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Spc. Justin Earnhart, 470th Military Intelligence Brigade, pulls security during the 2021 Army Futures Command Best Warrior Competition at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. (U.S. ARMY/PFC. JOSHUA TAECKENS)

Army Futures looks to 2035 and beyond

Armey Futures Command marks its third anniversary this month, but the work is just starting for the command's 26,000 soldiers and civilians, tasked with enabling a massive transformation.

"This organization remains focused on preparing the next generation—and the generation after that—of soldiers and ensuring they have the same benefits my generation has had in terms of doctrine, in terms of concepts, in terms of materiel solutions, to keep ahead of our potential adversaries," said Gen. Mike Murray, commander of Futures Command.

Futures Command, which officially began operating out of its Austin, Texas, headquarters on Aug. 24,

2018, has made a lot of progress in its mission of modernizing the Army, Murray said.

It continues to work on its 31 plus four signature modernization efforts while cutting the requirements process by two to three years to get capabilities into soldiers' hands more quickly. It stood up a Software Factory to train soldiers to code and help solve problems in the field, and it established the Army Artificial Intelligence Integration Center at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh to lead and integrate Army artificial intelligence strategy and implementation plans.

The command also built partnerships with academia and small businesses and has launched Project Convergence, which Murray describes as

the Army's "campaign of learning," to test and refine new, emerging technologies.

"The list goes on and on of the things that probably would never have happened had the Army not made the decision to stand up a command to focus on the future," Murray said.

Standing up the new four-star command was the largest restructuring of the Army since 1973, he said Tuesday during a roundtable with reporters. But its mission isn't confined to just seeking new equipment.

"It's also about how we fight and how we'll have to fight in the future, and how we'll have to look at our structure to make sure our structure is adequate enough for the future," Murray said.

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Mandatory COVID shots for troops to begin ‘immediately’

The military will “immediately begin” vaccinating service members against COVID-19, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in a Tuesday memo.

Austin’s memo comes a day after the Food and Drug Administration announced its full approval of the two-shot vaccine made by Pfizer and its partner BioNTech.

“To defend this Nation, we need a healthy and ready force,” Austin said in the memo. “After careful consultation with medical experts and military leadership, and with the support of the President, I have determined that mandatory vaccination against coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is necessary to protect the Force and defend the American people.”

Austin directed the service secretaries to “immediately begin full vaccination of all members of the Armed Forces under DoD authority on active duty or in the Ready Reserve, including the National Guard, who are not fully vaccinated against COVID-19.”

Military leaders have for months encouraged service members to get vaccinated. More than 800,000 service members have not yet been vaccinated, according to Pentagon data, the Associated Press reported.

As of Aug. 18, more than 1 million service members—more than



Spc. Eyza Carrasco, left, 2nd Cavalry Regiment, administers a COVID-19 vaccination at a 7th Army Training Command barracks in Vilseck, Germany. (U.S. ARMY/MARKUS RAUCHENBERGER)

388,000 of them soldiers—have been fully vaccinated, according to DoD data. An additional 244,000 troops, including 174,400 soldiers, are partially vaccinated.

Mandatory vaccinations will only use vaccines that have received full licensure from the FDA, the memo states. Service members who are actively participating in COVID-19 clinical trials are exempted from mandatory vaccination until the trial is complete, according to the memo.

Service members can receive an exemption for medical or religious rea-

sons, Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said. Those who do not qualify for an exemption but still do not want the vaccine will be given the chance to talk to a physician and his or her chain of command, he said.

“Commanders have a wide range of tools available to them to help their teammates make the right decision for themselves, for their families, for their units,” Kirby said.

He added that the vaccine mandate is now a lawful order. “We fully anticipate our troops are going to follow lawful orders,” he said.

Service members are considered fully vaccinated two weeks after completing the second dose of a two-dose COVID-19 vaccine or two weeks after receiving a single dose of a one-dose vaccine. Those with previous COVID-19 infection are not considered fully vaccinated.

Austin called on the services to move quickly. “The Secretaries of the Military Departments should impose ambitious timelines for implementation,” he said in the memo. “Our vaccination of the Force will save lives. Thank you for your focus on this critical mission.”

The memo is available here.



Spc. Ying Chen of the New York National Guard prepares a dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine at the Camp Smith Training Site clinic. (U.S. ARMY/STAFF SGT. JONATHAN PIETRANTONI)

Hundreds of National Guard troops fight wildfires across the country

National Guard troops from across the country continue to play a critical role in wildfire response as multiple fires burn across the United States.

More than 1,400 National Guard soldiers and airmen from 12 states have been called up to help with multiple blazes, including in California, Idaho, Oregon, Washington and Montana, according to the National Guard.

While the National Guard routinely responds to domestic emergencies, including natural disasters, the 2021 fire season has proven to be especially ruthless.

The National Wildland Fire Preparedness level escalated to its highest level on July 14, meaning several areas across the country “are experiencing large, complex wildland fire incidents ... which have the potential to exhaust national wildland firefighting resources,” according to the National Interagency Fire Center.

The July 14 escalation is “the third earliest occurrence since 1990,” according to an Aug. 1 wildfire report from the National Interagency Fire Center.

When 2nd Lt. Travis Stice of the Idaho Army National Guard heard the call for volunteers, he answered without hesitation, undaunted by the 15 wildfires burning across Idaho.

“I am very excited that this is a state mission,” Stice said in a National Guard press release. “It’s the reason I signed up for the Idaho National Guard, to help the citizens of Idaho, along with serving my country. I just love my fellow Idahoans. I called my employer with one day’s notice and they said, ‘Awesome, just come back safe and we’ll work everything out when you come back.’ They were very supportive even with the short notice.”

In Oregon, the Department of Forestry requested 115 Oregon National Guard troops to fight the Rough Patch and Bootleg fires.



Trees burn within eyesight of a California National Guard hand crew with Joint Task Force 578 in California on Aug. 16. (NATIONAL GUARD/1ST SGT. HARLEY RAMIREZ)

Though fire seasons are unpredictable until they start, Julia Johnson, a trainer for the Oregon Military Department who has been teaching National Guard troops vital fire support skills, said that conditions in Oregon have been particularly dry across the state.

In California, hundreds of troops from California, Nevada, Wyoming, Colorado, Wisconsin, West Virginia and Louisiana are fighting fires in the state, according to an Army press release. In just over a month, the Dixie Fire has burned more than 662,000 acres, making it the second largest in California’s recorded history.

Soldiers from the California Army National Guard’s 870th Military Police Company have been conducting traffic control in vital areas and assisting local law enforcement in several communities.

“On the one hand, most of us are pretty proud of our role here and of being Guardsmen in California,” said 1st Lt. Matthew Chow, one of the company’s platoon leaders, in a National Guard press release. “It’s nice talking to people ... because they’re thankful for the assistance from us. On the other hand, I can’t say I’m happy to be here because it’s kind of sad.”

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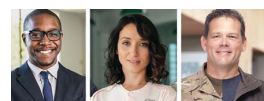
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Futures Command

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With that in mind, Murray and his team are already looking ahead.

Between now and 2024, “which is another three short years,” there are 22 signature efforts scheduled to be delivered to soldiers, he said.

“We’re going to drive on with what we’ve been doing in the past three years,” he said.

“We’re going to continue to push to get capability in the hands of soldiers more rapidly than we have in the past.”

The Army also plans to ramp up its Project Convergence exercises.

This fall’s event will include the Multi-Domain Task Force from Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, and the 82nd Airborne Division headquarters from Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

It also will feature the other military services.



Gen. Mike Murray, left, commander of Army Futures Command, and Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Crosby celebrate the command’s third anniversary in Austin, Texas. (U.S. ARMY PHOTO)

The Army also is taking the Multi-Domain Operations concept and turning it into doctrine, which will help Futures Command look even further into the future, beyond the

2035 goal for when the Army will be a multidomain-capable force.

“Right now, we’re running a future studies program that’s focused on 2035 and beyond,” Murray said.

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New book shares stories of armored cavalry in Vietnam

By Joseph Craig

No one would ever confuse the jungles and rice paddies of Vietnam with the open plains of Europe or the deserts of North Africa.

So, when the Army first went to war in South Vietnam, few thought of a role for armored forces. But the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment changed a lot of minds upon its arrival in 1966.

Troopers of the famed “Blackhorse Regiment” spent the next 5 1/2 years demonstrating their effectiveness on the battlefields of Southeast Asia.

Over 25,000 men served in the unit during its time in Vietnam.

Donald Snedeker—a former member of the unit, historian for the 11th Armored Cavalry veterans of Vietnam and Cambodia and author of *The Blackhorse in Vietnam*—carefully collected their stories over the past three decades.

The result is *Blackhorse Tales: Stories of the 11th Armored Cavalry Troopers at War*, the latest title in the Association of the U.S. Army’s Book Program.

We recently sat down with the author to discuss his work.

AUSA: How does this new book relate to *The Blackhorse in Vietnam*?

Snedeker: *Blackhorse Tales* is a companion volume to *The Blackhorse in Vietnam*. Where *The Blackhorse in Vietnam* tells the history of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment during its 5 1/2 years in combat, *Blackhorse Tales* shares the stories of the individual troopers who fought that war and their families who supported them then and continue to do so today.

AUSA: How did the wartime experience of a cavalry trooper differ from that of other soldiers?

Snedeker: Most of the soldiers who deployed to Vietnam between 1966 and 1972 lived on fire support bases and base camps, deploying to



Most Blackhorse troopers lived on their armored vehicles in Vietnam for months at a time, according to unit historian Donald Snedeker. (AUSA PHOTO)

the field on combat operations for short periods of time only.

Most Blackhorse troopers lived on their armored vehicles in the jungles and rice paddies for months at a time, getting to know the enemy and terrain on an up-close and personal basis.

AUSA: The modern-day cavalry may not have horses, but plenty of other animals are mentioned in the book. Please tell us about some of them.

Snedeker: The American GI at war has always been a sucker for young kids and small animals, and the Blackhorse troopers in Vietnam were no different. Even in the midst of mortal combat, troopers rescued

animals of all sorts—dogs, snakes, monkeys, chickens, goats, etc.—and made them part of their crews.

The dog, Combat, was the longest-serving Blackhorse trooper in the regiment, serving from when they arrived in September 1966 until redeployment to the U.S. in March 1971.

AUSA: What would the troopers want today’s generation to know about their time in Vietnam?

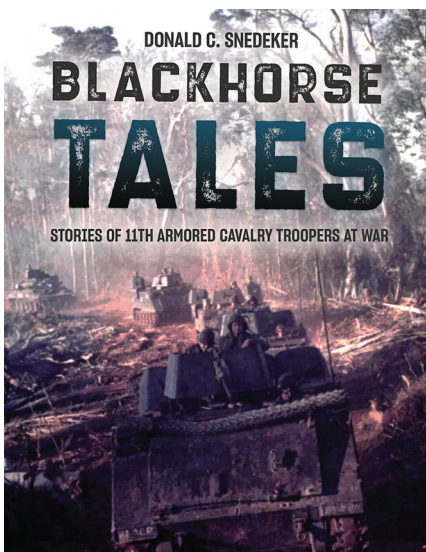
Snedeker: The 41st colonel of the regiment, Gen. Donn Starry, used to say: “The Blackhorse forever!” Today’s troopers are the latest generation to serve in “the best damn regiment you will ever see.” You are now part of the magnificent heritage that started in 1901, adding new pages each and every day.

AUSA: What do you have in mind for your next project?

Snedeker: I am working on a PowerPoint presentation of the history of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment from 1901 up through the National Training Center today.

To order a copy of *Blackhorse Tales: Stories of the 11th Armored Cavalry Troopers at War*, please visit us online at www.ausa.org/books.

Joseph Craig is AUSA’s Book Program Director.



Chapter program links soldiers with civilian mentors

A mentorship program established last year by the Association of the U.S. Army's Central Texas-Fort Hood chapter is growing in its mission of connecting soldiers and family members with civilian mentors.

The program was created by chapter member Fernando Fernandez and aims to increase partnerships between Fort Hood and the central Texas community through networking events and professional development forums.

After watching a forum in 2020 with then-Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy and community leaders, "I realized a couple of things. One, that there was a disconnect between the community

Central Texas-Fort Hood

and Fort Hood, and second, a desire from the community to be a part of the solution and help in any way they could," Fernandez said, according to an Army news story.

The chapter worked with several organizations to promote the mentorship program and find community leaders to become potential mentors, including Jose Segarra, mayor of Killeen, Texas, and a realtor with Homevet Realtors.

Segarra has mentored several soldiers, helping them to "truly get an understanding of what a sales career



Killeen Mayor Jose Segarra, left, meets with Sgt. Michael Hargrave, 3rd Cavalry Regiment, as part of the Central Texas-Fort Hood chapter's mentorship program. (COURTESY PHOTO)

is and what is required in order for them to be successful," he said.

Kelly Brown, the chapter president, described the program as "an opportunity to bridge the gap between the community and soldiers."

By the end of 2020, 10 soldiers had been connected with mentors in the surrounding communities through the chapter's efforts.

"If a family member or spouse has an interest in real estate or entrepreneurship," or whatever their passion may be, "we want to be able to link them to somebody within our commu-

nity who is an expert in their field to help them reach their dreams," Brown said last year in a local news report from KCEN-TV.

Soldiers often have wide-ranging experience in their fields of expertise, but when they transition to civilian life, finding a matching career can be a challenge.

Master Sgt. Nadia Davis of the 1st Cavalry Division is one such soldier.

Her mentorship experience with Megan Bradley, chief financial officer for the Killeen Independent School District, "gave me a chance to look at what logistics is like from the outside, versus what we do in the Army," she said, according to an Army news story.

"I found that it's similar, which made things easier for me to say, 'OK, I can do this on the outside,' instead of getting out and not knowing what to expect," Davis said.

Veterans or civilians who want to sign up to be a mentor for a soldiers and families can email Fernandez at fernando.fernandez@fhnb.com.

"If we can assist one person in achieving their goal of making an easy transition, then we will have achieved [our goal]," Fernandez said.



Abdul Subhani of Central Texas Technologies, left, discusses cyber security careers during a mentorship session with Sgt. 1st Class Michael McKinley, 1st Cavalry Division. The session was arranged through the AUSA chapter mentorship program. (COURTESY PHOTO)



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