

## Communications History Highlighted at Armed Forces Day

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CECOM recently participated in Aberdeen Proving Ground's annual Armed Forces Day, held May 14, 2010.

This year's Armed Forces Day (AFD) showcased Army history. According to assistant AFD coordinator Pedro Rodriguez of the Aberdeen Proving Ground (APG) Garrison, the Army history theme was selected with an eye towards educating local youth on military history.

The day began with a Gold Star family breakfast held at the U.S. Army Ordnance Museum. Opening remarks followed by MG Nick Justice, APG Installation Commander and Research, Development and Engineering Command (RDECOM) Commanding General; and COL Orlando Ortiz, APG Garrison Commander.



Reenactors in period Army uniforms pose in front of the CECOM display at APG AFD. The theme of AFD was military history.

Exhibits set up outside the museum by APG tenant organizations were then open to the public throughout the day. Reenactors dressed as period Soldiers mingled with the crowd, which included 168 local public school children, residents of APG, and, according to Rodriguez, 70 VIP guests. These VIPs included local politicians, school board officials, Army personnel such as MG Justice, and members of the Senior Executive Service. Rodriguez estimated approximately 600 guests toured the exhibits.

The CECOM exhibit highlighted the history of communications, "From Wig Wag to WIN-T." This communications history theme proved particularly timely as 2010 marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the U.S. Army Signal Corps.

The CECOM display featured a 10x8 foot graphic and posters, designed by Michael Kravetsky of Chenega Technology Services Corporation with input from CECOM staff. The exhibit and associated hand-outs explained that Albert James Myer, an Army doctor, first conceived the idea of a separate, trained professional military signal service. He proposed that the Army use his visual communications system called "wig wag" while serving as a medical officer in Texas in 1856. When the Army adopted his system June 21, 1860, the Signal Corps was born with Myer as the first (and for a time only) Signal officer.



U.S. Army Communications-Electronics Command (CECOM) Staff Historian Floyd Hertweck discusses the evolution of military communications in front of the CECOM exhibit at Aberdeen Proving Ground's (APG) Armed Forces Day (AFD) on May 14, 2010 with MG Nick Justice, APG Installation Commander and Research, Development and Engineering Command (RDECOM) Commanding General.

According to the Signal Corps' official 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary webpage at [http://signal150.army.mil/00\\_wig\\_wag.html](http://signal150.army.mil/00_wig_wag.html), the name "wig wag" reflects the concept of back and forth movement as a means of signaling through motion. Myer developed this system based on a two element "tap-code" he created for the deaf. The wig wag system used one flag for signaling. The position of the flags left, right, and front represented the numerals 1, 2, and 3, respectively, and combinations of these numerals conveyed messages via code.

The one-flag wig wag system used a cotton flag of two, four, or six feet square. The larger the flag, the greater distance it could be seen. The flag pole could be extended to a length of 16 feet using 4-foot segments joined with brass fittings. It took a strong Soldier to wave a 16 foot pole with a 6-foot square flag on it for an hour or more, especially in

wind, heat and probably under enemy fire. During night operations, the flag was replaced with a specially designed kerosene fueled torch used exactly as the flag would have been during daytime.

During daytime operations, Soldiers used different sized and colored flags based upon atmospheric conditions, such as clouds, haze, blue sky, etc. Only one flag or torch was used for signaling at a time, though.

Over the past 150 years, communications have become faster, more reliable, more deployable, and more secure. Systems such as the Warfighter Information Network-Tactical (WIN-T) provide the satellite and terrestrial communications networks and services that allow Warfighters to send and receive information in order to execute their missions.

To complement CECOM's graphic display, the Command worked closely with the Program Executive Office Command, Control, and Communications-Tactical (PEO C3T). The organization sent several vehicles outfitted with the latest in communications and electronics technology to APG to signify the advancement of signal technology over the past 150 years. These vehicles provided a stark contrast to the image of a Civil War Soldier holding his wig wag flag.

CECOM Staff Historian Floyd Hertweck and Debbie Barrows of the CECOM Command Events and Information Office staffed the CECOM booth. They coordinated with Richard Schaeffer of

PEO C3T's Project Manager Warfighter Information Network-Tactical (WIN-T) for the modern equipment and systems on hand.

