

## **Army fields 101st Airborne new tactical network with integrated training approach**

U.S. Army

FORT CAMPBELL, Ky. -- With the Army's newest set of tactical network systems now in the hands of Soldiers who could be among the last to deploy to Afghanistan, the service is ensuring users master the power behind their communications gear.

To do this, the Army established a new System of Systems, or SoS, training concept drawing on lessons learned from previous units fielded with the integrated communications package known as Capability Set 13, or CS 13, including two brigade combat teams, known as BCTs, of the 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry) that are now deployed to Afghanistan. The new approach embraces instruction on integrated systems capabilities, leverages Soldier knowledge and creates an underlying familiarity with how the equipment supports operations.

Using a train-the-trainer concept, the Army is instructing a "slice" of about 125 Soldiers from the 3rd BCT, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), in order to establish proficiency with the network communications systems known collectively as CS 13, before introducing the gear to the full brigade for collective training events.

"We're the fourth brigade to have CS 13, but the first to go through the SoS training," said Capt. Justin Zevenbergen, communications officer with 3/101. "As signal Soldiers, we're being trained first on CS 13 before the whole brigade is out there, so when we do begin our event training we can then say, 'We're going to rock-n-roll this because we know it, we've done it.'"

Led by the Program Executive Office for Command, Control and Communications - Tactical, or PEO C3T, the SoS training is based directly on user feedback and marks a key step in increasing unit proficiency and network performance. CS 13 marked the first time the Army has delivered network systems not on an individual basis, but as an 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.

"At first it's overwhelming because there are so many moving pieces, but as time goes on and we keep working with the equipment, I think it will get easier and easier," said Sgt. Brandon Pieper with the 3/101, who is also taking the training. "The systems are pretty easy to use and we're moving forward from the lessons learned."

As the Army continues to incrementally modernize the network and fields the follow-on CS 14 to additional units, including BCTs from the 82nd Airborne Division, this training concept will give Soldiers more time to learn the new systems and capabilities and maximize their effect. The right mix of technology and training will

continue to evolve as the Army works to simplify the network, making it easier to use, train, maintain and sustain.

"We continue to incorporate lessons learned from Capability Set fieldings and drive those into our processes so we get better every time," said Brig. Gen. Daniel P. Hughes, program executive officer for C3T. "Now we are focusing on simplifying our communications systems for the end user while delivering a pervasive network that meets their needs."

Also included in the SoS training is an overview course so commanders understand the network as an integrated combat multiplier and not just a collection of separate signal capabilities. A weekly technical "trail boss" meeting was added to keep training on schedule and troubleshoot any issues that arise.

"The idea is to get the brigade involved as much as possible, because that leads to good outcomes with CS 13," said Tom Eberle, PEO C3T's technical "trail boss" assigned to the 101st Airborne Division. "What the training allows them to do is to identify how the system is supposed to work. We wanted to help them help themselves. So we're training the units to do that."

The SoS training also focuses on "crew drills" that cross-train a collective crew on CS 13 systems -- both mounted and dismounted -- to ensure an overall understanding of how the systems function as a group in various mission scenarios.

CS 13 systems provide mobile satellite and robust radio capability connecting all echelons of a brigade combat team down to the dismounted Soldier, while improving battlefield awareness and reducing units' reliance on fixed infrastructure. This becomes increasingly important as U.S. forces continue to draw down and carry out advise-and-assist missions with the Afghan National Security Forces, turning over many of their Forward Operating Bases and other infrastructure and gradually losing fixed network locations.

Using CS 13, the 4th and 3rd BCTs, 10th Mountain Division (4/10 and 3/10) are exchanging information while on the move in treacherous terrain and digitally tracking and communicating with small groups of dismounted Soldiers who have spread out to remote locations as they advise their Afghan partners.

As the Army's first two units to receive CS 13 over the past year, both 4/10 and 3/10 faced an accelerated timeline for training with the equipment prior to deployment. As they completed their training exercises, the units recorded their experiences to pass along to their counterparts in 3/101 and 2/101. This input directly influenced the new SoS training concept, and highlighted the need for the Army to simplify network systems for the end user.

"Our big focus with this equipment is effective management of communications," said Chief Warrant Officer II Johnathan Bradley, a network technician with the 3/101. "It's making it possible for anybody to operate the equipment that needs to operate it. The end state is to get these guys familiar enough with the equipment that they know when something is wrong and can mold it where it needs to go."

The 3rd BCT, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), will continue training on CS 13 for the next several months prior to possible deployment in 2014.

The SoS training will evolve as the Army incorporates additional lessons learned from Afghanistan and from the Network Integration Evaluations, semi-annual events that leverage the 2nd Brigade, 1st Armored Division, conducting rigorous mission scenarios in a realistic operational environment at Fort Bliss, Texas, and White Sands Missile Range, N.M. Those lessons are continuously folded into the Army's tactics, techniques and procedures, so each unit can make optimal use of the equipment they receive and innovate new methods of use.

As it continues for future units, the SoS training will empower Soldiers and leaders with the technical knowledge to ensure the right information is delivered at the right time to make crucial mission command decisions. By fielding the network in Capability Sets, the Army is providing scalable and tailorable equipment that is responsive to what the commander needs to execute current and future missions.

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