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Bridging the Gap Between Science and the Battlefield

Chemical Soldier Assists Researchers in Meeting Warfighter Needs

By Aerial Storey



Sergeant First Class Johnny Roberts learns about the Center's Array Configured of Remote Network Sensors interface for military unmanned aerial vehicles from Mike Mays, Robotics Integration Team Lead at the Advanced Design and Manufacturing lab. (U.S. Army photo by Ellie White).

Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD – “I’ve always wanted my life to be like a movie,” says Sergeant First Class (SFC) Johnny Roberts, a chemical Soldier at the U.S. Army Combat Capabilities Development Command Chemical Biological Center (DEVCOM CBC). From testing obscuration techniques to responding to chemical attacks, serving as a vital link between scientists and warfighters is a role that the non-commissioned officer (NCO) is proud to play.

With a background in chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosives (CBRNE)

operations, Roberts’s unique role as a chemical Soldier allows him to combine his passion for military service with his expertise in science. He has dedicated his profession to enabling scientific advancements in the battlefield. Now, he continues that mission at DEVCOM CBC as a senior enlisted advisor where he acts as a liaison between Soldiers and scientists, providing his feedback and knowledge throughout project developments.

Born in Houston, Texas to a family of Marines, Roberts initially decided to pursue a career in nursing – a legacy stemming from his mother’s side of the family. “I have always been interested in science. In fact, chemistry was one of my favorite subjects in school,” he said of his decision. However, during his student residency, his passion for military service grew stronger. “I felt called to do something greater, something more. I blame it on the movies, seeing Soldiers in their actual suits, working with the deadliest chemicals in the world. I knew nursing wasn’t going to provide that for me.”

He recalled the conversations he had with members of his family who served as Marines, who had all suggested serving in the Army as an alternative. As a result, he went against the family convention of becoming a Marine and enlisted in the Army without their knowledge. A month before departing for basic training, he told his parents that he would be joining the Army. “Obviously, they were shocked, but they definitely love and support it. They’re extremely proud now,” said Roberts.



Roberts has served in the field for 12 years. He was first stationed in Fort Bragg, North Carolina in 2011 where he served as a CBRN specialist – responsible for managing the company-level CBRN program. He later moved to Fort Polk, Louisiana in 2013 to join the 10th Mountain Brigade as their CBRN NCO. These roles gave Roberts crucial experience in training service members on the maintenance and utilization of protective equipment, contamination and decontamination operations, and developing proficiency with defense weapons. His oversight as the brigade CBRN NCO ensured that members would be able to defend and preserve the force in the event of an attack with weapons of mass destruction.

Roberts has also been deployed overseas during his career. He was stationed in Afghanistan in 2015 where he engaged in several dismounted foot patrols with infantry members and managed military weaponry. He later volunteered to serve as a CBRN squad leader in Korea – leading eight other CBRN Soldiers in operational decontamination and training other crew members on weapons systems.

He later went on to serve at the Maneuver Support Center of Excellence in Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri in 2017 as a training developer for the Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction branch. Shortly after, he trained Soldiers on doctrine and tactics in Fort Riley, Kansas.

Prior to joining CBC, SFC Roberts was stationed in Hawaii serving as the battalion CBRN NCO, in addition to serving in the role of the operations sergeant major. Now serving at DEVCOM CBC as the research, development, test and evaluation (RDT&E) NCO and functional senior enlisted advisor, Roberts will hone his unique skillsets to contribute to the Center's latest, most cutting-edge developments.

"SFC Roberts brings specific chemical and biological operational knowledge we need here at CBC," said Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations Joe Gordon. "He's been a great advisor. Working with someone who can speak the language and help generate ideas has been fulfilling and helpful."

Roberts will be involved throughout the research and development process of upcoming projects. The collaboration enables project teams to get a better understanding of asset implementation on the field, while also providing access to a network of knowledgeable teams and individuals within the Army. He will also play a critical role in integration across the Center by providing information on experimentation, communicating across directorates, and building awareness of various efforts within DEVCOM CBC.

"The possibilities in this field are essentially endless," said Roberts on his experience at DEVCOM CBC. "Seeing the products and the capabilities that are here is very eye-opening. I know how much of an impact it's going to have on the force in a very beneficial way."



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<https://cbc.devcom.army.mil>

Roberts sees one of his most important roles as an advocate for the ongoing efforts at the Center. “All of the scientists are very passionate about what they do,” he said. “The passion to turn things into fruition to protect the lives of our brothers and sisters and the civilians that we do this for is great. I am extremely grateful for everyone that serves in this capacity.”

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For more information about the DEVCOM Chemical Biological Center, visit <https://cbc.DEVCOM.army.mil>

The U.S. Army Combat Capabilities Development Command (DEVCOM) Chemical Biological Center (CBC) is aligned under the U.S. Army Futures Command (AFC) and U.S. Army Combat Capabilities Development Command (DEVCOM.)

AFC provides Army modernization solutions (integrated concepts, organizational designs, and technologies) in order to allow the Joint Force, employing Army capabilities, to achieve overmatch in the future operation environment. DEVCOM is a major subordinate command of AFC. DEVCOM leads in the discovery, development, and delivery of technology-based capabilities to enable Soldiers to win our nation's wars and come home safely. DEVCOM CBC is the Army's principal research and development center for chemical and biological defense technology, engineering, and field operations. DEVCOM CBC is headquartered at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland.