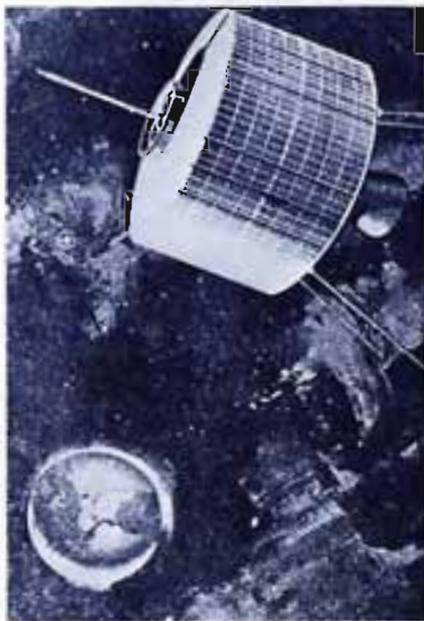


Bouncing signals off satellites is just part of the complex job performed by the U.S. Army Communications Command.



ACC MARKS ANNIVERSARY

by
Joe Wheistone

When the United States was still reeling from the tragedy at Pearl Harbor more than 35 years ago, Fort Huachuca, AZ, lay basking in the early afternoon sun as it brushed aside the desert chill from the night before.

Though Fort Huachuca was one of the many military installations being beefed up because of the ominous signs of war in Europe and the Far East, things were relatively quiet on this western front. It was oblivious to the bombs, ack-ack, and machinegun fire some 3,000 miles away on the island of Oahu.

Fort Huachuca was an infantry post back then—the 25th Infantry Regiment made its home there—but the appetite for men to feed the war machinery soon brought the 93d Infantry Division and the 92d Infantry Division there, swelling the ranks at one time to 10,000 troops.

The attack on Pearl, stark evidence that something was amiss in military communications, could be viewed as the turning point in Army communications and the seed which spawned the worldwide U.S. Army Communications Command.

While it took more than 10½ hours on 7 December 1941 to get a top priority dispatch from Washington to the Army commander in Hawaii (too late to save Pearl Harbor), that same message today, under similar conditions, could be flashed anywhere in the world within minutes, even seconds.

That's a proven fact as the ACC enters its 14th year of service to the Nation. On the ACC's 12th anniversary last year, the ACC commander sent a routine message to the 6th Signal Command in Hawaii. Elapsed time was 18 minutes from the moment it left the ACC headquarters at Fort Huachuca till the 6th Signal commander read it. It should be emphasized that the message sent last year was marked routine while the 1941 dispatch was high priority.

Had these capabilities been present 35 years ago, the U.S. Forces on Hawaii would have had some 2½ hours to prepare

for the attack. As it was, the Japanese raid had done its damage before the warning came.

There was little, if any, indication back in 1941 that Fort Huachuca would become the home of a major command, let alone hub of the worldwide "Voice of the Army." It was an infantry training post back then and, before that, cavalry. The only hint of communications or Signal Corps in its colorful past was a sophisticated network of signaling by heliograph, a method using mirrors to reflect the sun to warn of movements of the Apache Indians.

Soon after the U.S. entered World War II, the Army's Signal Corps was tasked with setting up and operating a worldwide communications net. That system became the Army Command and Administrative Network, or ACAN, the precursor of today's ACC. By 1945, the ACAN, headquartered in Washington, could reach from Moscow to New Delhi and from Anchorage to Chungking. But it was only after a series of growing pains and other crises—including the Korean conflict and the Cuban missile confrontation in 1962—that a major field command with full responsibility for communications-electronics was spawned.

On 1 March 1964, the Department of the Army established the U.S. Army Strategic Communications Command (STRATCOM) with headquarters in Washington, DC, directly responsible to the Army Chief of Staff. That same order had converted the Chief Signal Officer (CSO) position to the Chief of Communications-Electronics (C-E). It relieved the CSO of command responsibilities so he could concentrate on tactical and strategic C-E staff activities. Three years later, the headquarters of STRATCOM moved to Fort Huachuca. And in 1973 the term "strategic" was dropped from the title, better reflecting the scope of the ACC's mission. Over the years the ACC has assumed broader responsibilities and has grown nearly eightfold since its organization 1 March 1964—from approximately 4,000 to nearly 30,000 military and civilian employees.

The past deeds of the command are a reflection of its future goals. Its accomplishments are history and historical. Significantly, communications in the last conflict involving the United States was considered far superior to that of any other international crisis. Members of the ACC proved their capabilities and professionalism daily, and at the same time garnered some blue ribbons in communications, including: first use in a combat zone of tropospheric radio relay sets; first use in a combat zone of fully automatic digital message and data switches; and the first use of satellite communications in a combat zone (between Saigon and Hawaii).

This young command enters its 14th year under the direction of its sixth commander, MG Gerd S. Grombacher, with an eye to future communications needs. Communications responsibilities of this command range from calling across post to dialing Europe or the Pacific; from routing conversations overland between military installations to crisis communications between Washington and Moscow; and from an air traffic controller directing an aircraft overhead to communications by satellite 24,000 miles in space.