

# Chemical Corps Soldier personifies personal courage, places mission first

By Sgt. Mary Ferguson →

How many times have you thought or even said, “This is not my job; I didn’t sign up for this,” or “I’m not supposed to be here doing this!”?

When honest with themselves, even the most dedicated and selfless Soldier may answer “yes” to that question. They’re human — they breathe, bleed, want and need, just like everybody else.

However, Soldiers are different, because despite being human, especially in these moments, they still find the personal courage within themselves to place the mission first.

Sgt. Charles A. Claude Jr. found and lived that personal courage throughout his seven years in uniform — a time that’s afforded him many opportunities to say, “This is not my job.” One opportunity, perhaps none more obvious, was during his recent tour in Iraq.

Claude redeployed to Fort Bliss, Texas, in December 2007 after serving a 15-month tour in Mosul, Iraq, with E Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team 1st Cavalry Division. There, he earned a Bronze Star with “V” device and Purple Heart for doing what he’s always done — place the mission first.

“We’re a combat engineering company, and [downrange] we were in charge of clearing all of Mosul of [improvised explosive devices]. ... We only had one battalion and one route clearing company, so we did two to three missions a day,” Claude said, adding that Mosul is the second largest city in Iraq.

On Sept. 2, 2007, about three months before the company’s return to the United States, the Soldiers were pursuing insurgents who used rocket-propelled grenades and small-arms fire against them.

“All hell broke loose. ... We were coming down this back road, I was shooting this car and around the corner there was an insurgent. He tried to go head-to-

head with our [armored security vehicle]. He actually did some damage with his AK-47 — took my driver’s window completely out, and blew my sight out,” said Claude, who was the first sergeant’s gunner.

During the firefight, one of the insurgent’s rounds came through the ASV’s window, flipped around inside the vehicle and shattered apart, wounding Claude’s arm and his first sergeant’s leg.

“I didn’t know I was hit at that time,” Claude remembered. “It all happened so fast. ... We got a call from the vehicle behind us saying that the [insurgent] was hanging on our vehicle, so I popped out of the hatch and shot him. ... That day was just as crazy as the rest of the days, but that day we got hurt. It was only about two weeks later, and we were back out on the road again.”

Col. Michael Bolluyt, Claude’s former chemical battalion commander at Fort Polk, La., said, “Sgt. Claude came to the battalion during a crucial period ... and he stood out with basic combat skills as we began training on the brigade-sponsored live-fire ranges. He became a teacher and mentor to his peers in all the skills we were introducing to [Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear] Soldiers.”

“In the blistering heat of Fort Polk, he never complained, never quit and put the mission first because he knew how important the training was, despite one’s MOS,” Bolluyt added.

While Claude’s infantry experience led to an unusual mission even during his time in a chemical company, Claude said, all Chemical Corps Soldiers should prepare for the experiences he’s faced as a CBRN NCO.

“It’s important for some of the younger [Soldiers] to read this and think, ‘That could be me in a year or two,’” Claude said. “With any MOS like this, where you are probably the only one in a company, you have to really show that you are supposed to be there, to earn respect.

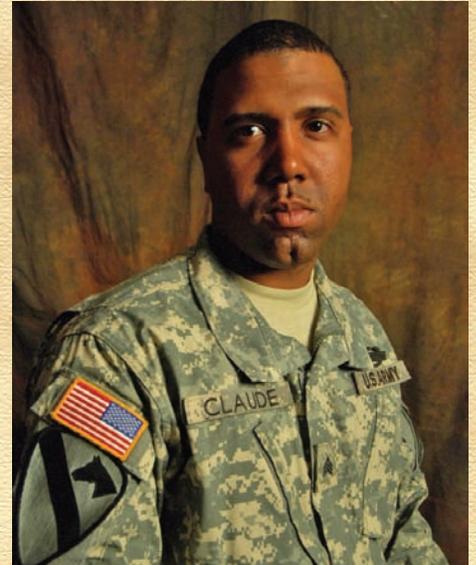


Photo by Mary Ferguson

Chemical Corps Soldier Sgt. Charles A. Claude Jr.

... You have to have pride in the Chemical Corps, represent it and think, ‘I’m going to do this job as well as anyone.’”

Bolluyt said this message is incredibly relevant for CBRN Soldiers, because the Chemical Corps is one of the few Army branches that has Soldiers at the corps, division, brigade, battalion and company levels.

“The Chemical Corps is making enormous contributions. ... We are the fifth most deployed branch,” Bolluyt explained. “All formations across the battlefield are vulnerable. ... By hearing Sgt. Claude’s experiences, I hope senior leaders see the importance of exposing their Soldiers to a mixture of combat skills.”

Claude agreed and said that today, all warriors have to be infantry Soldiers at heart. They have to know how to do the jobs around them, because even though everybody may have a specialty on their team, they may have to cover down to accomplish the mission, as he has throughout his career.

He also said his experiences have made him a better-rounded NCO with the ability to adapt and change to lead all types of Soldiers.

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