

112th Signal Battalion Celebrates Twenty-fifth Anniversary

MAJ Chris Keeshan

In 2011, the 112th Signal Battalion (Special Operations-Airborne) celebrated its 25th anniversary of supporting special operations forces.

Today's only airborne and special operations Signal battalion was activated at Fort Bragg, N.C. on the 17 September 1986 under the 1st Special Operations Command with the unique mission of providing communication support to Army Special Operations Forces. Since that time, the 112th has participated in nearly every major campaign and operation to including Just Cause, Restore Hope, Desert Shield, Desert Storm, Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom, New Dawn and countless smaller humanitarian assistance, unconventional warfare, non-combatant evacuations, foreign internal defense, and drug interdiction operations.

The 112th Signal Battalion's unique task organization, training model and emphasis on the empowerment of team leaders make it an ideal role model when considering tactical Signal unit reorganization. The battalion's cross-training model for Signal Soldiers proves that smaller teams can accomplish the most challenging missions when organized and trained properly.

Reactivation

Re-activated in 1986, the 112th Signal Battalion traces its roots to the airborne and glider formations of World War II. The unit's motto "Penetra Le Tenebre" is Italian for "Penetrate the Shadows," an acknowledgement of the unit's participation in the Italian campaigns in 1944. Elements of the 112th Signal Battalion participated in the liberation of Europe including parachute and glider assaults in France and Germany. Unit Soldiers refer to themselves as the "Shadow Warriors," in honor of their traditional and continuing role supporting the Army's airborne and special operations forces.

Current Task Organization

The battalion is currently task organized into a headquarters and headquarters company, three identical special operations Signal companies, and a theater Signal support company. The headquarters and headquarters company includes the staff and battalion support functions with organic motor and electronic maintenance sections,

as well as a robust NETOPS section embedded in the operations section. HHC is also home to the battalion's hub platoon which operates and maintains four mobile SATCOM hubs.

The 112th Signal Battalion special operations companies or "line companies" are currently task organized to provide eight nodes on the battlefield. A typical line company can support up to three combined joint special operations task forces, which usually consist of a U.S. Special Forces Group Headquarters and three or more SOF battalion-sized elements. Units from the 112th SB employ smaller Signal packages for support at the SOF company or team level. Additionally, because of their unique skills sets and SOF experience, 112th Soldiers are frequently employed as individual assets providing executive communications support to flag officers or other VIPs.

The theater Signal support company is led by a command team consisting of a major and sergeant major stationed at Fort Bragg, N.C. The TSSC oversees six separate and geographically dispersed SOF Signal detachments that are co-located with the regionally oriented TSOCs that they support. The six SSDs are; SOCAFRICA SSD stationed at Kelly Barracks Stuttgart, Germany, SOCCENT SSD at MacDill AFB, Fla., SOCEUR SSD at Patch Barracks Stuttgart, Germany, SOCKOR SSD at Yon Song Seoul, South Korea, SOCPAC SSD at Camp Smith, Hawaii, and SOCSOUTH SSD at Homestead ARB, Fla.

All of the SOF SSDs are 32-Soldier detachments with the exception of SOCKOR which has an authorized strength of 15 Soldiers. SOF SSDs are commanded by a captain and a first sergeant, with the exception of SOCKOR which is led by a master sergeant. SOF SSDs employ a variety of Army common, SOF program of record, and theater-specific communications packages to provide tactical communications support to their local TSOC. SOF SSDs are USASOC units, assigned to the 112th Signal Battalion and OPCON to the TSOC they support. The OPCON relationship means that the TSOC J6 determines the command's tactical communications requirements and tasks the SSD to meet them. Close coordination between the J6 and the SSD leadership is critical to mission success.

Training Method

The 112th Signal Battalion has had at least a company-sized element deployed in the

CENTCOM AOR since October of 2001, making it one of the most deployed units in the Army. To maintain that presence in-theater, the battalion has grown, activating Charlie company in 2001, and developing and refining its own training and force generating cycle. The 112th SB's "green-amber-red cycle" is similar in concept to USSOCOM's Joint Operations and Readiness Training System and the U.S. Army's Army Force Generation cycle in that it aims to train and equip the appropriate sized force to maintain the current and projected OPTEMPO.

The green-amber-red cycle concept is based on three, eight-month phases focused on training, deployment and reset. The centerpiece of the cycle is the "green cycle," or pre-mission training phase. Green cycle begins with a comprehensive operational readiness survey which is designed to validate the operational readiness of major systems, including all Signal assemblages, power generation systems, weapons and optics. The training focus of green cycle begins with individual training on IT basics including A+, Network Plus, Security Plus, warrior tasks and hands-on training on Signal assemblages. Emphasis is placed on Signal theory as opposed to orientation to a specific Signal system or assemblage.

A key objective in the green phase is the transformation of young Signaleers fresh from initial entry training into "SOF communicators," ready to deploy in as little as eight months from their arrival in the 112th. Cross-training among military occupational specialties 25B, 25C, 25S, 25F and 25N means that Soldiers are truly members of a team - capable of taking on a different role or specialty if the mission dictates. As green cycle progresses, collective training at the team level and

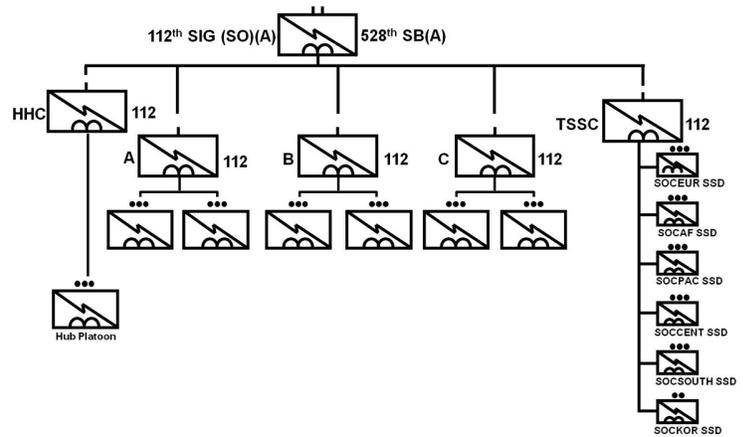


Figure 1 - Current 112th Signal Battalion Task Organization.

then company level is integrated and validated in the form of a series of named collective training exercises. Each collective exercise builds on the previous event and culminates in a company-led and battalion-validated exercise known as Shadow Strike. Shadow Strike certifies that individual teams are prepared to execute their wartime mission and upcoming deployment.

Amber cycle is the term used to describe the deployment phase or actual execution of the mission. Deployed units leverage distance learning to keep their individual skills sharp during deployment. Upon redeployment, 112th companies enter the "red cycle" phase, or reset. The focus of red cycle is the reintegration of Soldiers and families, NCOES and professional development schooling, equipment resets and support taskings. Companies in red cycle are responsible for keeping some teams and packages ready to deploy on contingency missions in support of SOF.

NCO Leadership

The key to 112th SB's success has always been with the empowerment of its non-commissioned officers. Special operations forces operate in small dispersed teams, often relying on only what they bring with them and their own resourcefulness and ingenuity. This isolation frequently means that 112th teams consisting of three to seven Soldiers led by either a sergeant or staff sergeant must make decisions and configuration changes to their equipment without the instruction or oversight of company or battalion leaders. Team leaders are highly trained communicators typically holding numerous technical certifications and often with bachelors or advanced degrees in information technology. Unit PMT emphasizes

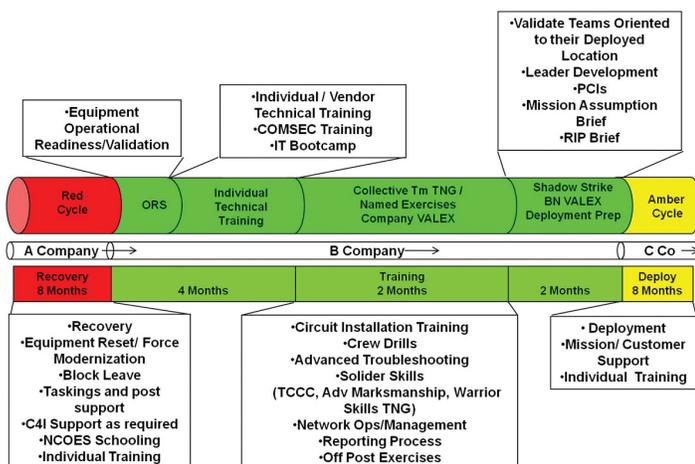


Figure 2 - The Green-Amber-Red training and deployment cycle.

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realistic training focused on the area or site to which the team is deploying, but is also designed to encourage initiative and aggressive problem solving at the team level.

The unwritten philosophy of the 112th is to “equip the man” as opposed to “man the equipment” which is why 112th teams have historically remained small (three to seven Soldiers) as their equipment evolves with technological advances.

CSM Chet Grelock, 112th SB command sergeant major, emphasizes this reliance on strong NCO leadership and Soldier initiative. He says, “If you want to be a master of your field, this is where you want to be. We want you to communicate. We are not bringing extra folks [on deployment] to pull detail. I need you to be an expert. I plan on a team member to be acting team chief when the team leader is not there, and I want you to solve the problem.”

LTC Charles “Chuck” Daly, 112th SB commander says, “The 112th succeeds because we have great NCO leaders who lead and operate in small, decentralized teams, and we heavily invest in the technical and tactical development of our Soldiers – regardless of their MOS. We deploy some very unique expertise in the tactical segment of the SOCOM information environment, notably our HUB capability and the NETOPS we are providing for joint special operations forces.”

Capabilities

Units from the 112th SB employ a variety of Army common, SOF program of record and unique systems. The 112th SB is equipped with a number of Army common multichannel SATCOM systems including

the Secure Mobility Anti-Jam Reliable Tactical Terminal, the Phoenix Terminal, and the Lightweight High Gain X-Band Antenna. The 112th modifies these systems to meet unique SOF requirements when the mission dictates.

The 112th SB performs the majority of its support within USSOCOM’s portion of the Global Information Grid known as the SOF information environment. The SIE includes SOCOM-owned and leased transport systems reaching every region of the globe, as well as data centers and services designed to reach from CONUS to the SOF team level. The SIE includes gateways to the DISN to provide SOF the ability to communicate directly with their conventional force counterparts. The 112th SB enjoys the unique ability within SOF to operate both within the SIE and when necessary connect directly to the DISN with its own unique joint interoperability test command certified systems.

To operate within the SIE, the 112th SB employs equipment fielded under the SOCOM Program of Record known as Special Operations Forces Tactical Assured Connectivity System. The SOFTACS family of systems includes the SOF deployable node light, medium, and heavy packages. Each of these SATCOM transit cased systems is tailored to provide SOF forces access to the SIE at the team, company, and battalion echelon. The 112th SB has used the KU-band SDN-Medium and SDN-Heavy system in support of OIF and OEF for several years. In addition to SOFTACS equipment, the 112th Signal Battalion developed and fielded the Scalable Internet Protocol Package Remote. The SIP2R is an “everything over IP” transit case baseband system utilizing iDirect modem technology. When combined with the

transport capability of the Phoenix terminal, the SIP2-R delivers secure voice and data connectivity to battalion and battalion-plus size elements like a CJSOTF.

Experience in OEF and OIF shows that multichannel SATCOM systems that “reach back” to CONUS to reach their data store, or to reach out to a neighboring unit in theater, experience performance degrading latency. To solve the latency problem, and “keep theater traffic in theater”, the 112th developed a mobile SATCOM hub as part of the SIP2R architecture known as the Interim Hub Node. The IHN uses an iDirect hub to terminate SIP2R nodes and SOFTACS systems in theater and can be directly connected to the DISN. The IHN then eliminates the latency associated with reaching back to CONUS and provides SOF a deployable and JITC certified DISN gateway. Additionally, the battalion chose to integrate Riverbed network accelerators to enhance performance of the SIP2R architecture.

Having proved the value added benefits of a mobile SATCOM hub to SOF, SOCOM has developed and fielded the first Mobile SOF Strategic Entry Point to the 112th SB based on the IHN model. The 112th deployed the first MSSEP to the CENTCOM AOR in May of 2010, which along with the IHN continues to provide service to SOF customers throughout the AOR.

Members of the 112th SB pride themselves as a source of technical expertise for the larger SOF community. The battalion has maintained a SYSCON in theater since the kick off of OIF and in May of 2010, combined its SYCON with the Special Operations Command Central Joint Network Control Center. The 112th’s SOF experienced

officers and NCOs who manage the JNCC on SOCCENT's behalf serve as the NETOPS for the majority of SOF deployed in the CENTCOM AOR.

Shadow Week 2011

The 112th SB enjoys an active alumni which annually gathers at Fort Bragg to celebrate the battalion's organizational week known as "Shadow Week."

Shadow Week coincides with the annual USASOC C4I Conference and includes a technology exposition, conference meetings, alumni socials, the battalion dining out, and recreational events for current Soldiers and alumni.

Shadow Week 2011, held in March 2011, was particularly special as the battalion celebrated its 25th anniversary since its reactivation. Special events this year included the ribbon cutting of the battalion's new headquarters complex and the unveiling of a 25th Anniversary



(Photo by Sharilyn Wells)

MG USA (Ret) James "Dave" Bryan (right) and artist Stuart Brown at the ceremony marking the ribbon cutting of the new 112th Signal Battalion Headquarters and the unveiling of the 25th Anniversary painting on 21 March 2011.

painting celebrating the unit's service past and present. Special guests at the ribbon cutting ceremony included the first commander of the 112th Signal Battalion (SO)(A), MG James "Dave" Bryan, and the 25th Anniversary painting artist Stuart Brown.

Conclusion

The 112th SB remains poised to deliver flexible and reliable communications support to Special

Operations Forces well into the future. As conventional units redeploy as part of the drawdown in Iraq and Afghanistan, SOF forces may be asked to remain as a stabilizing force. The departure of conventional forces will mean that long haul theater communications will also depart, creating ever more reliance on tactical systems provided by the 112th SB.

MAJ Chris Keeshan is the former Executive Officer of the 112th Signal Battalion (2010-2011). He served four years in USASOC including assignments as the 4th PSYOP (Airborne) Group S6, 3RD PSYOP Battalion (Airborne) S3, and the 112th SIG BN Theater Signal Support Company commander. MAJ Keeshan has also served in the 35th Signal Brigade, the 1st Cavalry Division, and the Department of the Army CIO G6. He is currently a student at the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, KS.

ACRONYM QuickScan

ARFORGEN - Army Force Generation
CJSOTF - Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force
CONUS - Continental United States
DISN - Defense Information Systems Network
GIG - Global Information Grid
HHC - Headquarters and Headquarters Company
IHN - Interim Hub Node
JITC - Joint Interoperability Test Command
JNCC - Joint Network Control Center
JORTS - Joint Operations and Readiness Training System
MSSEP - Mobile SOF Strategic Entry Point
NETOPS - Network Operations
OEF - Operation Enduring Freedom
OIF - Operation Iraqi Freedom
OND - Operation New Dawn
OPCON - Operational Control
OPTEMPO - Operational Tempo
ORS - Operational Readiness Survey
PMT - Pre Mission Training
POR - Program of Record
SATCOM - Satellite Communications

SDN - SOF Deployable Node
SIE - SOF Information Environment
SIP2R - Scalable Internet Protocol Package Remote
SOCAFRICA - Special Operations Command Africa
SOCCENT - Special Operations Command Central
SOCEUR - Special Operations Command Europe
SOCKOR - Special Operations Command Korea
SOCPAC - Special Operations Command Pacific
SOCSOUTH - Special Operations Command South
SOF - Special Operations Forces
SOFTACS - Special Operations Forces Tactical Assured Connectivity System
SSD - Special Operations Forces Signal Detachment
TSOC - Theater Special Operations Command
TSSC - Theater Signal Support Company
USASOC - United States Army Special Operations Command
USCENTCOM - U. S. Central Command
USSOCOM - U. S. Special Operations Command