



Can You Hear Me Now?

We Control the High Ground

USASMDC/ARSTRAT and Satellite Communications



Until recently, the five companies of the 53rd were located at Fort Detrick, Md; Fort Meade, Md; Landstuhl, Germany; Camp Roberts, Calif., and Fort Buckner, Japan, the sites of the DSCS Operations Centers.



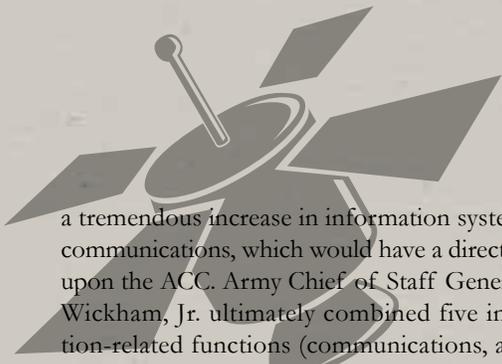
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In June 2010, the U.S. Army Signal Corps marked a significant milestone – its 150th birthday. While only a fraction of the age, the USASMDC/ARSTRAT’s 53rd Signal Battalion has a long tradition of providing satellite communications support to the Soldier and the nation. The two organizations can trace their parallel history back to the early 1960s and the Initial Defense Satellite Communications System.

In May 1960, the DoD established the Defense Communications Agency (DCA) uniting the three services to operate and manage a new Defense Communications System (DCS), a worldwide, long-haul system, the DCS would provide secure communications for the President, the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, government agencies and the military services. In 1962, the Secretary of Defense authorized the new satellite proposal – the Initial Defense Satellite Communications Program (IDSCP), later renamed the Defense Satellite Communications System (DSCS), Phase I. Repeating the formula established in the 1950s, the Air Force was tasked to develop the spacecraft and communications payload and satellite operations and the Army role was limited initially to the ground communications segment.

At the same time an Army-wide restructuring brought changes to the Signal Corps. In 1964, the Chief Signal Officer’s responsibilities were incorporated in a newly established major command – the U.S. Army Strategic Communications Command (STRATCOM). STRATCOM missions included management of all long-distance Army communications and the engineering, installation, operation and maintenance of the Army portions of the DCS.

In 1973, STRATCOM became the Army Communications Command (ACC) to more accurately reflect its broad range of missions. These responsibilities ranged from “providing communications within Army posts, camps, and stations to signaling across the continents with satellites.” The ACC also oversaw civil defense communications and management of air traffic control at Army airfields. The next decade saw



a tremendous increase in information systems and communications, which would have a direct impact upon the ACC. Army Chief of Staff General John Wickham, Jr. ultimately combined five information-related functions (communications, automation, visual information, publications/printing, and records management) into the Information Mission Area. Oversight was assigned to the ACC, renamed the Army Information Systems Command in 1984. The USAISC's role was "to provide the commander the information he needed to make accurate decisions and the ability to put them into effect once they were made."¹ Included in this mix was the responsibility for the satellite ground stations.

In the 1980s, DSCS entered its third phase. The first DSCS III satellite, launched in 1982, provided an improved communications capacity of 200 percent and up to 700 percent for the tactical user. To meet these new requirements, obsolete ground terminals were replaced with DSCS Operations Centers and the program began to transition from analog to digital.

Also in the 1980s, Army re-emphasized its interests in space, establishing the Army Space Agency (ASA), the Army component to U.S. Space Command (USSPACECOM). 1986, however, would be a pivotal year in the history of Army space and the DSCS. In July 1986, General Robert Herres, USSPACECOM Commander, recommended to General Wickham, that the Army take a more active role in space. General Herres particularly noted that DSCS III control should be given to the ASA. In response the ASA assumed operational and maintenance (O&M) responsibilities for the DSCS GMFSC and MSQ-114 functions. The Joint Chiefs of Staff MOP 178 formalized this transfer when it assigned platform control and payload execution to CINCSpace, with O&M control of all seven DSCS Operations Centers to be given to ASA.

In the meantime, on April 7, 1988, the Army activated the U.S. Army Space Command (ARSPACE), as the new Army component to the USSPACECOM. Later that year, ARSPACE's GMFSC managers formally activated the Regional Space Support Center planning and management cells. These would support the unified and specified CINCS with GMF access on the DSCS. Finally, in February 1989, the USAISC and ARSPACE completed the MOU by which the remainder of the DSCS mission and personnel would transfer to ARSPACE. Effective Oct. 1, 1990, ARSPACE assumed control of the GMFSC Centers, AN/MSQ-114 along with 241 positions

and an additional 103 support spaces created based upon the increased ARSPACE missions.

In August 1992, the Army again reorganized to improve space management. Although ARSPACE became a subordinate command in the merger with the U.S. Army Strategic Defense Command, Army Space now had a voice at the three-star level. Among the six missions specifically listed in the General Order creating the U.S. Army Space and Strategic Defense Command was the requirement to command the DSCS Operations Centers and manage joint tactical use of these resources. Essentially a TDA organization, the ARSPACE aligned personnel in offices and directorates according to their functions. The group that oversaw the DSCS were assigned to the Directorate of Military Satellite Communications or the MILSATCOM Directorate.

The demands for tactical space support grew exponentially following Operation Desert Storm and the concurrent evolution towards a force projection Army. Subsequent efforts to regularize the structure were realized on May 1, 1995, when the 1st Satellite Control (SATCON) Battalion became the first battalion in the history of the Army with an operational mission directly tied to the control of space systems and capabilities. As today, the companies were organized according to location. The Fort Detrick, Md. DSCSOC Detachment became A Company; Fort Meade, Md. – B Company; Landstuhl, Germany – C Company, Camp Roberts, Calif. – D Company and the recently completed Fort Buckner, Japan – E Company.

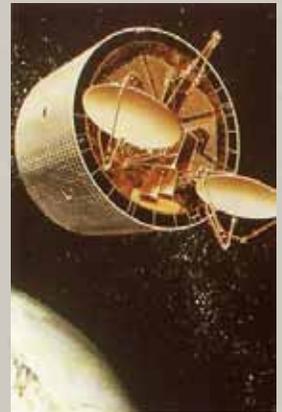
The current configuration traces its history to 2002 and the initial approval of a Modified Table of Organization and Equipment or MTOE structure for Army Space units. The design for the 1st SATCON Bn was approved in 2003 bringing with it significant changes. Effective October 15, 2005, the 1st SATCON Battalion and its companies were formally inactivated. One day later its mission, functions, personnel etc. were activated as the 53rd Signal Battalion (SATCON) and assigned to the 1st Space Brigade (Provisional). As BG Jeffrey Horne, the USASMD/ARSTRAT Deputy Commanding General – Operations noted during the ceremony, "The Army formally recognizes the unit's operational warfighting mission. Soldiers in this battalion make vital communications happen for our civilian leaders and joint warfighters." To paraphrase their motto – they control the high ground. 

DSCS I



The first DSCS satellite was launched in June 1966, from Cape Kennedy, Fla. Launched in groups of eight, a full constellation of 26 of these small 100-pound satellites were put into orbit.

DSCS II



The much larger DSCS-2 had a capacity for 1300 two-way voice channels or 10 million bits of digital data per second. The cylindrical DSCS-2 measured nine feet in diameter and 13 feet in height and weighed a total of 1300 pounds,

DSCS III



First launched in 1982, the DSCS III satellites weigh 2,580 pounds and already exceeded their life expectancy of ten years. The rectangular body measures 6 feet X 6 feet X 7 feet and its solar arrays create a 38 foot span.

Footnotes

¹ Brenda Raines, *Getting the Message Through*, p. 399.