

March 17, 2003. Copyright 2002. Graphic News. All rights reserved.

U.S. infantry prepares for digital war

LONDON, March 17, Graphic News: The U.S. Army’s 4th Infantry Division, called the “Ivy Division” for the four green ivy leaves on its shoulder patch, was the only American unit to fight on both the British and French sectors of the western front during the First World War. Twenty-seven years later, it was the first allied unit to assault the Normandy coast.

Today, it is the most forward-looking unit in the U.S. Army, nicknamed the “Digital Division” because it has been the proving ground for the most advanced high technology weaponry in America’s arsenal. The Digital Division’s weapons are so modern that they were only fully tested in a combat exercise within the last two years, and signed-off just 16 months ago.

One of the new systems, the digital command and control system -- awkwardly known in military jargon as “Force 21 Battle Command Brigade and Below,” or FBCB2 -- is an integral feature of the Ivy Division’s M1A2 Abrams tanks, Bradley fighting vehicles and Apache Longbow attack helicopters.

FBCB2 is a tactical internet system which works in the same way as the world wide web to integrate all the weapons systems into one great database, giving combatants the ability to see the entire battleground on a computer screen.

“It allows a soldier to know where he is, where his buddy is, and know where the enemy is” said Leonardo Rodriguez, an Abrams tank driver.

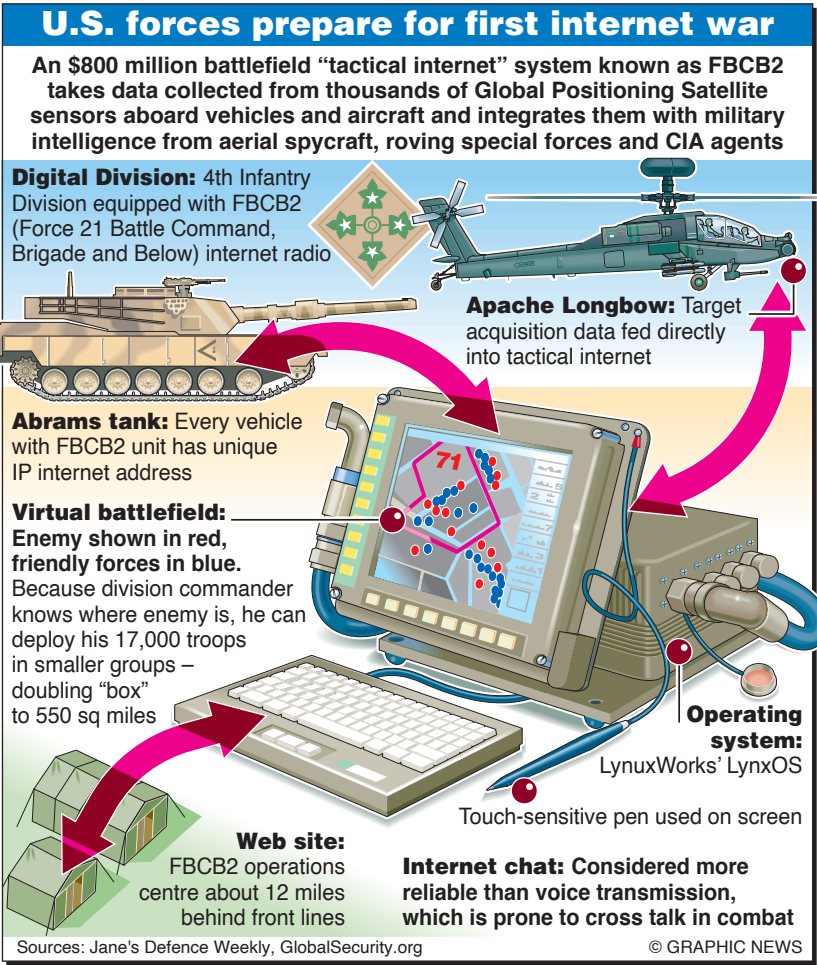
“In the past, we had a lot of ‘friendly fire’ accidents because we weren’t always in sync with each other. We didn’t always know where everyone else was, and sometimes mistook one another for the enemy. But with this system, everyone is on the same page. The FBCB2 lets everyone communicate and know who’s who.”

It is this battlefield awareness that is arguably the most significant change since the 1991 Gulf War. That conflict saw one in four U.S. fatalities and most British casualties caused by friendly fire. FBCB2 should make such accidental attacks virtually impossible.

Another advantage of FBCB2 is a large increase of the “battlefield box” that a commander can control. Since the commander knows where the enemy is, he can operate with smaller groups over a much greater area. Being internetted, tanks in the same brigade can keep track of each other even though they are not in visual contact, and the groups can mass their fires to greater destructive effect against an enemy. During a 14-day exercise in April 2001 the 4th Infantry Division’s troops, tanks and helicopters doubled the box they controlled to just over 550 square miles (1,400 sq km).

The network, which is driven by the powerful Linux operating system, relies on a fortified internet server located some 12 miles (19 km) behind the front line. Each tank or helicopter is identified by a unique IP (internet protocol) address which pinpoints its exact position within the box. Voice communication -- considered prone to cross talk in the fog of war -- has also been replaced by chat-room-style instant messaging.

With Britain providing the only other substantial ground force in the Gulf, the three UK brigades are set to receive 50 FBCB2 systems. The tanks of the 7th Armoured Brigade, the “Desert Rats,” are expected to receive the bulk of the equipment with others going to vehicles in the 1 (UK) Armoured Division HQ and 16 Air Assault Brigade.  
/ENDS



Cut-and-paste conversions:  
550 sq miles = 1,400 sq km  
12 miles = 19km

EDS -- DATA CORRECT AS AT MARCH 17, 2003

STORY TO LEFT OF GRAPHIC << STORY TO LEFT

CATEGORY: Society  
IPTC CODE: MIL\_OVR :Military  
SUBJECT: IRAQ: U.S. Army deploys tactical internet  
ARTISTS: Duncan Mil, Phil Bainbridge, Adrian Dean, Jordi Bou, Julie Mullins (research)  
ORIGIN: GRAPHIC NEWS  
TYPE: Colour / Adobe Illustrator version 8.01  
SIZE: 2 columns by 127mm deep  
DATE: 14/3/2003  
SOURCES: Janes Defence Weekly, GlobalSecurity.org  
GRAPHIC #: 14939

STANDARD MEASURES (SAU)		
Width	Picas	millimetres
1 col	12p5	52.3
2 col	25p7	107.7
3 col	38p9	163.2
4 col	52p	219.0
5 col	65p1	274.4
6 col	78.p3	329.7