Record Traffic From The Past

Story by Rebecca Robbins

During the 1880s, Signal units were first established in the National Guard. Among the earliest were two Provisional Signal Corps units assigned to the 1st and 2d Brigades of the New York National Guard. The one assigned to the 1st was organized at New York on 6 December 1886 and the other was organized at Brooklyn on 29 December 1884. The 101st Signal Battalion of today is the lineal descendant of those units. Throughout its long history, the 101st has been a Signal unit, and it has served with distinction in both foreign and domestic service.

The labor strikes of the 1890s provided opportunities for the New York National Guard Signal units to demonstrate their expertise. In August 1892, the Signal Corps of the 1st Brigade provided communications for the troops called out during the railroad switchmen's strike in Buffalo. During six days of service in that city, the corpsmen operated telegraph lines between the camps surrounding the railroad yards at which the troops were located. In addition, visual communication stations were maintained from which messages were conveyed by means of flags during the day and oil-burning torches at night. When the Brooklyn surface railroad (trolley car) workers went on strike in January 1895, both the Signal Corps of the 1st and 2d Brigades were called into service.

Men of Co. C, 101st Signal Battalion Corps, IX U.S. Corps, erect a pole on the side of a hill during the completion of an open wire telephone line between Chunchon and IX Corps Headquarters, near Chunchon, Korea. (U.S. Army photo)

On 17 February 1914, the two units, then designated as the 1st and 2d Companies, Signal Corps, were consolidated and redesignated the 1st Battalion, Signal Corps, with its headquarters at New York. The battalion did not participate in the War with Spain, but it was mustered into federal service on 3 July 1916 to serve along the Mexican border. It was stationed in Texas from 10 July to 13 December 1916 and was mustered out of federal service on 23 December. The Star of Texas on the battalion's insignia represents its service there during that period.

It was not long before the battalion was again called to serve, this time across the Atlantic. Mustered into federal service on 21-25 July 1917, the battalion was reorganized and redesignated as the 102d Field Signal Battalion on 1 October of that year. The 102d was assigned to the 27th Division, which was composed of New York National Guard units, and sailed for France on 17 May 1918. During the war, the 27th Division served, successively, with the 4th, 3d, and 2d British Armies, and the British XIX Corps. As an element of the 27th Division, the 102d participated in several major operations including the occupation of the Dickebusch-Scherpenberg sector in Flanders, the Ypres-Lys Offensive in Belgium, and the Somme Offensive in France. In a letter to the 102d, the commander of the 27th Division, Maj. Gen. John F. O'Ryan, expressed his recognition of the "determination, resourcefulness, valor, and endurance of the officers and men of the Signal Battalion." On 15 March 1919, the 102d returned to the United States and was demobilized on 31 March at Camp Upton, New York.

While the 102d was in federal service, a new unit, designated as the 1st Battalion, Signal Corps, was organized in the New York State Guard to take its place. The two units were consolidated on 1 June 1921 to form the 101st Signal Battalion of the New York National Guard with its headquarters at New York. The 101st remained active throughout the interwar period and, in May 1940, was the only National Guard Signal Battalion in the nation.

With the entrance of the United States into World War II, the 101st was called into federal service for a third time, and was inducted on 13 January 1941. During the war, the battalion served in the Pacific where it participated in two of the hardest fought campaigns in that theater. On 21 December 1941, the battalion arrived in Hawaii where its duties included operation of telephone and telegraph installations in addition to the operation of a radio station at Departmental Headquarters, Fort Shafter. The battalion also

Maj. Gen. Reuben E. Jenkins, CG, IX U.S. Corps, fastens a streamer on the battalion standard as the meritorious unit citation is awarded to the 101st Signal Battalion Corps, IX Corps, during ceremonies held at IX Corps Headquarters. (U.S. Army photo)

performed cable-laying missions and underwent amphibious warfare training in preparation for the assault landing to be made on Leyte. The battalion left Oahu on 11 September 1944 and proceeded to Manus Island where troops were gathering for the Leyte invasion. On 21 October, the 101st landed on Leyte's eastern coast, near Dulag. While on Leyte, the battalion installed, operated, and maintained communications for the XXIV Corps, Sixth Army. Laboring during torrential rains which made their task extremely arduous, the members of the 101st Signal Battalion erected wires along the Dulag-Abuyog and Abuyog-Baybay roads.

In December, the XXIV Corps launched an attack against Ormoc, an important Japanese stronghold on Leyte's western coast. Under enemy artillery and machine gun fire, the 101st set up a message center at Ormoc which made a vital contribution to the American victory there. The capture of Ormoc hastened the end of the Leyte campaign, and the 101st Signal Battalion departed from the island on 24 March 1945. Its next combat service was in the Ryukyus campaign as part of the Okinawa invasion force. Landing on Okinawa on 4 April, the 101st provided Signal communications for the XXIV Corps, Tenth Army. After the battle ended in July, the 101st remained on Okinawa until August while mopping-up operations were conducted.

With the end of the war, the 101st performed occupation duties in Korea. Returning to the United States early in December 1945, the battalion was inactivated on 8 December at Camp Stoneman, California. A Phillippine Presidential Unit Citation was awarded to the battalion for its service from 17 October 1944 to 4 July 1945.

The battalion was reorganized and federally recognized on 16 October 1947 with its headquarters at Yonkers. Organized as a nondivisional battalion providing Signal communications at the corps or Army level, the 101st was called into federal service, for the fourth time in its history, on 19 August 1950 for the Korean conflict. The battalion landed at Inchon on 8 April 1951 and was attached to the IX Corps. Its mission was to provide communications for corps headquarters and for the units operating directly under corps headquarters. It also provided photographic service, handled Signal supplies, and performed field maintenance of Signal equipment for corps units.

During the Korean War, the 101st Signal Battalion participated in the following campaigns: first UN counteroffensive; CCF spring offensive; UN summer-fall offensive; Second Korean winter; Korea, summer-fall 1952; Third Korean winter; and Korea, summer 1953. For their service in Korea, officers and men of the 101st Signal Battalion collectively earned one Air Medal, five Soldier's Medals, seventy-seven Bronze Stars, and seventy Commendation Ribbons. The battalion was awarded a Meritorious Unit Commendation for the period 1 December 1951 to 30 June 1952 in which its members were cited for "consistently carrying out their complex assignment with a standard of excellence that evoked the highest praise from all those cognizant of their fine work." A Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation was awarded to the IX Corps and its attached units, including the 101st Signal Battalion, for their services, in particular, their participation in Exercise MUSHROOM, the first large-scale atomic defense training maneuver, and their role in the defense of Whitehorse Mountain and the Kumsong Salient.

In recent years, the 101st Signal Battalion has continued its tradition of federal service on two occasions: during the Berlin crisis, from 1 October 1961 to 5 August 1962, and with participation in OPERATION GRAPHIC HAND, when troops were called out during the federal postal workers strike, from 24 to 30 March 1970. Today, the 101st Signal Battalion is an active element of the New York Army National Guard with Headquarters and Headquarters Company and Company C stationed at Yonkers; Company A at Brooklyn; Company B at Ossining; and Company D at Orangeburg.

Members of the Telephone and Telegraph Company, 101st Signal Battalion operating switchboard at IX Corps Headquarters in Korea. (U.S. Army photo)