Building Readiness and Signal Proficiency
SMART

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On March 22, I was notified 1st Infantry Division (1st ID) would serve as the pilot unit for the firstever Signal – Mobile Advanced Readiness Training (SMART) course, via email, while in full execution mode of Austere Challenge/Warfighter 243. From that email, and after multiple operational planning teams, site surveys and coordination efforts with the Cyber Center of Excellence (CCoE), 20 1st ID Soldiers graduated from the twoweek SMART Pilot Class 2401 on July 26.

Working with the CCoE's SMART team, we began tailoring our specific training needs and further identifying benefits of this new program. SMART was developed to solve a very unique problem set within the Signal Regiment, and to some degree, the Army. First, technological advances and unit fielding plans outpace Training and Doctrine Command's procurement process, resulting in Soldiers receiving training on equipment during Advanced Individual Training (AIT) that is not utilized at their assigned duty stations. Compounding this initial issue is the current communications equipment rapid fielding process. Signal Soldiers in units across the Army participate in New Equipment Training/New Equipment Fieldings (NET/NEFs) and receive specific training on a specific piece of equipment in a vacuum. They do not receive training on how that equipment integrates as a system of systems within their unit's network.

Last, and as to be expected in the Army, Soldiers who receive training on their units' latest fielded equipment will conduct a permanent change of station at some point. These moves degrade unit readiness due to the unlikelihood that incoming Soldiers have also received training on newly fielded equipment specific to that organization. These combined problems prevent signal Soldiers from providing their units the support they're fully cable of providing (but have not received proper training to provide said support), which decreases overall organizational readiness.

What's unique and exciting about SMART is it was designed to decrease the impacts to unit readiness caused by the aforementioned problem set. SMART's ingenuity stems from its flexibility to align with a unit's specific modernization schedule and ability to adjust its training curriculum to a unit's organic communications equipment set.

Any unit's Force Integration section and/or G6 can reach out to the CCoE SMART team to begin the process of scheduling a course. This process includes working with their team to identify what communications equipment you have, and deconflicting their training schedule with your unit's training and fielding schedule. In our case, 1st ID still operates on mostly Warfighter Information Network – Tactical Increment 1 (WINT INC 1) End of Life equipment, including Joint Network Nodes, Command Post Nodes, and Lot 9 Satellite Transportable Terminals at the brigade level, with three WINT INC 2 Tactical Communications Nodes (TCNs) at the division level. After informing the SMART team of our Upper Tactical Internet (UTI) equipment set, we worked together to develop a robust training curriculum which addressed our specific UTI and Lower Tactical Internet (LTI) requirements, including Joint Battle Command – Platform, Single Channel Ground and Airborne Radio System, and Tactical Operations Center InterCommunication System.

While 1st ID operates on somewhat antiquated communications equipment (with future modernization efforts scheduled), the SMART team also has the ability to provide training on more recently fielded and/or procured Commercial of the Shelf (COTS) communications equipment and systems including, but not limited to: Secure but Unclassified – Encrypted, Integrated Tactical Network enabled equipment, Android Tactical Assault Kit, Mounted Mission Command – Software, Starshield, and Kymeta. In speaking with leadership from the SMART team, their 2402 Class with 25th Infantry Division will incorporate some of these COTS systems currently utilized within the Tropic

Lt. Col. Marrero Burch, 1st ID, poses with Pfc. Monique Monroy, also with 1st ID. Monroy was recognized as the "Distinguished Honor Grad" for SMART Pilot Class 2401. (Courtesy photo)

Lightning Division. This flexibility is key to what distinguishes SMART from training provided to signal AIT Soldiers and the standalone NET/NEFs. When scheduled properly after a unit is fielded new communications equipment, SMART reenforces and fully integrates within the "Train" window of the Army's Regionally Aligned Readiness and Modernization Model.

Other benefits of SMART, over the normal NET/NEF process, include the crosstraining signal Soldiers receive during the course, and that the training curriculum is developed from a unit's own specific TAC-SOP and/or TTPs. With most NET/NEFs, Soldiers are divided by military occupational specialty (MOS) and trained on their individual piece of equipment, which is part a larger integrated system. No matter your rank or MOS, with SMART, every student receives classroom and extensive handson training in each of the four tracks: focusing on a unit's LTI and UTI communications equipment, Network Operations and Security Center, and unit specific services used to manage its Common Operational Picture. In 1st ID's case, the rank of students in the course ranged from private first class to warrant officer, to first lieutenant, and they conducted concurrent training on all of the aforementioned 1st ID organic UTI and LTI communications equipment.

Ultimately, the CCoE created a new training strategy in SMART, which successfully integrates the Chief of Staff of the Army's priority "Strengthening the Profession," the Forces Command Commanding General's (CG's) priority "Readiness," enables the Third Armored Corp's CG mission statement "to rapidly deploy and conduct the full range of military operations," and enables two parts of the 1st ID

CG's Big Red One Big Four to: "Build Warfighting Readiness" and "Continuous Transformation to Meet Emerging Threats."

If planned for properly and incorporated correctly, SMART reenforces training signal Soldiers receive at AIT and builds upon the instruction received during NET/NEF, which improves proficiency and increases that organization's overall readiness. Usually, most Army pilot programs are used to work out issues and gather lessons learned on a new system or piece of equipment to ensure the next iteration runs smoother.

While SMART 2401 had quite a few lessons learned, I believe observing the average pass rate of initial written tests increased from 26% to 82% on the posttest, validated this program's intent and highlights its proven results. I also don't believe our success with this program was a coincidence and have confidence that any Soldier and unit that participates in SMART will gain proficiency and increase their unit's readiness.

I highly recommend this program as a readiness contributor across the Army.

The appropriate points of contact are listed below to assist with SMART courses.

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Students from the SMART Pilot Class 2401 pose for a group photo. (Courtesy photo)