

# *Tactical voice communication returns to prominence*

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During the late stage of the Mobile Subscriber Equipment era, it became increasingly evident to both war fighter and signal personnel that there was a very rapidly increasing demand for digital data communications.

Prior to 11 September 2001, battalions were limited to a half a dozen tactical telephones and to a handful of secure and non-secure network connectivity with a trickle of bandwidth in the field.

As operations in Afghanistan and in Iraq demanded a Forward Operation Base-centered operating environment, improving data communication was in high demand.

Today as the Army shifts focus from Counter Insurgency to Decisive Action operations, tactical voice communication regains some of the importance that it lost to data communication during the past decade.

Demand for increased bandwidth for digital data communications went hand in hand with the establishment of Forward Operating Bases in Afghanistan and Iraq. Units occupied Forward Operating Bases for 12 months on average from where they conducted Counter Insurgency operations in their Area of Responsibility. This type of war fighting demanded digital Common Operating Pictures and large electronic files had to be generated and pushed and pulled between brigades and battalions. The increased use of computers and extensive electronic file sharing made the Mobile Subscriber Equipment outdated and the Signal Corps embarked on a series of upgrades increasing the data rate of Small Extension Nodes from 16 Kbps to 64 and then eventually to 256 kbps at battalion level. Putting patches on an antiquated system could not keep up with the demand and in 2002 the Signal Corps initiated the development of the Warfighter Information Network-Tactical.

In 2004 the Army began fielding the Joint

Network Node for brigade/ regiment and division level and Command Post Nodes for battalion/ squadron level to bridge the gap between Mobile Subscriber Equipment and the "full" on-the-move Warfighter Information Network-Tactical network capability. The Warfighter Information Network-Tactical network provided battalion-level and above with the ability to connect to the Army's digitized systems, voice, data and video via satellite Internet connection at-the-quick-halt. Command Post Nodes at the battalion level are now capable to provide up to 4 Mbps bandwidth and are able to easily handle the graphical images and documents that are required to keep key leaders informed of the battlefield's situational aspects.

During the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Army has of course maintained its need for tactical voice communications, but the focus for dynamic and rapid development was on data communications.

Soldier training was also revamped to meet the need of the increased demand for data communications and Soldiers in the Military Occupational Specialty 25 B (Information Technology Specialists) were assigned to battalion level.

Now that tactical unit rotations to Iraq have ended and deployments are winding down in Afghanistan, training focus is shifting from Forward Operating Base-centered Mission Readiness Exercise to Decisive Action Training Environment. Data communication is still very important in the Decisive Action Training Environment and of course, Warfighter Information Network-Tactical is perfectly fitted to meet all needs. However, the fluidity of tactical operations that is not centered on well-established Forward Operating Bases, places a renewed emphasis on tactical voice communications and elevates the status of good, seasoned Soldiers in the Military Occupational



Specialty 25U (Signal Support System Specialist), who are the technical experts in radio communication systems.

During the recent Decisive Action Training Environment rotation at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center at Hohenfels, Germany, Observer- Coach/Trainers could clearly see the resurging importance of tactical voice communication. Large file sharing of current and future operations and targeting briefs in well established and documented Area of Operations with clear communication capabilities

and limitations gave way to operations focusing on rapid push into hostile areas with squadron Tactical Operation Centers frequently on the move and relying on terrain analysis to identify dead spaces and for planning retransmission sites for radio communication. What the unit now had to plan and analyze was previously handed over to the incoming unit from the outgoing unit during the Relief in Place process in Iraq and Afghanistan. During Decisive Action training the squadrons had to frequently jump and often there was no opportunity to

establish data communication. Thus the squadrons often had to rely on voice communication with regiment.

Although the need for data communication will be sustained in the future, the shift from Counter Insurgency to Decisive Action operations will place more emphasis on tactical voice communications. This shift will require the battalion/squadron signal officers and communications chiefs to dust off some of their tactical voice communications planning skills and increase emphasis on tactical radio troubleshooting and Communications Security loading training for their Soldiers when preparing for Decisive Action operations.

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## ACRONYM QuickScan

COIN - Counter Insurgency  
 COMSEC - Communications Security  
 CPN - Command Post Node  
 DATE - Decisive Action Training Environment  
 FOB - Forward Operating Base  
 MRE - Mission Readiness Exercise  
 MSE - Mobile Subscriber Equipment

JMRC - Joint Multinational Readiness Center  
 JNN - Joint Network Node  
 MOS - Military Occupational Specialty  
 RIP - Relief in Place  
 SEN - Small Extension Node  
 TOC - Tactical Operation Center  
 WIN-T - Warfighter Information Network -Tactical