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SENIOR ARMY SIGNAL LEADERS ASK SOLDIERS OF V CORPS' 22ND SIGNAL BRIGADE TO SHARE IN TRANSFORMATION

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DARMSTADT, Germany -- Brig. Gen. Janet A. Hicks stood before assembled formations of officers, NCOs and enlisted Soldiers from V Corps' 22nd Signal Brigade and listened to their comments and suggestions, exchanged ideas with them, and perhaps most importantly, listened to them.

With the Army's Signal Corps in the midst of transformation, Hicks, commander of the U.S. Army Signal Center and Fort Gordon, Ga., and Signal Regimental Command Sgt. Maj. Michael A. Terry, visited the 22nd earlier this month to share the future with the corps' signal Soldiers.

"We are in a period of lots of work, and lots of change, and lots of mission. Changes are happening at the very core of our Army," said Hicks.

A primary focus of Hicks and Terry's visit was to clarify exactly what this restructuring means and explain its impact on signal Soldiers. The general detailed the philosophies and plans of Army Chief of Staff Gen. Peter Schoomaker and the shifting focus of the Army from plans for the future to today's needs.

“Under [former Army leadership], if you called the Pentagon and said, ‘I want to talk about the present,’ they would tell you that they’d have to get back to you on that. But if you called up and wanted to talk about the future, they would say, ‘Great! How much do you need?’ [Schoomaker] is committed to giving the Army what it needs right now,” Hicks said.

More than coming to announce changes however, Hicks came to announce that the Signal Corps was ready for those changes and is open to suggestions. Because of its recent deployment to Operation Iraqi Freedom, she said, 22nd Signal has seen unprecedented activity for a signal brigade, and that makes the brigade’s Soldiers especially qualified to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the Army’s signal program.

During the brigade’s deployment, the normal command structure of signal units underwent fundamental changes, as an entirely new class of signal equipment – the Promina -- was put into use in Operation Iraqi Freedom for the first time. “We had Soldiers reading instruction manuals as they crossed the berm [into Iraq],” said Hicks.

As a result, signal Soldiers from private to sergeant suddenly found themselves on somewhat even terrain with regard to knowing the equipment. Privates and specialists often had to step up and assume leadership positions, the general explained, giving them on-the-job training and experience that put them far ahead of signal Soldiers who did not deploy.

That combat-tested knowledge the brigade earned during its tour in Iraqi Freedom makes it a prime sounding board in this time of radical changes, said brigade Command Sgt. Maj. Ray D. Lane.

As one acknowledgement of the value of the brigade's efforts during its deployment, Hicks presented Col. Jeffery G. Smith, the 22nd's commander, with the Silver Order of Mercury. The award is the Signal Corps Regimental Association's highest honor, given to those who make "conspicuous long-term significant contributions to the U.S. Army Signal Corps and the Signal Regimental Association."

Hicks also visited each of the 22nd's battalions, where she was briefed on their performance and heard the lessons each learned during deployment. She also discussed ideas, suggestions and critiques on the general effectiveness of their training and how it applied to their warfighting experiences.

In discussing the transformation of the Army's signal community, Terry encouraged Soldiers to greet the changes ahead with excitement and enthusiasm.

"You've got to be excited about this," he told the signal Soldiers. "I've talked to a number of you, and I know that some of you have got some inhibitions. Hey, if we didn't get excited about what's going on here, we'd still be riding horses in our Army today. This is not about the Signal Corps. This is not about flags. This is not about turf. This is about lethality in our Army today (and) the ability to carry the fight to the enemy and to protect America and its views about liberty and freedom, and (about) treating people with dignity."

