- All Photos by Robert L. Stevenson

Division Capstone Exercise Verifies the Effectiveness Of Army's Tactical Internet

(This article was prepared by the ARMOR staff from exercise reports. – Ed.)

The Army's search for enhanced combat capabilities through the application of advanced technologies — a process known as digitization — reached another milestone this spring at the National Training Center, where the first fully digitized brigades demonstrated that they were fully capable of accomplishing their wartime missions.

The Division Capstone Exercise (Phase 1) (DCX I), conducted against Fort Irwin's world class OPFOR, demonstrated the capabilities of the 2d Brigade Combat Team and 4th Aviation Brigade of the 4th Infantry Division (Mechanized). The exercise confirmed that these "Ironhorse" Division units, equipped with the M1A2 SEP tank, the M2A3 Bradley Fighting Vehicle, and the AH-64D Apache Longbow attack helicopter, can contribute decisively to the III Corps' land campaign counteroffensive capability, and that these Legacy Force systems, especially as updated with the latest technology, remain dominant battlefield killers.

Over the past ten years, the Army has searched for advanced technologies that would empower its formations to dominate information as an element of combat power. The search for these advanced technologies and concepts came to be known as "digitization," and began in earnest in 1994 with the first advanced warfighting exercise, Desert Hammer, at the National Training Center. Soon after that, III Corps' 4th Infantry Division (M) was designated as the Army's experimental division for the application of advanced warfighting concepts. Subsequent combat training, materiel developments, and further field experimentation have led to the incorporation of a range of organizational, doctrinal, combat platform, and information systems improvements to the division's formations.

The outcomes of brigade and division Advanced Warfighting Experiments in 1997 demonstrated that the Army was on the verge of achieving powerful enhancements to waging combat. As such, the goal was set to bring the 4th ID's combat brigades to a go-to-war status employing advanced capabilities. The Division Capstone Exercise, Phase I, was the expression of this goal. In October, a second phase of the DCX at Fort Hood, Texas, will continue the assessment.

During Phase I of the Division Capstone Exercise at the NTC, leaders expressed tremendous confidence in their organizations and equipment, which greatly improved a range of capabilities: "When fighting at night, these systems are unmatched. My Bradleys made direct fire kills routinely at 3700 meters

Bradley crewman enters enemy location data on the FBCB2 touch screen.

and beyond. Additionally, the FBCB2 increased our situational awareness dramatically. We were able to conduct bold maneuvers at night that we would normally only do during daylight," said CPT Dane Acord, commander of B Co, 2-8 IN.

Phase I of the DCX focused on combat brigade operations in an expanded tactical battlespace, the ability to exploit information, achieve dominant maneuver, execute fire and maneuver, conduct tactical assault and sustain combat power. Phase II will focus on a division combat operation as part of a III Corps fight in a robust Battle Command Training Program scenario, exercising the full range of division command and control capabilities at brigade and divisional level.

"The new systems give soldiers greater levels of understanding of where friendly forces are located, where soldiers are located themselves, and where the enemy is located," said SGT Robert Munsey, B/1-67AR. "With the new systems, we can virtually pick and choose our fighting positions, giving us the freedom to seize every opportunity."

DCX I was more than just a assessment, certification or experiment. It demonstrated the 4th ID's ground maneuver and aviation brigades' combat mission capability across a range of attack and defend missions — enabled with battle command, organizational, equipment, doctrinal, and C4ISR enhancements. Tough, demanding, realistic training challenged the competence and character of every soldier and leader and the reliability and contribution of our new technologies. They conducted non-stop operations against a very adaptive enemy employing asymmetric strategies, and validated new Army tactics and strategies for combat operations.

SFC Campos, platoon sergeant for 2nd Platoon, A Co, 3-67 AR, provided one example of the demonstrated lethality of the 4th ID during the DCX. On 4 April, as the OPFOR attacked, SFC Campos destroyed 15 enemy armored vehicles. With the powerful sights of the M1A2 SEP, he identified targets up to 8 kilometers away and destroyed them as they entered his engagement area. This ability to acquire, identify, and destroy targets was the result of several factors. First, SFC Campos had the most lethal equipment currently available. Second, empowered by advanced technology, he had excellent situational awareness that maximized the potential of his direct fire weapon system. Third, SFC Campos had a trained crew. His gunner has been with him for two years. They knew their tank and they knew each other.

The warfighting activities during DCX I were executed in force-on-force and live-fire scenarios designed to replicate likely deployment and contingency operations in a major theater of war. Extraordinary effort was expended to develop a contemporary operational environment that would challenge 4th ID units with a world class opposing force that operated continuously across the spectrum of conflict. The opposing force was designed to execute adaptive and asymmetric strategies, and employ the full range of unpredictable and lethal tactics expected on today's and future battlefields.

The range of modernized and recapitalized combat systems, such as the M1A2 SEP Tank, AH-64D Longbow Apache and the M2A3 Bradley Fighting Vehicle, have significantly increased the lethality of the 4th Infantry Division. The 2nd Generation Forward Looking Infra-red Radar (FLIR), Commander's Independent Thermal Viewer (CITV), and enhanced mechanical reliability improved warfighting capability. An upgraded and modernized information network, linking these combat platforms, empowered commanders to execute precision maneuver and fires. "The DCX provided us with continuous operations in a tactical environment that challenged our systems — our communications systems, our digital systems, and our warfighting systems — against a very, very competent OPFOR," said MG Ben Griffin, commander of the 4th ID.

DCX I demonstrated that the soldier remains the centerpiece of the Army and represents the core of the nation's ability to fight and win wars — decisively. DCX I provided an opportunity to enhance combat leader development in a contemporary threat environment. Tough, field-wise soldiers and leaders in well-trained teams achieved a level of situational awareness during DCX I that empowered them to accomplish their combat tasks under extremely demanding, continuous, and lethal conditions. They were able to exploit the nature of their environment, apply their competencies in field craft and technology, and relentlessly pursue their tactical missions to fight and win engagements and battles. Enhanced and enabled by the latest ground combat and information systems, the soldiers of the "Ironhorse" Division proved their mettle against a wily and cunning foe and came out better trained and prepared to win on the battlefield.

"… It is clear at this point that these units are superior warfighting outfits whose great soldiers are able to superbly leverage information technology to significantly enhance the combat

effectiveness of the Army," said MG B.B. Bell, Chief of Armor, who served as Exercise Director.

The Army's investment in developing the Army Battle Command System (ABCS), along with doctrinal, organizational, and materiel system upgrades, powerfully enhanced the 4th ID (M)'s ability to fight. The observed units were judged to have achieved their training goals and possess a formidable go-to-war capability. Maneuver units are more lethal than before. They possess and routinely employ an all-weather night and day combat capability. They are survivable, and can effectively dominate the enemy in an expanded, dispersed battlespace. During DCX I, the training units, enhanced with ABCS, operated with greater initiative, at faster tempo, and adapted more quickly to changing battlefield situations.

The 1-67 AR Scout Platoon demonstrated the significance of having a Common Operating Picture (COP) that accurately portrayed both friendly and enemy locations. The scout platoon, having completed the security zone fight, experienced one of their most challenging operations. Using advanced technology to pinpoint their locations, the platoon moved back on a moonless night, in the midst of a blowing sandstorm, and passed safely through designated lanes in the mine/obstacle belt without delay or casualty. Equally important, the battalion had an accurate picture of the scout locations and accurately tracked their rearward movement.

The new, networked Army Battle Command System (ABCS) empowered soldiers to be responsive and dominant across the full spectrum of military operations. The sharing of knowledge between the primary killers on the battlefield — the M1A2 SEP Tank, the M2A3 Bradley, and the AH-64 Apache Longbow — enabled the division to apply overwhelming combat power at the decisive point in order to defeat the enemy.

The unparalleled navigation capabilities and situational awareness provided by this electronic network gave 4th ID the ability to know where its forces were, as well as the location of the enemy, even during periods of darkness, sandstorms, and in difficult terrain. Armed with this accurate information, 4th ID demonstrated unprecedented synchronization, speed, and agility under all battlefield conditions. The advantages also extended to the area of air-ground integration. The integration of Air Force A-10s and F-16s into the 4th ID's tactical internet provided friendly locations on the pilots' Head-Up Displays (HUDs) and proved decisive in the close air support role. An Air Force JSTARS provided Moving Target Indicators digitally to the cockpit of Apache Longbows, significantly enhancing the 4th ID's ability to apply decisive and overwhelming force on the battlefield.

The exercise surfaced some solid conclusions:

- DCX I units have achieved a go-to-war capability.
- III Corps is postured today to deliver the legacy counteroffensive force, with full-spectrum relevance, against a contemporary operational threat for the next 15-20 years.
- Recapitalized and modernized legacy systems are more lethal than ever and demonstrate significant overmatch against potential enemies.
- The force significantly increased its pace and tempo in continuous, day/night operations.
- Effective information technology (ABCS) systems provided the same picture of the battlefield to all friendly forces.
- Continued improvements in advanced technology will build an even more significant overmatch capability for the future.
- Information superiority significantly improved the logistician's ability to provide proper resources at the critical place and time on the battlefield.
- Well-trained and well-led soldiers, equipped with appropriate technology, remain central to effective combat operations.
- Improved intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems (e.g., tank 50-power FLIR, TUAV, JSTARS, etc.) dominated acquisition at extended ranges.
- Artillery, while performing satisfactorily, requires improved range, rates of fire, mobility, and survivability. Future systems require simplified sensor-to-shooter links and quicker response times for accurate fires.

DCX I confirmed the course for the transformation of III Corps into the nation's land campaign counteroffensive formation. While the Army pursues solutions to Objective Force requirements, III Corps' counteroffensive capability will form the nucleus of the nation's ability to fight and decisively conclude land campaigns over the next 15 to 20 years.

DCX I thrust the mechanized and aviation brigade combat teams of the 4th Infantry Division (M) into a complex threat and terrain environment typical of what we expect on today's battlefields and those in the future. The brigades executed their warfighting doctrine, learned to synchronize the elements of combat power, and employed their full range of combined arms. Importantly, DCX I demonstrated the brigades' ability to effectively employ information as an exponential element of combat power. These units are fully capable of fighting and winning decisively.

"The process of digital transformation isn't just about new equipment. It is a process that involves developing leaders who can see opportunities in time and space provided by information superiority, and be versatile and adaptive enough to take full advantage of those opportunities," said LTC Damon Penn, commander of 1-67 Armor.