

Sig Corps. History

Part 7.

PF

THE SIGNAL CORPS IN KOREA

1. Supply

"Enemy planes," someone shouted, and a Signal Corps soldier hit the dirt. It was the runway at Suwon airport in Korea and the soldier was Private Frederick J. Walsh, Company B, 71st Signal Battalion, unloading valuable signal supplies for the Korean aggression which had just begun.

Private Walsh felt a sharp, stabbing pain. He had been hit by an enemy strafing. Later in the hospital, he learned he was the first Ground Force soldier to be wounded in Korea. At about this same time, newspapers in America were announcing that the first Ground Troops to be sent into Korea were Signal Corps.

These two facts, better than anything else, serve to point up the importance of communications in modern war. The speeds of jet fighters and atomic weapons mean that communications almost literally have become the nerves of the fighting body, the means of tying together into one unified, instantly acting fighting force, Infantry, Armor, Artillery, and supply services.

The job of the Signal Corps is to provide these nerves, to get the Army's messages and communications through, rapidly and securely. Getting the message through means getting supplies through, delicate and precise instruments, radios, telephones, wire and cable, batteries, vacuum tubes, a thousand and one complicated equipments necessary to keep the circuits open from the Pentagon to the fox hole.

When news of the Korean aggression broke on the world, there was immediate activity in the Pentagon "telecon" room. At a large oak table, the Chief Signal Officer, Major General S. B. Akin, and his staff took their seats and waited for the lighted screen in front of them to project the teletypewriter messages that were to be exchanged with General MacArthur's headquarters.

Probably the greatest increase in activity came about in the supply of field wire. By 6 July FECOM had asked for 29,600 miles of wire, and by that same date 36,000 miles of wire already were on the way, including 2,000 miles of ^{the} our new WD-1 wire which, when it got into action, was to win combat honors and the plaudits of field commanders as well as the GIs who had to string the wire and keep it working.

Let's take a moment to say something about this new wire. Here is what it is and what it does:

Recently developed by the Signal Corps, and now being produced in quantity by industry, the new wire, known as WD-1, has withstood all the rugged conditions of combat encountered in Korea. It can be laid at speeds up to 120 miles per hour from airplanes with good results.

The wire represents a successful effort by Signal Corps engineers to combine the substantial talking range and other characteristics of standard field wire with the reduced size and easy carrying of assault wire used by fast moving troops in World War II. It is particularly suited to airborne operations.

The improved wire provides a talking range of approximately twelve and a half miles and weighs about 46 pounds per mile. It consists of two conductors, each individually insulated and jacketed, and twisted together to form a light flexible, flat-lying 'twisted pair.' Each conductor is composed of three zinc-coated high-carbon steel strands and four tinned copper strands, all twisted together in a tight, concentric bundle, covered by a tight-fitting cylinder of polyethylene -- the new, low-loss electrical insulation. A thin covering of nylon provides a tight waterproof container for the strands.

The new design does not require rubber for insulation, thus avoiding dependence in time of emergency upon this critical item.

Companion item to the new wire is an improved dispenser, the result of research to develop a wire coil that can release wire at high or low speed without the use of reels or reel equipment. It is light in weight and made of non-critical materials.

The dispenser is constructed of canvas and tape and when wound with its maximum one-half mile of field wire, it is approximately 13 1/2 inches in diameter and 5 1/2 inches wide, and weighs only 26 pounds.

Field wire can be released from the improved dispenser by pack-board from a soldier's back without use of his hands, from any land or amphibious vehicle, or from an airplane. A soldier, equipped with a rifle grenade, or bazooka, can also 'lay' this wire by shooting it over rivers, lakes, cliffs or other obstacles.

Another advantage of the new dispenser is that two or more may be connected in tandem and the wire strung without stopping to make a splice.

A torpedo shaped container, with a six-dispenser capacity, has been developed which permits the laying of two continuous three mile circuits simultaneously from a plane in flight.

The demand for dry batteries shot up sky high, too. Japanese manufacturers assisted us, manufacturing for us on an emergency basis almost six and one half million dollars worth of this important communication item.

The story is too long to go into detail from this end except to say that all supply needs were met.

2. Signal Supply at the Theater End

Now let us see what was going on in the theater of operations. By the time the "telecon" between Washington and Tokyo stopped its chatter, a well coordinated staff of officers from the Signal Section of GHQ and Eighth Army descended upon the Signal Depot. Their coming brought problems requiring that the Depot be placed on a 24-hour, seven-day a week schedule. Colonel Louis J. Taton, the Depot Commander, called together the Chiefs of the various Divisions and their assistants, i.e., Lieutenant Colonel Herbert J. Slingo, Deputy Commander, Major John F. Gebhart, Executive Officer, Major George I. Bradford, Jr., Chief of Storage Division, Major Abraham I. Lipman, Chief of Stock Control Division and his assistant Mr. Patrick Shane, Major Frank H. Fogel, Chief of

Reclamation Division, and his assistant, Captain Edgar L. Brooks, and Major Randolph H. Vinding, Chief of Maintenance Division, to form a planning staff to solve the "Gordian Knots" which the conflict in Korea had produced. This staff worked through the first three days without rest outlining the steps that had to be taken to place the Depot in position to supply the United States Forces that had been alerted for departure to Korea and to supply the embattled Korean Army with Signal supplies needed to assist them in an effort to stem the Red forces.

Requisitions began to pour into the Depot by the hundreds. The initial planning began to pay off. Regardless of the number received, requisitions flowed through the Depot like water over smooth, well-worn rocks. Not a deadline was missed. During the first two weeks all normal requisitions were frozen and only those classed as emergency were processed. The Stock Control Division during this period received over 2,448 requisitions. These requisitions contained over 24,429 lines of items needed. Of this amount 21, 118 lines of items were filled and shipped. This was an overall increase of 85% over the previous month of June. Normal reclassification program of the Reclamation Division was changed to the inspection and certification of all stock leaving the Depot and to the assembling of components of equipment to complete sets. Even with this change it processed 2,838 measurement tons* of equipment, an increase over the month of June of 294%. In addition, this Division processed 7,875 boxes and 1,200 measurement tons of major assemblies. All Divisions of the Depot were divided into two shifts of 12 hours each, so that the large quantities of supplies needed could be processed with the minimum amount of delay.

Problems began to arise in spite of the well planned program. Additional military, civilian, and indigenous personnel were needed,

*The "measurement ton" actually is a unit of-volume measurement, being the number of cubic feet divided by 40.

The hard working Personnel Office and the Labor Office went to work on these problems. Three hundred and 79 Japanese were hired on a temporary basis; 12 DAC and State Department employees were obtained on a loan basis; permanent Japanese employees were increased to a level of 1,486; and 15 officers and 69 enlisted men were received from other organizations. But these military personnel were not to be retained long. Ten officers and 99 enlisted men were withdrawn in organizing three Signal units; the 8052nd Port Signal Detachment, 8085th Signal Depot Company, and the 8086th Signal Repair Company. Personnel of the 584th Signal Depot Company, the only unit attached at the beginning of the emergency, were placed in job positions that would be similar to those they would hold under field conditions. The Maintenance Division was materially helped as a result.

The value of the Maintenance Division became apparent as combat units were alerted for service in Korea. Demands upon its services gradually increased. In addition, demands for installations were made for which the Division was not equipped or experienced. To avoid any stoppage of operations, additional Japanese were hired for all repair sections, as enlisted men were pulled out for field service. This of course added to the difficulty of operation, since the new people had to be trained while they worked at their respective jobs.

The initial work load fell upon the Crystal Shop, which had just recently been moved into new quarters and had not yet completed its personnel expansion program. In addition to training newly assigned Japanese personnel, this shop, between 25 June and 31 July 1950 ground a total of 1,176 units to exact frequency. This required from one-half to 12 man-hours for each unit depending upon the allowable tolerances. In addition, 18,000 crystal units were checked for frequency and activity. Approximately 10% of this amount required some adjustment in frequency. Twenty-five thousand crystal units were checked for activity only.

While losing qualified enlisted personnel in the Maintenance Division, before new Japanese employees were trained, demands were made for installation work which meant that the few qualified men on hand were required to work steadily for long periods of time with very little rest. During the first 30 days of the emergency, over 40 radio installations were made in motor vehicles exclusive of tanks. This load was carried by the radio section in addition to its regular repair load.

In order to meet the demands for installations in tanks, a crew of two officers and nine enlisted men were placed on DS with the Tokyo Ordnance Center. Within two months, 140 radio sets were installed in 60 armored vehicles of various types, as fast as Ordnance completed final checks of the vehicles. On occasions when large numbers of installations had to be made in a short time, as many as 50 men, both military and Japanese, worked the clock around. Food for the Japanese was a problem since no provision could be made to feed these men. On several occasions, officers and enlisted men bought food out of their own funds for this purpose. Weather conditions made work on the vehicles difficult but all deadlines were met on schedule.

The installation program developed a new problem inasmuch as complete sets of SCR-508's, 506's and AN/VRC-3's had to be assembled. This equipment was obtained mostly from unclassified stock. Depot shortages developed, particularly in set-assembly components such as brackets, mast bases, headsets, etc. Installation kits were fabricated in the shops and assembled from Group "C" stock (stock awaiting repair). As components were found, they were sent to the emergency area where a set-assembly unit had been established. This unit is now building up a supply of assemblies so that future emergency demands can be met as efficiently as possible.

This in turn placed an additional burden on the classified crew working on roll-up stock, who had already been hampered by heavy and continuous rains. To meet this condition, more men were placed on the team, one additional officer was added and later thirteen specialists on TDY from GHQ were detailed to work on the Classification Program. This unclassified stock (Roll-Up) was picked up from Saipan, Guam, Korea, Iarbo, Philippines, and many islands of the Pacific, after the end of World War II. It was in such condition as only long exposure to sun, wind and rain of the humid climate of the Southwest Pacific area can produce.

Since the beginning of the Korean war, all Division repair shops have been greatly enlarged, particularly the radio shop which has expanded nearly 300 %, and is still growing. This expansion has greatly stepped up production and has been largely responsible for the Division's record of meeting all deadlines on schedule.

However, as a net result of the intensified 24-hour-a-day program, the Depot shipped to the United States Forces in Korea and to the Korean Army, 584,979 items of Signal equipment weighing 4,970 measurement tons (M/T) and costing \$6,246,283.24. Tonnage handled in the Depot increased 111% over the month of June. Three thousand and 751 M/T were received, 10,335 M/T shipped, and 5,217 M/T were rewarehoused. Twenty-nine thousand, 543 miles were traveled in delivering supplies to the port and/or the airfields for the forces in Korea. In addition, 1,163 M/T of equipment, costing \$1,947,683.10, were shipped to units in Japan during the same period.

good

Are the figures on Signal Supply in the Korean war impressive? Maybe this is a better way of putting it. By the middle of September, enough boxes and crates of communications gear had been sent to the Korean fronts to build up two football fields to the level of ten feet.

The average division going into combat uses 2,000 radios and enough telephones, switchboards and wire to accommodate a small town.

3. Signal Eyes of the Army

Getting the "nerves of the Army" and getting the Army's communications through is only part of the Signal Corps' job. It acts as the eyes of the Army, also. When Private Walsh, of the Signal Corps, the first doughboy to be wounded, was being hit, another Signal Corps soldier, a member of the Army Pictorial Service, was taking pictures of the enemy strafing. Other Signal Corps still and motion picture cameramen also were on the job, so that not only the strafing of the Suwon airstrip but all other military action in Korea was recorded for history and public information. Their film was rushed to Tokyo and thence to the Pentagon for release to the newsreels and television stations, and to the daily newspapers. These pictures, which have helped not only Americans, but people all over the world, to get a better understanding and knowledge of what war is like, have won universal commendation. The following letter to the Chief Signal Officer tells the story:

6 September 1950

CS 062.2 (25 Aug 50)

SUBJECT: Commendation for Combat Photography

TO: Commander in Chief
Far East Command
APO 500, c/o Postmaster
San Francisco, California
ATTN: Chief Signal Officer

1. The Office of Public Information, Department of Defense, has notified the Department of the Army of their gratitude and commendation for the exceptionally fine still and motion picture coverage of Armed Forces activities in Korea provided by Signal Corps U.S. Army photographers. The work of these men has been a valuable contribution in the success of the public information mission of the various services.

2. Through the efforts of these photographers 570 still pictures were released to the American press through 23 August 1950. An extremely high ratio of usage has been noted. This record of usage indicates that our combat photographers are doing an outstanding job in obtaining the type of pictorial coverage desired by American news media for public consumption.

3. The motion picture coverage has been equally commendable and many thousand feet of their film have been used in newsreels and on television newcasts. A major portion of all Korean coverage in these fields was photographed by combat photographers, Signal Corps, U.S. Army.

4. The Department of the Army is proud of the fine work being done by the combat photographers in your command and it is requested that this information be conveyed to those responsible for the excellent photographic coverage above listed.

/s/ E. H. BROOKS
Lieutenant General, GSC
Acting Deputy Chief of Staff
for Administration