Fans view new equipment, technologies at Army-Navy game

U.S. Army

PHILADELPHIA (December 10, 2012) -- To communicate as a sergeant in Vietnam, Bill Sim would sit on a sandbag with a radio and wait.

When his son Brett fought in Iraq 40 years later, the then-captain had a tactical operations center full of digital systems to instantly connect with fellow troops over vast distances.

"We would go without seeing or hearing from guys for days -- they [now] know where they are every second," Bill Sim said. "To me, it's amazing that they can do that."

On Saturday, the elder Sim got to see some of the technologies available to his son for the first time as they joined thousands of football fans at the 113th match up between Army and Navy, held at Lincoln Financial Field. At the stadium, the Army displayed a wide variety of equipment and technologies, including the tactical operations center, mine-resistant, ambush-protected all-terrain vehicles, or M-ATVs, a Stryker vehicle, small and large military robots and a variety of Soldier weapons, uniforms, helmets and body armor.

"Everyone I've met out here has been really supportive," said Sgt. Matthew Ackles of the 2nd Brigade, 1st Armored Division, who fielded questions on the M-ATV and how the Army is introducing mobile network capabilities to vehicles so Soldiers can communicate while on-the-move. He said the general public could understand the importance of the complex equipment.

"It's easy to explain to most people -- they know what a wireless network is," said Ackles, who operated some of the displayed communications technologies and others during the Army's most recent Network Integration Evaluation, or NIE, 13.1. NIEs are semi-annual, Soldier-driven evaluations designed to rapidly modernize and integrate the tactical communications network.

For veterans like Bill Sim, the demonstrations at the game are a chance to check in on the Army's progress since they wore the uniform, said Lt. Col. Thomas Ryan, product manager for crew-served weapons with the Army's Program Executive Office Soldier. He oversaw a popular display that allowed game-goers to handle an array of weapons in use in the field today -- from the widely known M-4 Carbine to the M-107 .50-caliber sniper rifle.

"A lot of the veterans had the M-16, they're now able to see where we've come with the M-4 Carbine," Ryan said. "It's great to talk to them about what their experiences were, and if they've been out of touch with things for awhile, just to see what kind

of improvements we've made."

Other visitors did not have an existing connection with the military, but said the displays gave them new insight into how the Army is advancing technologies in response to Soldier needs.

Tom Koelsch attended the rivalry game for the first time with his 13-year-old son, whose goal is to someday attend the United States Military Academy at West Point, N.Y. The Koelschs checked out several technologies, including hand-held devices that leverage commercial smartphone technology to help dismounted leaders and Soldiers navigate and communicate on the battlefield, and solar panels that can be used to recharge batteries for the devices.

"The way it's all integrated is what I think is most fascinating -- they have the battery here and it integrates with all the smartphone stuff they're doing elsewhere," Koelsch said. "It seems like they are putting the Soldier first, which is great."

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