

“Big Red One’s” Division Artillery is back

By Amanda Kim Stairrett, 1ST INF. DIV. PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Division Artillery is back. After its inactivation 10 years ago in Germany, the “Big Red One’s” Division Artillery is back and ready to resume the mission of effectively synchronizing joint fires across Fort Riley and the 1st Infantry Division.

Reactivating 10 of the Army’s division artillery units is a process that began more than a year ago, and the 1st Inf. Div.’s will be welcomed back Oct. 16 at a ceremony on Cavalry Parade Field.

The Big Red One DIVARTY is one of the last two to stand up this year, Col. Thomas Bolen, DIVARTY commander, said.

“We feel privileged to be activated to be the DIVARTY,” Bolen said. “There’s such a great team already in place.”

From warfighting prowess to community outreach, Bolen said the goal was for DIVARTY to complement what the Big Red One already does.

WHAT IS DIVARTY?

Bolen said DIVARTY fills a unique role in the division. Leaders continue to work to educate people about what DIVARTY brings to the mix. Most people are familiar with artillery,

Bolen said, but what DIVARTY does is standardize artillery training by training and certifying sections and enabling higher-level exercises.

DIVARTY will work with the 1st Inf. Div.’s fires section and field artillery 5th Field Artillery Regiment, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, and 1st Battalion, 7th Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team. These units can and have already done great training, Bolen said, but DIVARTY will help to coordinate even larger exercises.

That added capability will bring a degree of synchronization as the division, its brigades and its battalions move forward in their training “that maybe we haven’t done in previous years,” the colonel added.

In the future, that could expand to synchronizing training between general support units on and off post, the Air Force and their attack aircraft and the 1st Combat Aviation Brigade, he added.

Another aspiration is creating a force fires headquarters, supervised by DIVARTY, with which any fires unit could train. Those units could include elements from Fort Sill, Oklahoma, or the Kansas National Guard, Bolen said.

DIVARTY’s return doesn’t mean area residents will see an increase in big equipment on the post. The

division’s two field artillery battalions will maintain their guns and radar equipment. The biggest pieces the DIVARTY will bring are radar and communications equipment, Bolen said.

BUILDING DIVARTY

While the Oct. 16 ceremony marks DIVARTY’s official return to the Big Red One, Soldiers and leaders are already in place at Fort Riley to move its mission forward. As of this week, the unit is continuing to build its formation with an expectation to be at 90 percent strength by January, according to information from the unit.

Those Soldiers came from other units across Fort Riley — namely, the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, which inactivated this spring. One of those to shift from the “Dragon” brigade to “Drumfire” was Maj. Charles “Skip” Turner.

Turner has some experience standing up units. He was the 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, 4th IBCT’s fire support officer when it activated in 2006 at Fort Riley.

He returned to Fort Riley in July 2013, helped inactivate the 4th IBCT’s 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Brigade, and moved to DIVARTY in June. That experience helped “tremendously,” Turner said. As DIVARTY’s operations officer, Turner and other leaders are facing the same hurdles he experienced in 2006. The key, he said, was to establish good systems right away to ensure things like personnel and equipment flow went smoothly. The fruits of that hard work will pay off in the long term, he said. Soldiers were busy signing for inventory — everything from vehicles to radar to office equipment — and getting it up to standard, said Sgt. 1st Class Albert De La Garza, DIVARTY master gunner and operations noncommissioned officer. De La Garza served as a platoon sergeant in 2nd Bn., 32nd FA Regt., before moving to DIVARTY in April. The early weeks and months found leaders signing for buildings in their new footprint and welcoming new Soldiers.

Spc. Christian Kim, a new DIVARTY Soldier, arrived this summer at Fort Riley. As an intelligence analyst, Kim is one of those who helps field artillerymen get a clear image of the battlefield. On the garrison side of the house, he helps Soldiers in process and get their security clearances up to date.

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PASSING ON THE DIVARTY LEGACY

Like most newer Soldiers, Kim has never served in a DIVARTY.

“I was pretty excited to be in something new,” Kim said of his arrival. He and the others are learning about the unit’s history and current role from senior officers and NCOs who have served in or alongside DIVARTY. De La Garza’s last DIVARTY experience was while serving as a private in 1998 in Korea. He said he learned a lot about its purpose then from his chain of command and is now working to pass that knowledge down to those who have never served in a traditional field artillery world.

“There’s just a handful left who were part of DIVARTY,” De La Garza said. De La Garza said DIVARTY’s history was a huge deal and he was excited to be part of standing it back up.

Bolen said imparting that legacy started right when new Soldiers arrive at Fort Riley. Leaders work to greet them immediately “so they know that they belong to a unique organization,” Bolen said.

Aside from seasoned officers and NCOs, one of the most valuable assets are DIVARTY veterans — many of who reside in the communities surrounding Fort Riley. As leaders worked on preparing the unit for new Soldiers, they also reached out to local veterans for their insight and input. All showed a tremendous amount of interest in the stand up, Turner said.

“They are extremely excited,” he said of the DIVARTY veteran community. “Once you reach out to veterans, it’s amazing ... what comes out.”

Retired Col. John Seitz has deep ties to DIVARTY. Aside from serving as a career “redleg,” his father, retired Brig. Gen. Andy Seitz, commanded 1st Inf. Div. Artillery from 1958 to 1961 at Fort Riley before serving briefly as the division commander. Seitz is donating many of his father’s treasures from that period to DIVARTY for historical displays.

“Field artillerymen, active and retired, are very pleased that the Army has finally recognized the need



The 1st Infantry Division Artillery reactivated Oct. 16 at a ceremony on Cavalry Parade Field. U.S. Army photo released.

for the division artillery and is doing something about it,” Seitz said.

He and other veterans host and attend a yearly Big Red One DIVARTY reunion. This year’s is set for later this month in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and Bolen and Command Sgt. Maj. Jonathan Stephens, DIVARTY senior NCO, are scheduled to attend. The 2016 reunion is set to take place in Junction City and Fort Riley, Seitz said.

It is important for Seitz and his fellow field artillery veterans to maintain the branch’s legacy through events like the reunions and the Artillery of the 1st Infantry Division Association. Traditional artillery balls and Saint Barbara events help do that, too, he said.

“Having a colonel-level commander for the field artillery units gives the field artillery Soldiers equal footing with their maneuver, aviation and logistics contemporaries in the other brigades of the division,” Seitz said. “Having an experienced field artillery colonel to mentor the field artillery Soldiers will help them hone their professional skills.”

Bolen said DIVARTY’s outreach mission fits right in with something the Big Red One already does: working with all the folks in the Flint Hills region. Soldiers and leaders are working to establish a role in the community like every other brigade headquarters, “so we want to be a part of that,” he added. 