are underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. The 2020 conference brought students and professionals together for three days of networking, job prospecting, learning opportunities, and recognition of award recipients.

Rich Recruiting Ground

The Center has long supported BEYA with many of its employees receiving BEYA awards over the years. The BEYA conference also provides the Center with an excellent opportunity to engage with recent engineering graduates about job opportunities with CBC, often resulting in new hires.

This year, Joe Grodecki, CBC's Sustainment Engineering Division chief, attended the conference. The quality of the candidate pool impressed him. "There was an incredible number of qualified and talented candidates at this event," he said. "At CBC, we feel extremely fortunate to have recruited three of those candidates. They have been a welcome addition to our organization."

The successful recruitment of these three engineers to the Rock Island campus, located at the U.S. Army Rock Island Arsenal, helps the Center maintain and extend its



contribution to the nation's defense. It also provides the organization with new perspectives and improves the diversity of the CBC Rock Island campus workforce. With new talent comes the new techniques and creative thinking skills that the recruits gained in their academic studies.

The three new hires are recent graduates from engineering programs at the University of Maryland, Florida International University, and Virginia Commonwealth University. They earned degrees in chemical, life sciences, and biomolecular engineering. All three have been placed as general engineers in CBC engineering teams. Isaac Ghobrial works on the Individual Protection team, Mohammadou Njoya is assigned to the Collective Protection team, and Imani Bynum is a member of the Decontamination team.

Safely Onboarding During a Pandemic

The onboarding process for bringing the new hires into the workplace posed a greater challenge than usual this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on access to the physical workplace. Most CBC employees have been teleworking since mid-March. CBC management had to make sure that the onboarding process was as safe as possible and in compliance with Rock Island Arsenal protocols, government guidelines, and best practices for COVID-19 mitigation. Much of the onboarding process was conducted virtually over Microsoft (MS) Teams, phone calls, and e-mail. However, parts of the process required the new employees to be onsite.

The CBC team, from the senior manager level to the onboarding action officers, collaborated closely to follow Rock Island Arsenal and local guidance for safely bringing the new employees on site. Holly Humphrey, the Center's onboarding program coordinator, was very pleased with the collaborative effort required to make the program a success. "Our onboarding process coordinates the actions of many people both inside and outside of our organization, and I have been proud of how well everyone adapted to the new environment and successfully provided our new employees with what they need to get off to a great start," Humphrey said.

After receiving a virtual briefing by phone from Civilian Personnel Action Center (CPAC) representatives, the newly hired engineers spent a two-week period onsite at CBC's offices. They learned about how the Center is structured and employee procedures from CBC administrative personnel. They also met with their first line supervisors who provided additional details on what their assigned branches and teams do to support the Warfighter.

Mentorship Makes a Difference

The onboarding team assigned each of them a mentor who introduced the new employees to their team members at their branches. During these first two weeks, the mentors reviewed and monitored an onboarding checklist and training plan.

The mentors also made sure that the new hires had access to MS Teams, which has proved to be an indispensable tool in conducting meetings and conferences in a telework environment. After completing their onboarding, the new hires transitioned to a schedule



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of on-site work combined with telework. The onboarding coordinator also conducted a virtual session to assess the employees' telework experience and provided additional guidance.

The new employees continue to participate in weekly virtual meetings with the onboarding coordinator. These sessions provide a forum for raising issues, asking questions, and receiving additional briefings and guidance. They have grown adept at using MS Teams to engage and collaborate with their colleagues in their divisions and branches.

While more face to face meetings with team mates and other CBC employees would be ideal, these virtual interactions have provided a safe way to get to know their coworkers during the pandemic.

"I have been very pleased with how hard the onboarding team has worked to give our new employees the assistance they need to acclimate to our work environment in the midst of these challenging times," said Kevin Lee, DEVCOM CBC's Rock Island Site Director. "I have also been impressed with our new employees' willingness to meet the challenges of working for DEVCOM CBC during a pandemic. They have become productive members of our organization."

Imani Bynum said that her onboarding experience went surprisingly smoothly. While she misses interacting with others in the office in person, Imani said, "I think my onboarding prepared me to work independently, which made it easier to adjust to teleworking." Imani also said that having a mentor assigned to her during onboarding made the process easier.

Isaac Ghobrial agreed, "There is always at least one person from my team in the office so that has helped a lot, and even in the virtual environment, everyone is still pretty accessible through Microsoft Teams." CBC's third hire from the BEYA 2020 event, Mohammadou Njoya, experienced some delays in gaining full computer access but described his experience as a good one. "I am happy to be working for CBC because of the bond I feel with my co-workers."

Everyone involved in the hiring and onboarding process was pleased with how well it worked despite the pandemic. Even after the pandemic, many of the efficiencies of virtual recruitment will be here to stay.

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