

Army space embraces major changes as new battlefield emerges

By Sean Kimmons, Army News Service January 31, 2020



SHOW CAPTION +

1 / 4

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. -- After Capt. Robert Franchino attended the basic course for Army space cadre, the military intelligence officer was hooked.

"It lit a fire," he said. "I was interested and engaged the entire time, and I just knew I wanted to be involved in space operations somehow in the military for the rest of my career."

Now a space operations officer through U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense School's Functional Area 40 qualification course, Franchino said he's excited about the work.

He's currently assigned to the 10th Mountain Division with a space badge on his uniform, serving as a planner integrating space capabilities into maneuver units.

Franchino is one of thousands of students across the Army and Defense Department who enrolled in space-related courses last year through the Army Space and Missile Defense Command's schoolhouse. In 2019, instructors taught nearly 16,000 students in Colorado Springs and at home-station training.

Awaiting them is a new battlefield now being contested with near-peer threats.

"We're not going to be the exclusive users of space," Franchino, 34, said of why he chose the career field. "China and Russia are putting up satellites at a competitive rate to us -- that means they are leveling the playing field.

"If you want to have far-reaching effects with the work you put in every single day, [this is] the place to go."

DOMINATING SPACE

A larger focus on space is underway after the recent re-activation of U.S. Space Command and the establishment of an independent "Space Force" branch of service.

Officials have also discussed creating a 40-series space career field in the Army to bolster its force. Today, SMDC relies on Soldiers transferring from other military occupational specialties -- such as those in signal and missile defense -- to fill its ranks.

The command currently stands at nearly 3,000 Soldiers and civilians.

A joint space university is also being planned in the next few years, officials said, that would complement efforts of the Army schoolhouse and Air Force's National Security Space Institute at nearby Peterson Air Force Base.

"We definitely see growth within the formations," said Daryl Breitbach, the school's director. "The threat continues to grow and the United States, the Department of Defense and specifically, the Army, needs to be able to respond to that increased threat."

Army space could see another boost since SMDC recently took on additional responsibilities supporting both U.S. Strategic Command and U.S. Space Command.

SMDC removed Army Forces Strategic Command from its name in the process to simplify things.

Now with SMDC supporting two four-star combatant commands, the realignment should strengthen the unity of effort and control of Army's space and missile defense missions, said a senior staff officer. It could also lead to new capabilities being developed quicker, especially if they support both commands.

"You're going to be seeing the synergy of two combatant commands that have a lot of influence back to Washington, D.C., and trying to get certain initiatives to move forward," said Col. Christopher Smith, director of strategy, plans and policy for SMDC. "Instead of one trying to carry the water, you'd have two in this case."

While he does not expect any Soldiers to move, or missions to drastically change as a result, he does foresee some adjustments to take place as mission oversight evolves.

"No matter how the changes go in this transition over the coming months and years," he said, "we'll be ready as the headquarters to address whatever the needs are and provide the trained, ready and equipped forces that U.S. Space Command and USSTRATCOM require."

WARFIGHTING DOMAIN

Since space is still emerging as a warfighting domain, a significant challenge for SMDC is making Soldiers aware of its capabilities.

Many Soldiers, officials said, are unaware they use space-enabled equipment all the time. GPS devices, for instance, enable weapon systems and help Soldiers move around a battlefield. Satellites give units the ability to communicate and to share intelligence.

"They are protecting us, they're enabling us, they're providing an operational advantage to the Army," said Breitbach, who is also an Army Reserve FA-40 officer. "Soldiers use these capabilities on a daily basis."

Cheryl Hughes, an instructor for the school's Army Space Training Division, often travels around the country to enlighten Soldiers on space capabilities that can help them in combat.

"We teach them the basics on space," Hughes said. "We also try to provide enough information so that they're able to recognize if they are ever operating within a contested environment."

Each standard brigade combat team, she noted, already has over 2,500 pieces of space-enabled equipment. She and her team also bring "space kits" and jammers to units and show Soldiers how their equipment can be affected by enemy interference.

Much of this training occurs well before a unit heads to a combat training center so they can be ready for what may be thrown at them in the box.

"The stronger and more prepared and educated our forces are on the capabilities and also the vulnerabilities of their equipment," she said, "the better they'll be at a fight with peer- and near-peer enemies."

Back at the schoolhouse in Colorado Springs, Pfc. Jalynn Jurich admitted it was a bit nerve-racking when she discovered how much she had to learn in her course on how to operate a Joint Tactical Ground Station.

After she graduated, Jurich, who joined the Army about a year ago, was assigned to a JTAGS crew in Japan responsible for processing satellite data and disseminating ballistic missile warnings or special event messages to troops.

"You never want to miss a step," she said of the importance of the job. "You have to train yourself to be focused, to trust your training because we do a lot of training on systems."

While it has been difficult to memorize their functions, the 22-year-old said she signed up to be a 14H, or early warning systems operator, because she wanted to be pushed mentally in a job that had a lot on the line.

One day Jurich and her team may need to track a missile launched by an enemy, and it could be solely up to them to warn friendly troops of an impending attack.

"We are kind of their eyes in the sky. We are the earliest warning," she said. "We want to make sure our troops are safe. If this is coming your way, let's take shelter or evacuate, depending on time."

NEW DOCTRINE

On top of training, the schoolhouse is responsible for creating Army space doctrine.

It recently released an update to Field Manual 3-14 for Army space operations and a new Army Techniques Publication 3-27.3 for Army ground-based midcourse defense operations.

Officials also review other warfighting publications across the DOD to ensure Army space assets and issues are addressed, Breitbach said.

At the center of many of these efforts is the Army's new concept of multi-domain operations.

Space assets are now being embraced in the Multi-Domain Task Force, an experimental unit that some senior leaders see as the future of Army formations. Built around a fires brigade, the unit includes an element for I2CEWS: intelligence, information operations, cyber, electronic warfare and space.

The convergence of such assets could help the Army overcome an adversary's anti-access, area-denial capabilities.

"[The adversary wants] to push us out; they want to prevent us from getting into the fight and bringing all of these capabilities together," Breitbach said. "That's our strategy for being able to enter in and establish a foothold in an operation."

The Army expects to roll out a second Multi-Domain Task Force in Europe, officials said, after a pilot in the Pacific region conducted several exercises.

Other innovative ways to compete in the space domain will likely be needed in the near future as technology continues to grow in leaps and bounds, Franchino said.

For the captain and other new members of the space cadre, this could mean a very different battlefield with space assets playing a more significant role.

"It's an important part of how we fight wars and it's also currently held at risk," he said. "It's something we're going to have to continue to exploit in new and creative ways to make sure that we do maintain the strategic advantage over our adversaries."

Related Links:

[Army News Service](http://www.army.mil/ARNEWS) [<http://www.army.mil/ARNEWS>]

[Soldiers features](https://www.army.mil/soldiers) [<https://www.army.mil/soldiers>]

[U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command](https://www.smdc.army.mil/) [<https://www.smdc.army.mil/>]