

THUNDERBIRD CERTIFICATION PROGRAM PROVIDES JOINT OPPORTUNITIES

By 1LT Steven Baer
and
2LT Ari Merdler

The Thunderbird Certification Program provides a wealth of Signal-oriented courses, training, industry certifications, and incentives for the Soldiers of the 11th Signal Brigade. Soldiers assigned to the 86th Signal Battalion at Fort Bliss, Texas; the 57th and 62nd Signal Battalions at Fort Hood, Texas; and the 40th SIG BN and Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 11th Signal Brigade assigned to Fort Huachuca, Ariz., participate in this rewarding program.

The program was developed in 2011 by the Thunderbird Commander, COL Patrick C. Dedham, and has gone on to certify over 800 Soldiers.

The intent of the Thunderbird Certification Program is two-fold: first, the program serves to incentivize self-training by rewarding and recognizing Soldiers who take the time to further their Signal education; second, the TCP works to improve the overall mission-readiness and knowledge base of the 11th SIG Bde, supporting the unit charter to remain the Army's premier unified land operations Signal brigade.

The TCP is structured as a four-tiered model, with the intent that Soldiers progress through



the program in sequential order, from bottom to top. The base level, "Green Certified," requires Soldiers to satisfy a number of basic Army-level requirements, to include: Army Warrior Tasks, the Army Physical Fitness Test, mandatory training, and weapons qualification.

The next level, "Bronze Certified," pushes the Soldier to meet Signal Corps-level requirements, covering knowledge every good Signaleer should have, to include: Information Technology Essentials, IT Networking and Cisco Routing, tactical radios, and an understanding of communications security key management and fill devices.

The third level, "Silver Certified," drills down into the Military Occupational Specialty level and, for example, a 25B: Information Technology Specialist, would have to meet the following course requirements: Voice Over Internet Protocol, Ad-

vanced Routing, Network Management, Security+, Network+, A+, and Active Directory.

Finally, "Gold Certification," further emphasizes MOS-level tasks and knowledge, challenging the Soldier to push the limits of his/her knowledge within their given career field. For a 25N: Nodal Network Systems Operator/Maintainer, this would include: Advanced Network Nodal Management, A+, NET+, and Cisco Certified Network Associate.

Upon completing the bronze, silver, and gold-level certifications, unit commanders may recognize the Soldier with an Army Achievement Medal for bronze/silver and/or an Army Commendation Medal for gold. Additionally, the 11th SIG BDE further recognizes Soldiers by awarding them green, bronze, silver, or gold ID tags engraved with their name, date of certification, and the Thunderbird insignia.

SGT Christopher Collins, a 25L: Cable Systems Installer/Maintainer, from Charlie Company, 40th SIG BN distinguished himself as the first Soldier in his battalion to complete all four certifications (green, bronze, silver, and gold) for his MOS.

SGT Collins first arrived at Fort Huachuca in 2000 and has taken his success into his

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own hands ever since. SGT Collins completed all of the requirements for Gold-level certification in 2013 by completing Basic Splicer School, Advanced Routing, Basic Network Nodal Management, and the Basic Installer Course. He attributes his accomplishment to simply being self-motivated and keeping a positive attitude: "I really love what I do. I want to know as much as I can and keep learning. This was something I really wanted to accomplish and made the time to get it done and self-studied."

His company commander, CPT Larry Baca, and 1SG Billy Atkinson said SGT Collins produced outstanding results.

"SGT Collins is very self-motivated and took the initiative and time to accomplish his goal. The Cobras and Team 40th are all very proud of his accomplishment," said 1SG Atkinson. CPT Baca echoed 1SG Atkinson's comments, "This was an outstanding achievement and we are all very proud of SGT Collins. He has set a new standard and he has shown everyone in the Battalion that if you set a goal for yourself, it is achievable. SGT Collins really set a new standard for his Soldiers, peers and superiors to look up to and achieve themselves."

Thunderbird Certification Program courses and training modules are offered via three sources: the Army Communications-Electronics Command Data Universities; Army Skillport distance learning modules; and the Fort Gordon LandWarNet Blackboard courses. Available courses include: IT and Cisco Routing, Network Management, Information Assurance, and Joint Network Node System Operator Training. Industry certifications offered by Cisco, Microsoft, and CompTIA are also available, to include: A+, NET +, SEC +, CCNA, CCNA Security, CCNA Voice, Active Directory 2008, SharePoint Server 2007, and Windows 7.

Soldiers may enroll and schedule courses by speaking with their company training office. Further coordination is then pushed through to the BN-level and finally to the BDE training section. 11th Signal Brigade works directly with the CECOM Data University office to arrange for requested courses to be scheduled. A mobile training team, typically comprised of one CECOM civilian instructor, will travel to Fort Bliss and Fort Hood on a semi-monthly basis to teach courses to Soldiers stationed outside of Fort Huachuca.

Although the Thunderbird Certification Program focuses primarily on Signal-related training, the TCP LWN website is open to non-Signal Soldiers in Maintenance, Logistics, Human Resources, Ministry, Intelligence, and Food Services. Soldiers are encouraged to cross-train into other branches in order to widen their skill sets and strengthen their abilities to adapt in an ever-changing operational environment. The key to shaping a well-rounded and proficient Soldier is education and the TCP is the 11th SIG BDE's key to remaining the most knowledgeable and capable Signal brigade in the U. S. Army.

1LT Steven Baer commissioned as a U.S. Army Signal Officer in 2009 from the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill, Reserve Officers' Training Corps and has spent his last three years assigned to Fort Huachuca, Ariz. He deployed to Afghanistan in 2012 with HHC, 11th SIG BDE and was assigned to Camp Marmal, supporting the Regional Network Operations Control Center - North as a battle captain. He is currently serving as the training officer in charge for the 11th Signal Brigade.

2LT Ari Merdler commissioned as a U.S. Army Signal Officer in 2012 from Seton Hall University ROTC, and is assigned to Fort Huachuca, Ariz. He is originally from Baltimore, Md. and is currently serving as the training officer in charge and public affairs officer for the 40th Signal Battalion.

ACRONYM QuickScan

BDE - Brigade

BN - Battalion

CCNA - Cisco Certified Network Associate

CECOM - Communications-Electronics Command

HHC - Headquarters/Headquar-

ters Company

IT - Information Technology

LWN - LandWarNet

MOS - Military Occupational Specialty

NET+ - Network Plus

ROTC - Reserve Officers' Training Corps

SEC+ - Security Plus

SIG - Signal

TCP - Thunderbird Certification Program