

Humvee training sets support Army network fielding

U.S. Army

RED RIVER ARMY DEPOT, Texas (March 11, 2013) -- The Army is preparing to deploy the first Security Forces Advise and Assist Team to Afghanistan equipped with the latest suite of integrated network communications gear, but first the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry), must train on the new equipment and learn how it will aid in the advise and assist mission.

To get the brigade's Soldiers quickly trained and ready for the deployment, the Army has integrated some of the network capability into a familiar vehicle platform.

The Humvees rolling off the line here -- more than 330 over the course of four months -- are equipped with data radios, situational awareness software and other network systems that will be used by lower-tier echelons in the brigade. Two brigade combat teams, or BCTs, of the 10th Mountain Division are using the Humvee vehicles for their Mission Rehearsal Exercises and other stateside training before deploying to Afghanistan, where they will receive mine-resistant, ambush-protected vehicles, or MRAPs, All-Terrain Vehicles, M-ATVs, and MaxxPro vehicles with the same lower-tier network package for use in theater.

"The Humvee training sets have the same systems and configurations that the units will see in theater, so it's a good way to familiarize Soldiers with how to employ the network while taking advantage of the vehicles the Army has available in the U.S.," said Maj. Rick Wilkins, the Army's assistant product manager for light tactical vehicles, who is overseeing the production effort. Network components on the lower-tier MRAP vehicles will be integrated in theater, allowing for the units to 'fall in' on the equipment once they arrive later this year.

The quick-reaction project to complete the Humvees reflects a strong partnership between the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics and Technology, known as ASA(ALT), and Army Materiel Command, or AMC, to leverage expertise across both communities and deliver a needed capability to support Operation Enduring Freedom.

The training vehicles are one part of the service's comprehensive effort to quickly field Capability Set 13, known as CS 13, to select BCTs, who will deploy to Afghanistan to support the drawdown of U.S. forces. CS 13 is the Army's first integrated communications package that spans the entire BCT formation, connecting the static tactical operations center to the commander on-the-move to the dismounted Soldier. The network will provide on-the-move voice and data communications over vast distances, which will be critical as U.S. troops work closely with the Afghan forces, take down fixed infrastructure and become increasingly mobile and dispersed in their operations.

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The first recipients of the Humvees are the 4th and 3rd BCTs, 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry), who are now training with those vehicles as well as higher-echelon MRAPs integrated with Warfighter Information Network-Tactical (WIN-T) Increment 2, the mobile network backbone of the capability set, and the latest tactical data radios and Mission Command software. These M-ATV "Key leader" vehicles were first equipped with Underbody Improvement Kits, or UIKs, at the Fort Bliss, Texas, MRAP facility and subsequently shipped and integrated with the communications suite at Space and Naval Warfare, or SPAWAR, Systems Center Atlantic in Charleston, S.C. When the brigades deploy, they will take the higher-tier MRAPs with them and augment them with the lower-tier vehicles they will receive in theater. Meanwhile the Army will then rotate the Humvees to the follow-on units receiving CS 13, who will also be provided their own set of key leader MRAP vehicles.

"Rotating the networked Humvees among units allows the Army to cost-effectively train thousands of Soldiers on the capability set, and do it in a way that makes sense for the brigades' training and deployment schedules," said Col. Rob Carpenter, Army director of System of Systems Integration.

Similar to the SPAWAR team's work to network the MRAPs, the integration work at Red River Army Depot to prepare the Humvees is a complex effort that the Army is executing for the first time.

The Humvees are integrated in multistep process. Seats and armor are stripped from each vehicle and brackets to hold the network capabilities are installed. Holes are drilled in the exterior to let air flow in and prevent overheating. Cables are measured, cut and connected. One of the more complex efforts involved switching out the Humvee alternator for a higher-output version, to help power the radios, antennas, switches, transceivers, computer screens and other network parts which are also precisely installed.

With a team of more than 25 skilled technicians, each day the line churns out an average of six vehicles. The training sets come in three different configurations of varying complexity, depending on the user's role in the BCT, said Robert Vallee, the depot's supervisor for Humvee reset. The Army leveraged the Humvee original equipment manufacturer to come up with an integration design, which was then validated and turned over to RRAD for physical integration.

"The timeline was very aggressive, and from a platform perspective it was a steep learning curve" to become familiar with and incorporate network equipment from several different sources, Wilkins said.

But leveraging the experienced technicians at Red River, the operation overcame these challenges and is on track to finish production by the end of March, he said.

"This was a great team effort across ASA(ALT), including Program Executive Office Command, Control and Communications-Tactical, and Combat Support and Combat Service Support, AMC depots and our industry partners to design build and deliver a

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cost-effective training solution on a tight calendar schedule," Carpenter said. "These training sets are an essential asset as we continue to execute the CS 13 fielding mission."

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