

Corps constructs Digital Multi-purpose Range Complex to keep Soldiers on target

“... the demand for training is growing, requirements are growing, the training tasks have increased, and the complexity of the tasks has increased. That’s a simple result of being an Army at war, an Army that had to expand and an Army that had to rapidly adapt to two theaters of operation.”

Fred Weekley, Installation Range Management Officer, Fort Benning, Ga.

At 1,600 acres, the Digital Multi-purpose Range Complex on Fort Benning, Ga., answers the Army’s call for transformation by bringing armor and infantry soldiers together in “real world” training scenarios. The overarching concept is that infantry and armor fight together, and therefore should live and train together.

The range includes several different targets, much like troops would encounter in ongoing Overseas Contingency Operations. The positioning of both stationary and moving infantry and armor targets, adds the element of uncertainty about the enemy realistic to warfare. The range complex provides state-of-the-art technology, diverse environments, and specialized designs—giving soldiers the best combat advantage.

The complex includes the first installation of the Digital Range Training System 2.0 software which trainers say tremendously expands the capability of the commander to capture the crew commands and vocalizations, and record commanders’ videos. The system captures the orientation of the main gun-tube and the weapons systems on the combat vehicles by a stand-alone camera system which records the movements of both the vehicles and soldiers.

Unique challenges for a unique project

The Savannah district worked closely with Fort Benning to build and modify the range to meet the customer’s diverse and sophisticated training needs. Completed in 2008 with additional modifications in 2009, the Digital Multi-purpose Range Complex is just one of the myriad projects designated as part of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Act. All construction at Fort Benning falling under the BRAC designation began in September 2007 and is scheduled for completion by Sept. 15, 2011. To date, the Corps has managed \$1.16 billion in completed and contracted construction on the post.

As the project manager for all range construction



The Digital Multi-purpose Range Complex at Fort Benning, Ga. includes several different kinds of targets, including 35 stationary infantry target clusters (above), 11 evasive moving armor targets (bottom), and 55 stationary armor targets (not shown).

at Fort Benning, Mark Puhalla directs details from concept development to construction completion and turn-over to the installation. According to Puhalla, the digital complex is one of 19 ranges built by the Savannah district in the last two years.

Steve Vaughn serves as the project engineer for the Corps' Digital Multi-purpose Range Complex. He recalls how the issue of training affected construction. "During the design phase, training standards were

different than when physical construction started." Vaughn said. "As the Army upgraded their training requirements and weapons systems, we had to continually adapt to meet them."

Just getting to the site proved challenging for Vaughn, Puhalla and the rest of the project delivery team. "Many of the ranges are in remote areas of Fort Benning not previously developed," Puhalla said. "This meant building and maintaining construction trails to the sites until the permanent infrastructure of roads and utilities were built."

Responding to the customer

Fred Weekley, a 25-year Army veteran, retired nine years ago from his position as the Sergeant Major of Fort Benning's Ranger Training Brigade. Today, he's the Installation Range Management Officer overseeing 16,000 acres of ranges across Fort Benning. "We have a lot of input," Weekley said. "At the site visits, we could raise our hand when we saw an issue that needed to be fixed before it got too far down the construction road and was irreversible in the process."

Throughout the environmental issues, construction timelines, budget constraints and manpower growth issues, Weekley and the Corps team remained focused.

Thanks to careful planning, expert construction, and the ability to adapt, the complex is getting a heavy workout. The Installation Range Management team schedules 120 events per training day, and instructs 108,000 soldiers a year, compared to 70,000 nine years ago. Typically, a soldier spends between 18 and 23 days on the range depending on the type of class. This includes everything from mortars and machine guns to hand grenades and anti-armor weapons systems.

"Having served for 25 years, this is a distinct pleasure for me," said Weekley. "Every day is a good day when I can come and set conditions so soldiers have the right training and events can be executed in the right kind of range and the right kind of environment and atmosphere." 

By Sandra Hudson, Corporate Communications Office

The Corps designed the range to accommodate strategically placed data relay nodes, which allow the range safety officer to digitally track the action of the crew on each combat vehicle or the movements and commands of trainees when they leave the security of the armored vehicles. *Photos by Bruce Dickinson*

