

Army expanding its cyber warfare capabilities

U.S. Army

FORT MEADE, Md. (Army News Service, Dec. 7, 2012) -- The 780th Military Intelligence Brigade hopes to have its new headquarters building here completed by fiscal year 2014.

That is when the brigade will reach full-strength at around 1,000 personnel. Of those, about 60 to 80 percent will be Soldiers and the remainder Army civilians and contractors, according to the brigade's commander, Col. Jennifer G. Buckner.

The brigade's strength is currently at around 600, she added.

Although the 780th has existed for only a year, Soldiers serving in the intelligence field have been doing similar work -- defending networks against cyber-attack and taking offensive actions as needed -- for years, albeit on a smaller scale.

"A decade ago, we were just a detachment," she said. "Then we grew to a company, then a battalion, and last year we stood up the brigade."

Buckner said the growth was necessary because of the growing threat from cyber attacks, which includes criminal hackers and state-sponsored ones.

This year, the brigade expanded its intelligence military occupational specialties to include the newly designated 35Q, or Cryptologic Network Warfare Specialist. Buckner characterized these Soldiers as "cyber warriors trained in a host of full-spectrum operations."

Duties of a 35Q require "an extraordinary degree of technical proficiency, initiative, responsibility and a great deal of creativity in how they apply their skill sets," she added.

That and the opportunity of valuable follow-on training and the importance of the mission itself are reasons the retention rate in that specialty is very good, she said.

The growth of the brigade means more job opportunities for civilians and for Soldiers in 35Q and related intelligence MOSs. For civilians, jobs are opening as intelligence analysts, cyber planners, network engineers and software developers.

Besides its headquarters at Fort Meade, the brigade has subordinate units in Augusta, Ga., San Antonio, Texas, and Honolulu, Hawaii.

Buckner characterized the 780th as "the Army's elite cyber-force," working with other services and allies to defeat the cyber threat, which she acknowledges is ever-growing and changing.

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The 780th falls under the operational control of Army Cyber Command at Fort Belvoir, Va. The brigade also works closely with the U.S. Army Intelligence and Security Command, at Fort Belvoir and with U.S. Cyber Command at Fort Meade.

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