



## Unit Set Fielding (USF) — Bringing Army Digitization to 112 Combat Formations

Joshua Davidson

**A**s it began to digitize its forces, the Army was limited in the fielding of its capabilities to between two or three brigades per year. This year, it is scheduled to reach 112 combat formations. The 5-phased USF process, initiated by the Army's Program Executive Office Command, Control, and Communications Tactical (PEO C3T) in FY06, is a repeatable process developed in response to the increased number of units receiving its equipment. The process has since improved the ability of PEO C3T personnel to support, field equipment to, and train Soldiers. "As we started rotating units into the combat theater in support of the global war on terrorism, it became obvious that we needed to create repeatable processes and lean them out so that we could spread the wealth of digitization across the Army," said MG Nickolas G. Justice, PEO C3T.

The Army's fielding process equips its Soldier force with complex systems, as well as basic fuel necessities. (U.S. Army photo by Jason Bock.)

Through the USF phases, the U.S. Army and the organizations of the Communications-Electronics Command (CECOM) Life Cycle Management Command (LCMC) simultaneously provide warfighters with each capability they need to perform their mission in combat. This means providing the Army Battle Command Systems (ABCS) 6.4, the communications systems, power, network, and enablers — all at the same time. The five phases of USF are:

- Phase I (Planning) — During detailed fielding and new equipment training.
- Phase II (Execution) — During fielding and training operations.
- Phase III (Reception, Staging, Onward Movement, and Integration) — Deploying or at an Army combat training center where units receive their training prior to deployment.
- Phase IV (Deployment) — For support of units when they are deployed.
- Phase V (Reset) — During the unit's reset upon return from deployment.

Over time, the PEO C3T staff has learned valuable lessons from the units it supports. “The ability to work closely with units just makes us better,” Justice remarked. “We learn more from units than they get from us. It's our privilege and our pleasure to be able to go out and engage with them, because those guys are just super.”

The PEO has learned how to change its fielding methods to align itself with those units' business processes. “In the Army, our combat formations have some awesome processes that allow them to do repeated tasks,” Justice stated. “These processes also allow them to push down and let people at every level of that formation accomplish their mission.” The units are very knowledgeable of their role and, therefore, function effectively from repeatable processes. In creating USF, the PEO C3T borrowed the battle drills that are rehearsed and mastered by units.

### USF Firsthand Experience

LTC Omar Jones, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment (2SCR), discussed how 2SCR recently entered the reset phase of USF. The regiment completed the majority of the process before a recent return from Iraq. Jones drew a similar correlation to Justice's. “In its previous AirLandBattle doctrine, the Army provided a doctrinal template that Soldiers used to predict their enemies' actions,” Jones said. “The commander then applies this to his or her analysis to adapt that template to the specific unit and conditions.”

The CECOM LCMC and PEO C3T staff followed a comparable process where they put forth a template for how they planned to field and support

a unit. The plan was then shown to a commander who would decide how to modify it for the specific requirements of his or her unit.

Jones was most impressed by two aspects of USF, the first being the holistic approach to fielding. “That makes it so much more effective and efficient from the unit perspective, having that model that is already laid out for you,” he said. The second is the validation process, which gives a unit confidence to know that expert support representatives will be with them from the time each ABCS is turned on. Those representatives were present when Jones' units first reached Kuwait in 2007 and during their arrival to Iraq in the fall. They remained present to ensure that each system that was plugged into the network functioned properly and that communications were possible among separate command posts. The fielding team was present each step of the way to provide invaluable assurance that the proper tools and reachback were available in the event of an issue.

The validation process was comprehensive and ensured the true interoperability and network functionality of each system after fielding. Achieving this would not be easy without the holistic-based USF process. “The confidence attained toward bringing the systems into combat by working with the CECOM LCMC and PEO C3T representatives was of great benefit,” Jones said.

Before beginning a mission, 2SCR takes steps to ensure the unit's Soldiers are comfortable that the systems they are bringing into combat will function and that they have the support they need. “I felt that we had that support and were able to gain confidence through the USF process,” Jones stated.



Soldiers pass floor sections along an assembly line and into a tactical operations center during a rotational exercise at the U.S. Army National Training Center, Fort Irwin, CA. (U.S. Army photo by Jason Bock.)

Jones, whose unit is now concluding the entire USF process with the reset phase, described the transformation from phase to phase as “seamless.” He said that the reset process was already coordinated for his unit prior to entering that phase. “It really was, in my mind, a partnered effort all the way through, and I felt very comfortable with the way it proceeded,” he said.

Partaking in the entire process gave Jones the chance to witness Army Team Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (C4ISR)

equipment in multiple life cycles.

Reflecting upon this, Jones called the PEO C3T and CECOM LCMC “truly synchronized.” “It gave me one point of contact and one organization to go to that really coordinated all of those other project managers [PMs] working on ABCS or various C4 systems and, to me, that was a great advantage.”

For Jones, USF made identifying an appropriate point of contact among the numerous agencies he coordinated with Armywide a straightforward process. He called the civilian field service representatives (FSRs) provided by PEO C3T and CECOM LCMC “invaluable.” The unit’s regimental S-3 and sergeant major absolutely embraced them. “We often called them Soldiers in khaki pants,” Jones noted.

Throughout the process, the digital systems engineers (DSEs) and FSRs were involved closely with the unit’s S-6 shop. Typically, it was the Soldiers who would repair systems and support

a squadron’s headquarters. However, many times, they obtained expert system advice from the civilian support staff.

During reset, much of the responsibility to synchronize Soldiers’ efforts falls on the brigade combat team (BCT) itself. This is the appropriate method for coordinating the schedule of the BCT,

which is responsible for ensuring training dates and resources are available. The PEO C3T’s assistance in planning eases this coordination effort.

“The more supporting organizations that move to a USF model, the easier it will be for the unit to focus during reset and training for deployment,” Jones said. For the unit’s

signal Soldiers and war-rant officers, accomplishing their missions in theater would have been difficult without the support and expertise of those FSRs.

At one point, the terrestrial-based unit was required to establish a communications network across the entire city of Baghdad, Iraq. This rare feat was achieved because of the expertise the Soldiers achieved during the fielding process. The FSRs worked as a team with the Soldiers and provided knowledge that was a key component of this remarkable achievement. At any location, the regiment could receive quick support from the fielding team. The BCT began the fielding process by setting up seven command posts in a single training area. By the time it reached the validation process, a

very cohesive team of Soldiers and contractors was in place. Spending time to become acclimated with one another paid great dividends when both shared missions.

“During training, the DSEs develop a working relationship and build trust with the unit they support,” said Frank Connolly, Regional DSE Lead, 407th Army Field Support Brigade. Many deploy with the unit into theater. The DSEs become closer with the Soldiers, who realize that they deal with many of the same issues.

Jones said that USF provided a more efficient and effective method of fielding systems to his unit. Pre-coordination of phases let Jones and other unit members determine which assignments needed an increased priority and allowed them to develop a sequential order of training classes for the fielded capabilities. Jones was also appreciative of the opportunity to partake in the after action review (AAR) process. “I had the luxury of seeing many of the AAR

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An Army Airborne Command and Control System is prepared for shipment. (U.S. Army photo by Jason Bock.)

comments from us and other BCTs get incorporated in the process,” he said. “Each AAR is a great process for learning.”

At the initiation of fielding, the five separate phases of the USF model allowed the Soldiers to be aware of friction points and areas of concern with the capabilities they received. At the conclusion of reset, it will allow them to take measures to eliminate and mitigate those friction points.

## USF Flexibility

The benefits of having the USF process in place also surfaced when President George W. Bush announced the troop surge in January 2007. When Jones’ unit began the USF process, it expected it would spend the majority of FY08 training in Europe. As it reached the final phases, it was deployed to Iraq for 15 months. The unit already was conducting classes on the ABCS 6.4 suite of digitized battlefield applications and was about a month away from its validation exercise prior to receiving its deployment orders. USF proved adjustable, as it was able to perform its second validation exercise while in Kuwait. USF’s flexibility allowed for changes during the middle of the fielding process.

GEN Benjamin S. Griffin, then-Army Materiel Command (AMC) Commanding General (CG), credited MG Dennis Via, CECOM LCMC CG; Justice; and their staffs for the impact they have made toward smoothing out the fielding process. “C4ISR is a continuous process, and whether it’s at the individual Soldier level, the unit level, the platform level, air, or ground, we’ve

made tremendous strides since I gave up command of the 4th Division,” said Griffin, who commanded the division from 1999 to 2001.

Originally, USF was managed solely by PMs from PEO C3T. Today, the PEO C3T’s PM

Command Posts leads Phases I-III, while the CECOM LCMC’s Logistics and Readiness Center (LRC) manages Phases IV and V.

The more supporting organizations that move to a USF model, the easier it will be for the unit to focus during reset and training for deployment.

The involvement of other organizations, such as the CECOM LCMC and AMC, is incredibly important to USF and the critical role of sustaining units after fielding capabilities to them. “One of the benefits of having the LRC lead those two phases is that we

have a command structure out there in AMC that does sustainment in the field,” Justice said. “We are leveraging AMC’s sustainment structure to do the Phase IV and Phase V operations for us. And, frankly, I need to integrate with them anyway because this is a cycle, not a linear process.”

## The Single Interface to the Field (SIF) Process

The SIF process and its associated portal have played an instrumental role in synchronizing warfighters, those who support them, and senior leaders. The SIF provides the warfighter with an entry point for support of any system managed by the CECOM LCMC. It not only guides them to the assistance they need; it also links them to



A Command Post Platform vehicle is unpacked during a rotational exercise at the U.S. Army National Training Center. (U.S. Army photo by Jason Bock.)

mission-essential information pertaining to areas such as fielding and training.

The SIF project is rapidly reaching one of its primary overarching goals — to be the single worldwide access point for users and/or the user support community to obtain C4ISR support. The SIF portal is becoming the primary tool for an Army Team C4ISR integrated support solution.

The SIF portal is one method for users to initiate contact with the Support and Operations Center (SOC) at Fort Hood, TX. The SOC provides tiered support, which is similar to that of companies such as Dell®. However, it is required to adhere to military standards. The round-the-clock center, established in January 2007 under Justice’s direction, provides a single point of support for issues with hardware, software, interoperability, systems architecture, training, and field support across Army Team C4ISR.

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