

Army to Release Squad Marksmanship Trainer

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Over the next year, 26 installations are scheduled to receive the new Squad Advanced Marksmanship Trainer — with the first potential location slated for Fort Drum, NY, officials said.

The Army has been working on a squad-immersive environment since 2009, but limitations on virtual reality and other related technologies have hindered the development process, according to MG Maria Gervais, director of the Synthetic Training Environment Cross-Functional Team (STE CFT).

Recent advancements in the \$5.2 billion virtual reality and gaming industry, though, have enabled the Army to field the virtual marksmanship trainer as an “immediate solution until a more robust squad-immersive environment is developed,” Gervais said.

Tied to the Soldier Lethality Cross-Functional Team, the new trainer is a joint venture with the Marine Corps, helping Infantry and “close combat” forces achieve their training objectives, Gervais explained during the Association of the United States Army’s Annual Meeting and Exposition on 10 October.

During a recent demonstration at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, CA, forces were outfitted with a goggle device synched to the Squad Advanced Marksmanship Trainer. From there, the squad lined up in a four-man stack and went through a series of breach and clear scenarios, the general said.

Through the marksmanship training device, one scenario transported breaching forces to a Middle Eastern virtually-constructed environment, where they engaged with simulated enemy forces. More importantly, Gervais said, the four-man stack was able to do this while navigating through a live training environment.



Synthetic Training Environment is an emerging Army capability that will converge current live, virtual, constructive, and gaming environments into a single simulation training environment. (U.S. Army graphic by Peggy Frierson)

“Now, we’re seeing technology where you can link the squad in, they can move, they can shoot, and keep going,” she said. “So, pretty exciting stuff.”

In addition to the virtual trainer, the STE CFT recently approved an “Army Collective Training Environment Initial Capability Document” to serve as the foundation for all STE support elements.

“We need to be able to provide our Soldiers and leaders the ability to conduct hundreds of repetitions wherever they are located so they can improve muscle memory and increase proficiency,” Gervais said. “The STE makes it possible to enhance home-station training and unit performance. Most importantly, the STE is focused on establishing common standards, common data, and common terrain to maximize interoperability, ease of integration, and cost savings.”

Moving forward, the CFT is considering what architecture and industry support is necessary to maintain the STE as a service, the general said. Similar to the way Netflix works, incorporating a “training as a service” business model would potentially keep the STE up to date with the newest tools, providing Soldiers the best possible training without any latency.

“With One World Terrain, we want to be able to pull down terrain at the right fidelity. If you’re a squad, the fidelity has got to be better,” Gervais said.

In addition to the right fidelity, the Army must streamline the materiel process to avoid slowing the research, development, and acquisition procedures supporting STE, said Retired GEN Peter W. Chiarelli, former vice chief of staff of the Army.

“This is not a tomorrow problem. This isn’t a problem that we need to wait five years to develop requirements, and wait another eight to 10 years to go ahead and field something to Soldiers. We need choice — we need to turn to industry,” Chiarelli said.