

Army Vice Touts TIGR; Success “In Spite of” System



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A technology that has “forever changed our Army” almost never made it to the troops. Called the Tactical Ground Reporting System (TIGR), it has made it to 15 brigade combat teams in less than four years “in spite of everything the Army could do to stop it,” Army Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Peter Chiarelli told the Army Science Conference this morning.

TIGR was first developed by DARPA, the military researchers who brought us the Internet. It is what the big brains here at the conference call a collaboration tool. The rest of us call it a shared computer database made up of maps and other tools that allow soldiers at the brigade level and below to share data and improve what they know about the enemy and each other. For those who’d like to read more, [here is the link to the official DARPA website](#).

To get an idea just how much Chiarelli thinks this system has changed how the Army fights, read these claims he made: “It empowers our front line soldiers like never before.” “The strategic corporal is a reality.” “Before every soldier was a scout. Now every soldier is an intelligence asset.” “It has literally trumped the way we do business.”

Chiarelli made a number of other bold claims about TIGR, but none of them had anything to do with the technology and everything to do with the cumbersome and often flawed process that identifies and funds programs. In fact, TIGR almost never happened. It began life as Command Post of the Future and DARPA was ready to kill the program because it couldn’t find anyone to fund it, Chiarelli said. Regular soldiers saw some examples of the system — sergeants and specialists — and TIGR “spread like a virus.” But Chiarelli said the service’s “institutional antibodies” tried to kill TIGR at almost every step and it was only saved through funding stuffed into supplemental spending bills.

“The Army could not see its value because we were fighting for what was already in place,” he said. I asked Chiarelli what must be done to fix the budgeting and planning system the Army uses, since it so obviously is not getting the right tools to the right people when it counts. First, the Army needs to move as much funding for things like TIGR from the supplemental bills into the base budget, he said. Then, obviously aware he was stepping into a political minefield, Chiarelli said there was “an education requirement” to make sure Congress and the Army know what is needed and what needs funding. He started to offer a fuller answer but he clearly heard a little voice telling him to stop so he did.

A congressional aide in the audience voiced surprise that a senior Army leader had gone as far as Chiarelli did in criticizing the budget and planning process. Maybe the general needs to go further if the system is really as ineffective and cumbersome as he claimed today. It’s an issue the Obama administration might try tackling — fixing the planning and budgeting system. Then again, TIGR did make it to the troops in spite of the lumbering giant that the Army can be. Maybe the system does work sometimes in spite of itself.