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91st Cyber Brigade activated as Army National Guard's first cyber brigade

Photo By Cotton Puryear | The command team for the Virginia... read more

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"Starting today and moving forward, the 91st Cyber Brigade will play a crucial role in our national defense," Kadavy said. "The Citizen-Soldiers of the Shadow Brigade represent a prime example of how highly-skilled Army National Guard personnel bring state-of-the-art skills to their part-time service to carry out the Total Army effort. Today's ceremony represents a leap forward for that Army, the Department of Defense and our entire country. Citizen-Soldiers are utilizing their own ingenuity and expertise as part of the Total Force to defend networks against hostile adversaries."

McAuliffe explained the efforts Virginia has taken in the cyber domain and said "there is no greater threat facing our nation today" than the potential harm caused by cyber attacks. He expressed his appreciation for the support the Virginia National Guard has provided in conducting cyber vulnerability assessments in 12 different localities across the commonwealth.

"You are on the cutting edge of history," McAuliffe said, and he added that he looks forward to the great partnership with the Guard at the local, state and federal level.

The 91st Cyber Brigade was reflagged from the 91st Troop Command, and the Fairfax-based 123rd Data Processing Unit was divided into the 123rd and 124th Cyber Protection Battalions. The brigade will also serve as the higher headquarters for 125th and 126th Cyber Battalions stationed in Columbia, South Carolina, and Hanscom Air Force Base in Bedford, Massachusetts, as well as an additional battalion that has not been stationed. The 10 previously approved Army Cyber Protection Teams stationed across the country will also align under the 91st Cyber Brigade for training and validation management.

The approval for the transformation of the 91st Troop Command to the 91st Cyber Brigade happened at "light speed" and standing up the unit was completed at an impressive pace, Kadavy said. After being presented by National Guard Bureau to the U.S. Army as a concept in June 2016, it was approved in February 2017.

"National Guard cyber warriors are not easy to grow," Kadavy said. "They possess a unique combination of military training, civilian credentialing and cyber security certifications. Forming the 91st Cyber Brigade required meticulous planning, relentless hard work and focused recruiting to find qualified Soldiers capable of taking on the constantly evolving mission."

Soldiers from across the 91st are currently activated across 30 states and territories supporting enduring missions for U.S. Army Cyber and Cyber Command, Kadavy said. The largest of those is Task Force Echo at Fort Meade, Maryland, and the 91st will continue to mobilize a battalion a year for that mission.

Kadavy said the cyber mission is a perfect example of the strength of the Total Force, and Soldiers from Active Army, Army Reserve and Army National Guard train, deploy and serve side-by-side having been trained to a joint standard as established by U.S. Cyber Command.

"This is a historic day in the world of cyber operations," Williams said. "The 91st Cyber Brigade will be a leader and an innovator in the Army's quest to control the digital battlefield."

Williams said that the brigade follows a historic lineage, and the 91st designation was first used for the 91st Infantry Brigade in 1923 and it mobilized for duty in World War II. It was deactivated soon after the war, then reactivated in the 1980s to serve as the higher headquarters for non-divisional units like the 276th Engineer Battalion and 2nd Battalion, 224th Aviation Regiment. The brigade further traces its roots in the Data Processing Unit formed in 1975 and began conducting cyber network defense and recovery operations in the mid-1990s.

"For the Soldiers who are here today, the future is yours to write," said Col. William Zana, commander of the brigade. "The unwritten chapters will detail how you either prevailed against a very cunning set of adversaries or how perhaps you failed. How you respond to the wicked problems by making problems far more wicked for our adversaries and those who would do us harm, and bring consequences to them before they bring them to us or mitigate the impacts. By your actions, I challenge you to write the kind of future you want to be remembered for, carve out the legacy that you want to be proud of and continue to not just achieve but to set the standard in all the things that you do."

The 91st Cyber Brigade consists of approximately 950 traditional status Army National Guard officers, warrant officers and enlisted Soldiers across units in the 30 states, and the cyber battalion headquarters will each consist of approximately 25 personnel with each company consisting of about 35-40 personnel.

Each cyber protection battalion will have four subordinate units, a cyber security company, a cyber warfare company, and two cyber protection teams. In Virginia, the 133rd Cyber Security Company and 143rd Cyber Warfare Company will fall under the 123rd Cyber Protection Battalion and 134th Cyber Security Company and 144th Cyber Warfare Company will fall under the 124th.

A cyber security company conducts vulnerability assessments, forensics analysis, critical infrastructure assessment and support and cyber security support. It provides mission command for cyber security teams, cyber security support teams and critical infrastructure teams which includes operational direction and guidance in the conduct of defensive cyberspace operations.

A cyber warfare company conducts cyber opposing force support, network warfare activities and cyberspace intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. It provides mission command to network warfare teams, cyber analysis teams and cyber support teams which includes operational direction and guidance in the conduct of cyberspace operations.

A cyber protection team conducts defensive cyberspace operations on military networks. In compliance with federal and state laws, defensive cyberspace operations may be expanded to include cyber command readiness Inspections, vulnerability assessments, cyber opposing force support, critical infrastructure assessments, support for theater security cooperation activities, training support and advisory and assistance support.

Symbolism – Distinctive Unit Insignia
The quartered shield recalls other Cyber units, utilizing the colors of Black and Dark Gray to indicate the unit's alignment. The pixelated pattern is representative of technology and the future of warfare. The sword signifies both offensive and defensive capabilities. The motto: "UMBRA BELLATORES" translates to SHADOW WARRIORS. Black denotes cyberspace, security, and a new frontier. Steel gray represents fortitude, mettle, and endurance. The color of smoke signifies adaptability, fluidity, and secrecy. Gold exemplifies excellence, expedienc, and expertise.

Symbolism – Shoulder Sleeve Insignia
The sword and lightning bolt are indicative of cyber operations; the sword displaying offensive and defensive capabilities while the lightning bolts suggests technology, information, and signal transmissions. The stars represent the first 5 cyber protection battalions. The colors black and steel gray are associated with the cyber branch. Black denotes cyberspace, security, and a new frontier. Steel gray represents fortitude, mettle, and endurance. Gold exemplifies excellence, expediency and expertise.

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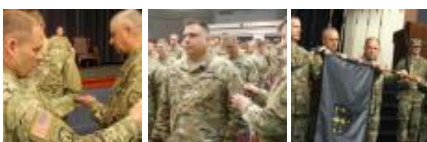
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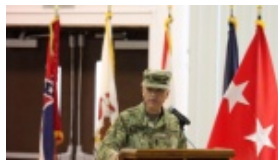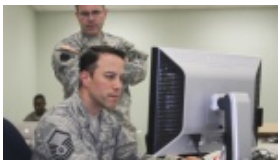
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