

U.S. Army Europe and 7th Army

contact: paoci@eur.army.mil
phone: 49-6221-57-5815 / DSN 370-5815
fax: 49-6221-57-6376 / DSN 370-6376



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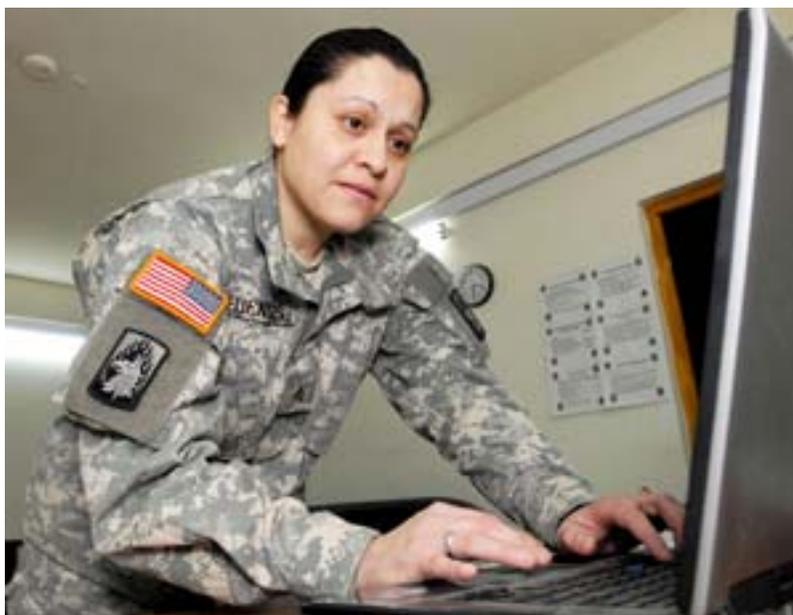
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SIGNAL SOLDIERS VITAL TO COMMUNICATIONS OF AVIATION TASK FORCE

By Sgt. Brandon Little

12th Combat Aviation Brigade Public Affairs Office

CAMP TAJI, Iraq -- Communication has always played a vital part in war-fighting efforts, and as technology and the enemy continue to evolve, so has the demand for lines of communications.



SGT BRANDON LITTLE

Sgt. Manuela Fuentes, a data and information integrator for Task Force XII, performs a system check on a computer in the task force's tax center at Camp Taji, Iraq. Fuentes and her fellow signal Soldiers keep task force members in touch and informed by setting up and maintaining systems from aircraft radios to computers, telephones and satellite communications.

The uses of these lines of communication can vary from allowing ground forces to radio for aerial support when they're in a tight situation to providing deployed parents with the opportunity to download e-mailed pictures from their families back home.

When members of Task Force XII, the aviation task force led by the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade that supports Multi-National Division - Baghdad, need to establish communications or get lines fixed or relocated, they turn to signal Soldiers.

"Most people don't recognize the necessity of automation in the support of combat missions," said Maj. Ronald Cohen, signal officer for Headquarters and Headquarters

Company, Task Force XII. “Without these (signal Soldiers) behind the scenes, connecting computers and telephones, the missions don’t get planned and orders don’t get pushed out.”

Signal Soldiers also ensure that helicopter radios function properly and help leaders who travel in Task Force XII aircraft stay connected to the battle by operating special radio consoles aboard the aircraft.

“A brigade functions similar to the human body,” said Cohen. “The operations section is the heart that pumps out the (information) through the veins that connect to the different sections of the brigade, but the signal sections are those veins carrying that information.”

It has taken a combined effort between signal Soldiers working in unit automation sections and in the Forward Logistical Element to meet the automated and tactical communication needs of Task Force XII.

“In the seven months we’ve been here, we’ve managed to establish networks here and at Logistic Support

Area Anaconda (in Balad, Iraq),” said Cohen. “Moving to Taji was definitely a challenge; we pretty much had to build the brigade’s automation systems from the ground up.”

Signal Soldiers are also responsible for maintaining and repairing these systems. They have completed more than 72 minor system repairs, or trouble tickets, this month.

“We troubleshoot problems involving all (types of communications) from computers to radios. We also work with telephones and satellites,” said Sgt. David Xiong, a TF XII senior local area network manager. “We stay pretty busy trying to maintain our everyday operations in addition to completing various projects that (arise).”

In the last month, the signal Soldiers have taken on projects that include relocating the brigade conference room and creating a tax center for Task Force XII Soldiers.

“They did a great job in setting up the tax center, and they finished it a lot faster than I expected,” said Spc. Jackson Longchamp, a TF XII paralegal specialist. “I really commend them on all the hard work they’ve done to get everything up and running.”

The tax center was fairly easy to set up, but relocating the conference room took several weeks of planning and coordination to accomplish because it contains a separate tactical and garrison communication network, said Sgt. Manuela Fuentes, a TF XII data and information integrator.

Without the hard work and dedication of these signal Soldiers, Task Force XII would literally have to operate in the dark, said Cohen.

“It’s amazing how reliant we are on automation, and when that goes down there are no phones, no e-mail ... no communication,” said Cohen. “A lot of the time we know that people might not notice we’re here, but we all know they appreciate the work we do and they value our contribution to the mission.”

The 12th CAB is a U.S. Army Europe unit headquartered in Ansbach, Germany.



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