



53rd Signal Battalion —

A Battalion with Dual Histories

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The 53rd Signal Battalion has two distinguished histories. How can a single battalion have two histories? The battalion was re-flagged as the 53rd Signal Battalion (SATCON) on Oct. 16, 2005. Although the battalion had inherited a proud lineage with the 53rd title, its parallel history as a satellite control organization extends back to the 1960s.

“We Control the High Ground”

The U.S. Army Signal Corps experimentation with Space-based communications began in 1946 when a high-powered radar was used to bounce signals off the face of the moon. The Signal Corps remained an innovator in satellite design and launched its first communication satellite in December 1958, less than a year after America’s first satellite, Explorer I, was put into orbit. That first communication satellite, the Signal Corps Orbiting Relay Equipment (SCORE), stayed in orbit only 12 days and paved the way for more successful and powerful devices. The Army’s role in Space communication evolved to development and manning of ground communications equipment that could “talk” to the satellites put in orbit by the U.S. Air Force.

The satellite control history of the battalion began in 1966, long before the organization became an Army battalion. In June of that year, the Department of Defense launched its first Defense Satellite Communication System (DSCS) satellites into orbit. This constellation of 26 satellites would be the first of three increasingly improved phases of the DSCS. The DSCS is a high-capacity super high frequency subsystem of the Defense Communication System. It provides worldwide secure voice and high

data rate communications for command and control, crises management, and intelligence data transfer. Its services are used by all branches of the military, the White House Communications Agency, the Diplomatic Telecommunications System and other NATO allies.

The ground communications segment of the DSCS was operated by U.S. Army Signal Corps Soldiers who manned several ground terminals in the continental United States, Europe and Asia. These separate detachments of Soldiers were assigned to the U.S. Army Information Systems Command (USAISC). On Oct. 1, 1990, in an effort to consolidate Army Space assets, the Army DSCS mission was transferred to the fledgling U.S. Army Space Command (ARSPACE). Simultaneously, Army Auxiliary Satellite Control Terminals (ASCTs) and Ground Mobile Forces Satellite Communication Systems (GMFSC) were also transferred to ARSPACE. In total, more than 300 Signal Corps Soldiers were transferred to Military Satellite Control (MILSATCON) Directorate of ARSPACE as part of this realignment.

The next great milestone in the unit’s history came on May 1, 1995, when the MILSATCON Directorate was converted to a battalion organization — 1st Satellite Control (SATCON) Battalion. Each of the DSCS detachments were organized as companies with the battalion headquarters collocated with ARSPACE headquarters in Colorado Springs. This move marked a significant recognition of the role played by Space technology in the Army of today. The 1st SATCON was composed of Headquarters at Peterson Air Force Base, Colo.; Headquarters Company at Schriever Air Force Base, Colo.; A Company at Fort Detrick, Md.; B Company at Fort Meade, Md.; C Company at Landstuhl, Germany; D Company at Camp Roberts, Calif.; and E Company at Fort Buckner, Okinawa. 1st SATCON was the first battalion in the history of the Army with an operational mission directly tied to the control of Space systems and capabilities. The new battalion was awarded the motto: “We control the high ground.”

Photo courtesy U.S. Army



First - Last - Always!

On Oct. 16, 2005, 1st Satellite Control Battalion was converted to a MTOE organization and was redesignated 53rd Signal Battalion (SATCON). With this change, BG Jeffrey Horne, deputy commanding general-operations noted that “the Army formally recognizes this unit’s operational warfighting mission. Soldiers in this battalion make vital communications happen for our civilian leaders and joint warfighters.” The old 53rd Signal Battalion had been inactivated at the end of its Vietnam War mission in 1971, but its lineage and honors were resurrected with this reactivation. The mission for the new 53rd remains unchanged from the 1st SATCON mission to provide 24/7 on-orbit command, control and communications of the Defense Satellite Communications System constellation in support of tactical and strategic missions. An official unfurling ceremony of the colors and guidons occurred on Oct. 26, 2005.

The 53rd Signal Battalion was authorized by the Regular Army on Oct. 18, 1927, but the battalion was not activated until the eve of World War II. The battalion was activated at Camp Bowie, Texas, on June 1, 1941, and began the long train-up for deployment. The 53rd participated in “Operation Torch” in November 1942 and landed in North Africa as part of the II Corps, 5th Army. It was the first Signal Battalion in the U.S. Army to go into combat in European/African Theater of operations. The battalion would support combat operations in Algeria and Tunisia before the end of the North Africa campaign. The 53rd went on to make the assault landings during the Sicily campaign and then spent the rest of World War II making the long push up the Italian peninsula. At war’s end the 53rd was in the Po River Valley of northern Italy. The battalion was inactivated at Leghorn, Italy, on Sept. 30, 1945. The 53rd received a Meritorious Unit Citation for its service during World War II.

The 53rd was brought back into service again on Sept. 21, 1954. During the intervening years

the battalion served at several places including Fort Hood, Texas, and Fort Huachuca, Ariz. The Battalion was deployed to Germany during the Berlin Crisis from December 1961 until June 1963. Charlie and Delta Companies were deactivated at Fort Huachuca in August 1965. The remainder of the battalion was deployed from Fort Hood to the Republic of South Vietnam in May 1966. The 53rd was stationed at Long Binh and assigned to the II Field Force as a III Corps communication and combat photo unit.

The 53rd also manned a radio relay station on a barren hilltop several miles from Long Binh. “Hill 837” was a remote, sporadically resupplied site that came under frequent mortar and small arms attacks. Men from the 53rd helped to defend the Long Binh perimeter during the Tet Offensives of 1968 and 1969 and provided radio/teletype teams to any II Field Force unit that was conducting combat operations. The 53rd served in Vietnam until 1970 when it was redeployed to Fort Lewis, Wash. The battalion was inactivated on June 23, 1971, at Fort Lewis. Its Vietnam service was recognized with three Meritorious Unit Commendation streamers for the years spanning 1966 to 1970 with credit for participating in various military campaigns.

The battalion’s new designation, the 53rd Signal Battalion (SATCON), represents its dual history well. The 53rd’s name brings a proud heritage of service during World War II and the Vietnam War. The “SATCON” reminds us that the battalion led the Army as the first battalion with a Space mission.



CPT Norine Amato, former commander, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 53rd Signal Battalion unfurls her company’s new guidon during the 53rd’s redesignation ceremony in October, 2005. Photo by MSG Dennis E. Beebe