

SIGNAL UNIVERSITY PREPARING SOLDIERS FOR FUTURE BATTLEFIELDS

By John Fry

Leaders of brigade combat teams, as well as divisional G6/S6 and G3/S3 shops, are often forced to make difficult decisions about scheduling and funding of sustainment training.

To assist Warfighters, CECOM Logistics Readiness Center Directorate of Readiness Training Support Division developed the "Face to the Field" Unit University Program to provide a sustained, flexible, on-demand training program. Through the Unit University system, units can

effectively schedule additional C4ISR training around the Unit's ARFORGEN Cycle thus meeting both long and short term training requirements. As well as providing a flexible training schedule, the University Program guarantees the highest quality of training by ensuring each course is developed and trained by a true subject matter expert with standardized lesson plans that integrate PM, TRADOC, and FORSCOM curriculum.

The design and intent of the University Program is to provide a direct response to the unique

training requirements of units while still facilitating the high standard of quality that has come to be expected from CECOM Training and Logistical support. Applicable training is tracked in the Army Training Requirements and Resource System.

LTC Eulys Bert Shell, 11th Signal Brigade liaison, attributes the success of the unit's prompt and precise deployment to the ease of access to CECOM's training at Thunderbird University in Fort Huachuca, Ariz. "(The training) resulted in our ability to quickly deploy and have the training necessary to extend and conduct network operations of the LandWarNet in support of Combatant Commanders and forward deployed headquarters at all echelons within the full spectrum of military operations," LTC Shell said.

The structure of each university is dictated by the supported unit. Typically, each university consists of one training coordinator who directly works with the supported unit to establish training schedules and requirements, and three instructors.

These instructors not only conduct training, they also develop lessons that are specific to each unit's including emerging technologies that are not yet implemented in TRADOC courses.

For example, if a unit needs a highly specialized SharePoint 2010 or a tactical radio course on a newly deployed radio, such as the AN/PRC-117G, then the on-site instructor will create the



SPC Rene Mendez, a 25B assigned to HHC, 11th SIG BDE, studying for his upcoming NET+ certification test. This is the last requirement he needs to become TCP Silver-certified

C4 SKILLS TRAINING FACILITIES

course and present the training on-demand, while also sharing the knowledge with CECOM instructors located at other universities.

Since the Universities are a part of the larger CECOM C4ISR Team, the training coordinator at each university has the ability to pull in outside resources to conduct training on the newest deployed technology that may be outside the scope of the local staff's competencies. They also have the ability to pull in more instructors to accommodate a heavy training schedule. By virtually creating a limitless training schedule for each supported unit, the university program ensures more Warfighters are properly trained for deployment.

"C4I Skills Training Team was crucial in preparing multiple battalions in our brigade for their deployments. Not only were they able to put together top-notch training in a rapidly decreasing window of time, but was able to supply equipment and training for communication requirements that were outside our Unit's normal mission set," said MAJ Craig Benke, military liaison for CECOM's C4I Training Facility in support of 1st Infantry Division at Fort Riley, Kan.

It's this type of personalized instruction that has been most recognized by currently supported Units. "The CECOM staff is highly professional and highly flexible in meeting our short-notice requirements to support operational missions and Brigade priorities," said LTC Shell. "Truly outstanding performance in delivering the right training at the right time to empower our Soldiers with the technical skillsets required in today's operational environments," he continued.

Another key to the successful training produced by CECOM at these universities is the ability for instructors to relate to the Warfighter. "The biggest benefit to us is having experienced and knowledgeable instructors available. Many of the instructors are retired Signal Soldiers with combat experience.

They can relate to our students and are often able to use examples from their lives to help show the importance of everyone learning the equipment," said CPT Carol Smith, military liaison for

162nd Infantry Brigade's Tactical Training Team. Currently, the "Face to the Field" unit university program has experienced success at eight TSD Unit Universities located at:

- Fort Campbell, Ky. - 101st Airborne Division's Screaming Eagle Network University
- Fort Riley, Kan. - 1st Infantry Division's C4 Training Facility
- Fort Carson, Colo. - 4th Infantry Division's Iron-horse University
- Fort Huachuca, Ariz. - 11th Signal Brigade's Thunderbird University
- Fort Polk, La. - JRTC Warrior Signal University
- Fort Hood, Texas - III Corps' Fort Hood Signal University
- Joint-Base Lewis-McChord, Wash. - I Corps' Courage University
- Fort Bliss, Texas - 1AD's Team Bliss Signal Center of Excellence

This success is achieved by not only delivering the highest quality of instruction, it has also been attained by working side-by-side with each unit to develop operating procedures and training focus

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SSG Michel Smith (left), SFC Matthew Long (middle) and SSG James Vasquez assemble the SIPR NIPR Access Point during training at Team Bliss Signal Center of Excellence.



SGT Jerome Crawford (left), SGT Bobby Bays (middle) and SSG Bart Deisch of the 1st Armored Division compare notes to troubleshoot the Global Broadcast Service at Team Bliss Signal Center of Excellence.

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that is specific to their requirements. This partnership between the unit and CECOM DRE begins with a one year trial period. Every supported unit has extended its operating agreement with CECOM DRE for three years. The main reason: Soldiers access to quality training.

In FY12 Screaming Eagle Network University conducted 163 courses, trained 2028 Soldiers and awarded 104 various certifications while the Team Bliss Signal Center of Excellence conducted 74 courses and trained 1745 Soldiers in their first year under CECOM FSD. In FY 12 the entire program trained 11,724 soldiers and awarded 3,334 commercial certifications in various technologies such as Cisco and Microsoft.

Initially the universities have focused most of its training on the following: The full suite of fielded tactical radios, systems training such as WIN-T/JNN/CPN, or Global Broadcast Systems; the newest Microsoft Software such as Office, SharePoint, Server, and Active Directory; and finally certification training such as CompTIA, Cisco, CISSP and TFOCA Fiber 3M/ETA. However, new courses will be developed depending on the needs of the participating units.

Each university has the capability to train Soldiers and DA civilians on CompTIA and Cisco Certifications. The University program has assisted each supported unit with their goal of 100 percent compliance of DoD Directive 8570.01, which requires IMO's to receive a certain certification level.

MAJ Craig Benke, military liaison for CECOM's C4I Training Facility in support of 1st Infantry Division, credits the training received at university for not only providing the Warfighters with the ability to review some topics, but it also opens new opportunity for education on the newest equipment being offered.

"Training included not only the PRC-117 Single Channel TACSAT equipment that our Soldiers had zero experience with, but also multiple Security+ classes in an effort to ensure not only our brigade, but 1st Infantry Division as a whole, was trained and properly compliant with FORSCOM guidance regarding information assurance requirements. It would have been impossible for our Brigade to resource this dynamically different training from within, and we are sincerely grateful for the C4I Skills Training Team's support," MAJ Benke said.

The university's certification capabilities also allow Units to reward their Soldiers by scheduling them for a civilian certification courses such as Cisco Certified Network Associate. The universities have had great success with these programs reaching an average 85 percent pass rates on all certification courses. This success is due to on-site instructors being able to spend more time working with Soldiers on their certifications. Each university is also equipped with a commercial testing center so soldiers can test immediately after the training and not worry about scheduling a test off-post.

The overall success of the university program is being noticed by not only by the partnering units, but also other major commands such as FORSCOM and CIO G6, which funds mobile training teams as a branch of the program.

Mr. John Fry is CECOM DAC GS-13 Lead for Training Support Division's Signal University Program. He received his B.S. in Management from Southern Illinois University and M.S. in Telecommunications Management from University of Maryland University College while stationed at Fort Gordon, Ga. He enlisted in the Navy in 1998 and served as Satellite Communications Lead aboard the USS Enterprise from 2000 - 2005 serving in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. He transferred to the Center for Information Dominance at Fort Gordon in 2005 and served as a 25S AIT Instructor. He joined CECOM Training Support Division in 2008 and currently works at Fort Campbell, Ky.