



Soldiers conduct hands-on training during first fiber optics installers course on Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, Feb. 29. Graduates of this U.S. Army Central Signal University class are assigned to various units and stationed throughout the country, which increases IT support capacity for base expansion efforts. (U.S. Army photo by Maj. Andrew Benbow, 335th Signal Command (T) Provisional)

Signal Support Training Vital to Effective Communications on the Battlefield

By Sgt. 1st Class Otis C. McCraw Jr.

174th Infantry Brigade

In this segment of our continuing series from noncommissioned officers sharing what they see as needed improvements to training and equipment in their military occupational specialty, Command Sgt. Maj. Kevin M. King, 174th Infantry Brigade, Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, asked Sgt. 1st Class Otis C. McCraw Jr., a signal support system specialist and S-6 communications shop noncommissioned officer-in-charge, to contribute to the conversation.

Signal Corps leadership should re-evaluate the course curriculum taught in Advanced Individual Training, Advanced Leaders Course, and Senior Leaders Course to avoid the need to execute a crash course on equipment training. I also suggest they take the opportunity to spend more time explaining the duties and responsibilities of a section sergeant, platoon sergeant, and first sergeant.

Equipment training is important but should be specific, since it is no secret that the Army has undergone a

massive personnel drawdown while the workload hasn't slowed down or stopped. Soldiers are required to know more and be able to do the job with less. That is why Soldiers receive training from their first line supervisor when they arrive at their unit. However, if Soldiers already have a working knowledge of their new unit's communications equipment before arriving, it would enhance unit readiness and efficiency while training on the job.

It is also clear that establishing communications is our first order of business and is essential to the mission success of every rapid deployment. That is why commanders and their staff must learn to separate "wants" from the minimum requirements necessary to meet or exceed mission success since unnecessary requests can overburden a "commo" sergeant's support ability.

It is common knowledge that every Signal Support Systems Sergeant (25U) is affectionately referred to as "commo." A "commo" sergeant is considered a jack-of-all-trades, and should train towards becoming proficient with all ground tactical communication systems, since they are the eyes and ears on the battlefield, providing commanders with command and control of their units and the ability to make immediate, critical decisions.

As an observer controller/trainer currently serving in an infantry brigade, I've had the luxury of measuring and

differentiating the various communications functions in every combat branch. There's one thing I can attest to ... that we must improve our "timing" as an Army. Normally, it takes too long, when setting up a new site, to establish positive communications between units. As I've learned, this is because some units still operate with outdated, single-channel ground and airborne radio systems and high-frequency equipment.

Understanding the importance of being fast and lightweight, developers have created products with Soldiers in mind. However, persuading a commander to spend the necessary funding on equipment is another challenge. I feel as though a dialogue is long overdue between the Signal Corps and the Army to replace some of the outdated and heavy communication systems and antennas, and to implement the return of Harris Radio field service representatives to brigade combat teams for field training purposes.

If our enemies move fast, we need to be ten times faster. When we decide to "shoot and move," the ability to communicate rapidly with the best equipment available is vital. History shows that the armies that possess superior technology have always had the advantage over their enemies, on and off the battlefield. ■



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