

FORT BRAGG

Upgrading the voice and data communication capabilities to support a large military base

The Background

Ft. Bragg, NC is best known as the home of the U.S. Army Airborne Forces and is the largest army installation and airborne facility in the world. The most notable units stationed there include the XVIII Airborne Corps HQ, the 82nd Airborne Division, the United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) and the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC). The United States Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) and the US Army Reserve Command (USARC) are in process of relocating from Fort McPherson, Georgia to Fort Bragg in 2011. FORSCOM is the Army's largest Command consisting of over 750,000 Active Army, US Army Reservist and Army National Guard soldiers. The base is the Department of Defense's cornerstone for rapid deployment of ground forces to defend the United States' interests around the world.

A critical component of the Army's arsenal at Ft. Bragg is its communications system, which Black Box is providing. To improve its defenses, the Army is moving towards unified communications, combining voice, data and video in one package designed to support the soldier anywhere on the globe. That means soldiers will have a universal email address, one telephone number, universal file storage and a standard collaboration tool set. The systems they train on at Ft. Bragg will be the same systems used in the field and will enable the warfighter to immediately enter the battle upon arriving in theater.

The Original Contract: IMOD

In 2008, the Army awarded Black Box the I3MP Infrastructure Modernization (IMOD) project for Ft. Bragg. This four-year, \$58 million dollar task order calls for Black Box to Engineer, Furnish, Install, Test and Secure (EFIT&S) an integrated telecommunications infrastructure consisting of multiple vendor platforms including communications shelters, power systems, inside and outside plant infrastructure, IP data network systems, and DWDM and SONET optical transport systems.

Hard Work Pays Off: Expansion

In 2009, the U.S. Army awarded Black Box an I3MP expansion task order to provide a state-of-the-art, IP-based voice solution. The project will upgrade and expand the existing time-division multiplexing (TDM) switching infrastructure to a Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP)/TDM hybrid system. In 2011, the U.S. Army took over Pope AFB that adjoins Ft. Bragg and awarded Black Box an additional I3MP task order to extend the Ft. Bragg network infrastructure and modernize Pope AFB, now known as Pope Army Airfield. The new orders expand the project time frame to five years and raise its value to more than \$110 million dollars.

Upgrading a "City" with No Downtime

At 251 square miles, if Ft. Bragg were a city, it would probably be the third largest in North Carolina, including army personnel, civilians and families. Because it is a BRAC (Base Realignment and Closure) site with the largest Command in the Army relocating to Ft. Bragg, the schedule for all communications upgrades is set by Congress and the deadlines are "hard-stop" dates, meaning they can't be changed. "Right now, it's like a city under construction," explained Mr. Tony Schneider, Black Box Vice President of Army Programs.

The new converged voice/data system Black Box is providing at Ft. Bragg is the largest and most complex that Black Box has delivered to the Army. It is a carrier class system, which means only 17 seconds of downtime are allowed every year. "The system is on 24/7, 365 days a year," continued Mr. Schneider. "We engineer 'flash cutovers' of the legacy systems to the new infrastructure with no disruption in service."

Project:

Voice and data communications systems and infrastructure

Major Benefit:

Unified communications

Major Challenges:

Complex hybrid system
No downtime
Hard-stop schedule

A Working Group Methodology

To manage this vast project, Black Box employs a teaming approach with Subject-Matter Experts (SME) assigned to lead each of the teams responsible for each of the various subsystems being deployed. The team leaders interface and collaborate daily with their Army counterparts on-site.

"Our project management approach of using ground-level working groups to collaborate and make decisions has been greatly received by the Army," explains Mr. Schneider. "As this project is very fast moving, we have been able to solve problems and make technological changes quickly. In fact, 94% of issues that have arisen have been solved at the ground level. This methodology has enabled us to meet and beat schedules to the delight of our customer. Because of our performance, we've built a great relationship and trust with the Army and we are delivering an excellent customer experience."

"Although Ft. Bragg is Black Box's largest Army project, our Black Box teams are deployed on many other Army posts worldwide, many of which have the same BRAC time considerations. All are part of transforming the Army's communications systems to the Global Network Enterprise Construct (GNEC). Our Black Box team is truly humbled and grateful to support our country's warfighters by this most ambitious implementation. We look forward to continuing to live up to and exceed the high expectations of the U.S. Army," said Mr. Schneider.



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