

HISTORY OF THE SIGNAL CORPS

The Signal Corps was founded on 21 June 1860 when MAJ Albert J. Myer, a doctor by profession, was commissioned as the first Chief Signal Officer. MAJ Myer modified a system of hand signals for deaf mutes that he had developed in a doctoral thesis and transposed them into flag signals. This first practical semaphore system of communications, with its red and white "wigwag" flags, is now symbolized in the branch insignia.

At the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, MAJ Myer and a small group of enthusiastic officers and enlisted men established signal schools to provide the growing Army with signal troops. The Signal Corps expanded and became a separate Army branch on 3 March 1863. Its function soon included the use of the telegraph and lighter-than-air military balloons.

In 1870 the Signal Corps established the first American weather bureau and subsequently sponsored meteorological expeditions into Arctic polar regions. One of these expeditions was led by LT Adolphus W. Greely who later became a general and Medal of Honor winner. In 1873 Albert Myer, now a general, introduced the idea of simultaneous worldwide meteorological observations at a weather conference in Vienna, Austria. This goal was eventually accomplished and was one of the most significant achievements in science, as well as in international relations, in the 19th century.

Pioneering in aviation, the Signal Corps operated the first military airplanes which were purchased from the Wright brothers in 1909. The operation of all military aircraft remained a Signal Corps responsibility until the Air Corps was established as a separate branch in 1918.

During World War I, the men of the Signal Corps proved vital to the war effort by providing essential radio and wire communications. They also developed photography for combat intelligence and historical purposes. This signal support grew rapidly during World War II and the Korean War when new and improved communications networks and equipment capable of worldwide service were developed to meet the demands of modern warfare.

The first regular U.S. Army ground unit to enter Vietnam was the 39th Signal Battalion, which kept pace with the old Army maxim: "The communicators are the first ones in and the last ones out." The Vietnam era saw the most ambitious communications systems ever developed by man put to effective use under extremely hazardous and demanding conditions.

Although the Signal Corps' contributions to military operations have been significant, its communications innovations are equally important in peacetime. The research, development, and testing of new equipment and ideas are continuing and vital missions. Of particular significance in recent times have been the developments of closed-circuit television for educational purposes and satellite communications. The Signal Corps, proud of its record in war and peace, is ever determined to follow the motto: "Get the message through!"