

Signal Corps ... Signal Regiment ... Signal Corps Regimental Association -- what's the difference?

by Amy Tuschen

This article will probably be the most thorough yet most concise overview of "things Signal" (Signal Corps, Signal Regiment, Regimental Division and Signal Corps Regimental Association) ... their roles and the differences among them ... you'll ever see in one place.

Many people contact the Signal Corps Regimental Association office, the Regimental Division or elsewhere at the Signal Center looking for information on the differences among the Signal Corps, Signal Regiment, SCRA and the different awards programs they offer. This article is intended to help clear up the confusion.

Essentially, the Signal Corps is the Army branch that was born in 1860. The Regiment came about in 1986, when the Army adopted the Regimental system. Office Chief of Signal's Regimental Division supports the Regiment with its education and marketing programs. And SCRA began in 1976 as the Signal Museum Association; today it's a private, non-profit organization based on paid membership.

The background and other differences are discussed in the rest of this article, beginning with the Signal Corps.

Signal Corps



BG Albert Myer, the Army's first Chief Signal Officer, in 1880 (shortly before his death).

Albert Myer, an Army doctor, first conceived the idea of a separate, trained professional military signal service. He proposed that the Army use his visual communications system, called "wigwag," while serving as a medical officer in Texas in 1856. When the Army adopted his system June 21, 1860, the Signal Corps was born, with Myer as the first Signal officer.

Myer first used his visual signaling system on active service in New Mexico during the 1860-1861 Navajo expedition. Using flags for daytime signaling and a torch at night, wigwag was tested in Civil War combat in June 1861 to direct the fire of a harbor battery at Fort Calhoun, Va. (also known as Fort Wool), against Confederate positions opposite Fort Monroe, Va.

Until March 3, 1863, when Congress authorized a regular Signal Corps for the duration of the war, Myer was forced to rely on detailed personnel. Some 2,900 officers and enlisted men served, although not at any one time, in the Civil War Signal Corps.

Myer's Civil War innovations included an unsuccessful balloon experiment at the first Battle of Bull Run and, in response to GEN George McClellan's desire for a Signal Corps field-telegraph train, an electric telegraph in the form of the Beardslee magnetolectric telegraph machine. Even in the Civil War, the wigwag system, dependent upon line-of-sight, was waning in the face of the electric telegraph.

The electric telegraph, in addition to visual signaling, became a Signal Corps responsibility in 1867. Within 12 years, the corps had constructed – and was maintaining and operating – some 4,000 miles of telegraph lines along the country's western frontier.

In 1870, the Signal Corps established a congressionally mandated national weather service. With the assistance of LT Adolphus Greely, Myer – by the time of his death in 1880 – commanded a weather service of international acclaim. The weather bureau became part of the Department of Agriculture in 1891, while the corps retained responsibility for military meteorology.



Adolphus Greely in 1887, just after the president promoted him to brigadier general and named him to succeed BG William Hazen as Chief Signal Officer. Greely developed the national weather service under Myer's direction.

The Signal Corps' role in the Spanish American War of 1898 and the subsequent Philippine Insurrection was on a grander scale than it had been in the Civil War. In addition to visual signaling, including heliograph, the corps supplied telephone and telegraph wire lines and cable communications, fostered the use of telephones in combat, employed combat photography and renewed the use of balloons. Shortly after the war, the Signal Corps constructed the Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System, introducing the first wireless telegraph in the Western Hemisphere.

On Aug. 1, 1907, an Aeronautical Division was established within the office of the Chief Signal Officer. In 1908, the Wright brothers made test flights of the Army's first airplane built to Signal Corps' specifications. Army aviation remained within the Signal Corps until 1918, when it became the Army Air Service.



Orville Wright makes one of the first test flights over Fort Myer, Va., of an airplane built to the Signal Corps' specifications. Aeronautics was part of the Signal Corps until 1918.

The Signal Corps lost no time in meeting the challenges of World War I. Chief Signal Officer MG George Squier worked closely with private industry to perfect radio tubes while creating a major signal laboratory at Camp Alfred Vail, N.J. (later Fort Monmouth). Early radiotelephones developed by the Signal Corps were introduced into the European theater in 1918. While the new American voice radios were superior to the radiotelegraph sets, telephone and telegraph remained the major technology of World War I.



Chief Signal Officer MG George Squier in 1917. He pioneered a close relationship with private industry to advance communications.

A pioneer in radar, COL William Blair, director of the Signal Corps laboratories at Fort Monmouth, patented the first Army radar demonstrated in May 1937. Even before the United States entered World War II, mass production of two radar sets, the SCR-268 and the SCR-270, had begun. Along with the Signal Corps' tactical frequency-modulation radio, also developed in the 1930s, radar was the most important communications development of World War II.

The Signal Corps' Project Diana in 1946 successfully bounced radar signals off the moon, paving the way for space communications. On Dec. 18, 1958, with Air Force assistance, the Signal Corps launched its first communications satellite, Project SCORE, demonstrating the feasibility of worldwide communications in delayed and real-time mode by means of relatively simple active satellite relays.

Meanwhile, the Korean conflict cut short an all-too-brief peace. Korea's terrain and road nets, along with the distance and speed with which communications were forced to travel, limited the use of wire. The Signal Corps' very-high-frequency radio became the "backbone" of tactical communications throughout the conflict.

The Vietnam War's requirement for high-quality telephone and message circuits led to the Signal Corps' deployment of tropospheric-scatter radio links that could provide many circuits between locations more than 200 miles apart. Other developments included the SYNCOM satellite-communications service and a commercial fixed-station system known as the Integrated Wideband Communications System, the Southeast Asia link in the Defense Communications System.



The Signal Corps' branch insignia. Included among places you'll see it is on Signal officers' uniform lapels. When it's in color, the red flag with white center is on the right side; when subdued (such as in a uniform patch), the darker flag is on the right side.

Today, communications systems and facilities are still evolving as the Signal Corps continues the commitment to its Regimental insignia's motto, "Pro Patria Vigilans" (watchful for the country). A major program in 1988 was the initial production and deployment phase of the mobile-subscriber equipment system. MSE, along with other innovations, in LTG Bruce Harris' words, "exemplify the dynamics of ... [the Signal Corps'] ever-increasing mission and responsibilities in supporting our Army. The professional challenge these initiatives represent is not new to our Signal Corps. Our history is dominated by rapid change. ..."

As in the past, the Signal Corps (Regiment) "will continue to ... [meet] these challenges with distinction."

Signal Regiment

Out of the Signal Corps – which was at the time 126 years old – was created the Signal Regiment. The corps still exists as the larger entity, the Army branch. Laid over the corps is the veneer of the Regimental system, which established a Regimental adjutant, insignia, coat of arms, motto and Regimental home base. The Regimental system also provided for honoring people who serve the Regiment in exemplary fashion through the honorary colonel/sergeant major/warrant officer and distinguished member of the Regiment awards programs.

The Signal Regiment was activated June 1, 1986, as a component of the U.S. Army Regimental System. The USARS concept was approved in 1981 by the Army's chief of staff "to provide the soldier with a continuous identification with a single regiment and to support that concept with a personnel system that would increase a soldier's probability of serving recurring assignments with his regiment."

The need for such a system derived, at least in part, from the Army's traditional manning system. While the American Army over time has been successful in fostering individual enterprise and self-confidence, it has had less success, according to Russell Weigley in *History of the United States Army*, "[i]n instilling group



The Signal Regiment's Distinctive Unit Insignia, commonly called the Regimental crest.

cohesion that will hold squads, platoons and companies together under pressure. ..." Learning from the past, in the early 1980s the U.S. Army conceded there was a definite problem and developed the USARS concept, labeled in December 1982 as "the new manning system." Under NMS, soldiers were to be assigned to regiments and remain there throughout their careers.

The USARS concept, as set forth in Army Regulation 600-82, includes the total Army. It stipulates that all soldiers, with certain exceptions, are to belong to a regiment/corps. The USARS concept provides:

- The opportunity for long-term identification with a regiment/corps;
- The potential for recurring assignments within a regiment/corps; and
- Chances to further emphasize the history, customs and traditions of the regiment/corps.

In addition, USARS offers soldiers regimental affiliation, thereby permitting the continuous association or identification with a combat-arms regiment, combat support/combat service support or special branch throughout their careers. Under the system, CS/CSS/special branches operate on a "whole-branch concept as a corps, but within the corps or special branch, carrying on the activities and traditions of a regiment."

USARS outlines a "regimental plan," which includes:

- Location of a Regimental home;
- The Reserve Components;
- Regimental accouterments;
- Regimental colors;
- A "regimental marketing plan" to educate soldiers about the regimental system and to keep them abreast of regimental activities, events and the historical importance of the regiment as well as its honorary positions;
- A "plan for providing CS/CSS/special branch/engineer soldiers the potential to serve recurring assignments based upon geographical locations, regional basing, branch units or associations with combat-arms units"; and
- A training-base plan providing regimental colors to training units.

According to the affiliation policy, each CS/CSS/special branch/engineer officer and enlisted soldier becomes automatically affiliated with his/her respective Regiment/special branch "upon graduation from a branch/MOS-producing school."

A few months after NMS had been "born," the Army tasked each CS/CSS branch chief in March 1983 to design a regimental system best meeting each branch's needs and requirements. Signal's initial concept – and USARS as a whole – stalled when the Army directed that no action be taken on any CS/CSS branch initiative. It wasn't until two years later – in June 1985 – that Training and Doctrine Command directed the Signal Center to develop a regimental implementation plan for the Signal Corps, rejecting the Signal Center's 1983 concept of nine Signal regiments created along nine functional lines. The Army's CSA had lit a fire under USARS again, instructing that 13 CS/CSS regiments be implemented during fiscal year 1986. The Signal Center submitted its plan of one regiment aligning with the whole-branch concept to TRADOC Aug. 19, 1985.



The Regimental coat of arms. The Regiment's motto, "Pro Patria Vigilans" (Watchful for the Country), can be found on both the Regimental crest and coat of arms.

Aspects of the Signal Center's proposal included:

- Designating Fort Gordon, Ga., as the regimental home base;
- Making no designation for a geographic home base;
- Developing regimental colors and a crest;
- Naming an honorary colonel of the Regiment and an honorary sergeant major of the Regiment; and
- Selecting a distinguished member of the Regiment.

In January 1986, the CSA approved the Signal Corps' regimental plan. Events then moved quickly. The regimental colors and distinctive insignia were approved March 5, 1986. Then, as authorized under General Order 21, the Signal Regiment and regimental program were activated June 1.



**CSM Cecil Miles, the first
Regimental command
sergeant major.**

The Signal Corps was one of the first CS branches to activate its regiment. The event, coupled with a change-of-command ceremony, officially was celebrated at the Signal Center June 3, 1986. At that ceremony, MG Thurman Rodgers, commander of U.S. Army Signal Center and Fort Gordon, became the first Chief of Signal under the Army's new regimental system before relinquishing command of the Signal Center to MG Bruce Harris, who then assumed the office of Chief of Signal.

CSM Cecil Miles, who participated in the Regimental activation ceremony, became the command sergeant major of the Signal Corps and, as such, was the first noncommissioned officer to perform regimental sergeant major duties.

In addition, a regimental march written by SSG Johnny Seay, a member of Fort Gordon's 434th Army Band, was played publicly for the first time.

As part of the regimental plan, the Signal Center's two training brigades officially were reflagged or redesignated Sept. 23, 1986. The 1st Signal School Brigade and 2d Signal School Brigade became 15th Signal Brigade and 29th Signal Brigade, respectively. The 29th Signal Brigade was later inactivated under School Model 89.

Under the regimental system, the director of OCOS (formerly the proponent office) became the regimental adjutant. The regimental adjutant, as authorized under AR 600-82, is responsible for monitoring and maintaining "the health of the Signal Regiment." The adjutant directs and/or participates in activities promoting the regimental system and fostering the Signal soldier's affiliation with the regiment (for example, liaison with units, regimental-association programs, guest speaker, rites-of-passage activities, continental United States and outside CONUS visits to major Signal Regiment elements).

In essence, the regimental adjutant serves as the spokesperson for the Chief of Signal concerning the Signal Regiment. As MG Leo Childs, former commander of the Signal Center, said, the adjutant is "... responsible for all administrative procedures for the Signal Corps regimental system throughout the world. That means wherever the Army is, there's a Signal soldier. The job of the regimental adjutant is to support that soldier."

Other components of the regimental plan are:

- Certificates of affiliation for all Signal soldiers;
- Regimental briefing classes for precommand and advanced NCO course students;
- The Chief of Signal Regimental Awards Program (Regimental impact award, Chief of Signal plaque, Regimental fellowship award and certificate of achievement);
- The lineage-and-honor book including each Signal organization's distinctive unit insignia and lineage-and-honor certificate;
- The Signal officer's basic course rites-of-passage ceremony, an event in which graduating second lieutenants are granted acceptance into the Signal Regiment; and
- The lieutenant's register for newly inducted Signal officers.

The Regimental NCO, who works in OCOS' Regimental Division, administers most of these programs. Each program is intended to foster esprit de corps, unit cohesion and affiliation, stability, commitment and a sense of appreciation of Signal Regiment history – all vital elements in the USARS concept and its overall goal of increasing combat effectiveness.

Regimental Division

OCOS' Regimental Division was created to carry out the "marketing" part of the Regimental plan. The division educates soldiers and officers about the Signal regimental system.

Regimental Division also manages the Chief of Signal's awards and recognition programs; publishes the Regiment's quarterly professional journal (***Army Communicator***); and develops and maintains the Regimental history resources and archives via the command historian and Signal Museum. Regimental Division's chief is also the Chief of Signal's liaison to the SCRA.

Other responsibilities for the division are:

- Providing Reserve Officer Training Corps units, U.S. Military Academy and Command and General Staff College Regimental support – including ROTC summer camps;
- Designing and overseeing development of new Regimental products;
- Representing the Regimental adjutant at meetings, conferences and working groups;
- Preparing communications for the Chief of Signal;
- Administering the "Go Signal" marketing initiative to cadets and youth; and
- Serving as the Chief of Signal's liaison for the Regimental Hall.

As I mentioned, the Regimental NCO is part of Regimental Division. The NCO's responsibilities include:

- Managing Chief of Signal awards program and honorary and distinguished member programs;
- Maintaining historical files of each color-bearing Signal unit;
- Maintaining Regimental leaders and sergeants major photo galleries;
- Delivering monthly Regimental briefings to basic and advanced NCO courses;
- Assisting soldiers in receiving their Regimental affiliation certificates;
- Maintaining a database of Signal unit commanders/honorary members/distinguished members/Chief of Signal and fellowship award recipients; and
- Fabricating memorabilia for presentation by the Chief of Signal to visiting dignitaries.

Confusion remains over obtaining **Army Communicator**, as the magazine was once part of the membership benefits when SCRA organized. After a time, **AC** became part of the Regiment's official Army publications; it has nothing to do with SCRA membership now and must be requested separately. Subscriptions are free. (See the magazine's website at <http://www.gordon.army.mil/AC/> for information on how to subscribe.)

The quarterly magazine:

- Promotes the professional development of Army communicators and automators by publishing technical and doctrinal information relating to the Signal Regiment;
- Presents new ideas, concepts and trends in communications, electronics, automation and visual information;
- Shares lessons-learned and "good ideas"; and
- Is available on the worldwide web as well as in print.

The Regimental Division's historical and archival arms are the command historian and Signal Museum. The command historian publishes the annual Signal Center historical report; manages historical archives of reference materials and donated collections; and answers historical inquiries and requests for information on the Signal Corps, Army and military.

The Signal Museum's mission is to function as a permanent historical and educational institution at Fort Gordon, providing training and education to soldiers and their family members and to the general public on all aspects of Signal Corps history; the development of Fort Gordon and vicinity; and the U.S. Army. The museum is also responsible for recommendations concerning the preservation, protection, development and enhancement of historical buildings, monuments, works and sites throughout the Fort Gordon military reservation.

The Signal Museum is located in Conrad Hall, adjacent to Signal Towers. Conrad Hall is also the home of the national SCRA office, as well as serving as the Regimental Hall.

The Regimental Hall is a meeting place for conferences, awards ceremonies or other special events, and it serves as the information hub for the yearly Signal symposium. Included in the hall are the Regimental lounge and Mallette Room.

Chief of Signal Regimental Awards Program

Part of Regimental Division is the Chief of Signal Regimental Awards Program; Signaleers go to SCRA for awards recognition when they actually should investigate the lesser-known (and free) Regimental awards program. This section of the article outlines the Chief of Signal's program, which is the "official" awards program; the next section presents SCRA and its awards program.

The Regimental awards program is designed to foster esprit de corps and contribute to the Signal Regiment's cohesiveness. This is done, in part, by recognizing the exceptional performance of individuals who merit special commendation from the Chief of Signal. The Chief of Signal may approve awards based on his/her personal observations or on a commander's or supervisor's recommendation. (See [related article](#) for "how to request a Chief of Signal Regimental Award.")

The Regimental NCO, as I mentioned, administers this program. There's no cost associated with any of these awards.

There are six types of awards/recognition:

- Regimental impact awards are unique mementos presented by the Chief of Signal as “on-the-spot” recognition for outstanding performance or achievement;
- The certificate of achievement (Fort Gordon Form 6723-1) is used to recognize outstanding achievements relative to the Signal Regiment’s mission. The certificate recognizes achievements of a lesser degree than required for the Chief of Signal plaque or Signal Regiment fellowship award;
- The Chief of Signal plaque is awarded to deserving individuals based on recommendations from commanders/supervisors citing outstanding achievement or recognition for special projects relevant to the Signal Regiment’s mission. The Chief of Signal plaque isn’t to be used as an end-term-of-service, permanent-change-of-station, retirement or any other official Army award;
- The fellowship award is designed to recognize people not affiliated with the Regiment. The requirements are the same as the Chief of Signal plaque, but the award isn’t normally presented to Signal personnel;
- The honorary member of the Regiment program recognizes soldiers and other individuals who have contributed to or served the Regiment in some way, but they aren’t members of the Regiment. People who have been recognized as Signal Regiment honorary members include foreign allied exchange/liaison officers and NCOs who have been assigned for duty at the Signal Center, non-Signal Regiment soldiers and service members of our sister armed forces; and
- Distinguished members of the Regiment, who are prestigious or notable military or civilian people recognized for their accomplishments. They must be current or former members of the Signal Corps/Regiment. Nominees (anyone can nominate, but the Chief of Signal selects) may be active-duty, Army Reserve, Army National Guard or Signal Regiment Department of the Army civilians (active or retired status). Designation as a distinguished member of the Regiment is largely ceremonial and serves to perpetuate the history and traditions of the Regiment, thereby enhancing unit morale and esprit.

The honorary colonel, honorary warrant officer and honorary sergeant major of the Regiment are distinguished, retired Signal Regiment special appointees who simultaneously become distinguished members of the Regiment when appointed to their honorary positions. These appointees serve a three-year tour and participate in command and award ceremonies, speaking engagements at dinings-in and other functions that help bridge the gap between the past and the present. When their honorary appointment term ends, they remain lifetime distinguished members.

SCRA

The Signal Corps, Signal Regiment and Regimental Division are all part of the “official Army.” SCRA, on the other hand, is a private, nonprofit organization affiliated with the Regiment. SCRA provides an opportunity for Signal officers, warrant officers, enlisted members and civilians – whether affiliated with the Active Component, Army Reserve or National Guard – to help preserve for posterity the proud heritage of the Signal Regiment and of Signal units throughout the world. Through direct financial support, the association enhances the Regiment’s educational and recreational value and thus ensures the lessons of history and the Regiment’s proud traditions aren’t forgotten by future generations.

The Network, SCRA’s quarterly newsletter, helps educate members and preserve the Regiment’s history, as well as inform members about Regimental events. Articles on SCRA chapter activities, unit activities, Signal history, SCRA awardees, chapter-contact information and corporate-member information are included. ***The Network*** is mailed directly to current SCRA members.

One of the most visible “arms” of SCRA, however, is its award program for its members and volunteers. There are five awards (Brevet Colonel, Silver Order of Mercury, Bronze Order of Mercury, Silver Wahatchee and Bronze Wahatchee):

- The Brevet Colonel Award recognizes non-government civilians who have supported and contributed to the Signal Corps’ enhancement. Membership in SCRA isn’t required for the recipient of this award;
- The SOM is the higher of the two-level Order of Mercury award. SOM recognizes individuals who have demonstrated conspicuous long-term contributions to the Signal Regiment and SCRA. Membership is required for this award;
- The BOM is presented to individuals who stand above their peers in their contributions to the Signal Regiment and SCRA. A minimum one-year membership requirement prior to award submission is expected;
- The SW award is presented to volunteers who demonstrate long-term support to the Signal Regiment’s soldiers. Membership in SCRA isn’t required; and
- The BW award is for volunteers who show outstanding support to the Regiment’s soldiers. Membership in SCRA isn’t required.

I hope this helps distinguish among corps, regiment, Regimental Division, SCRA, the Chief of Signal Regimental Awards Program and SCRA’s awards. To quickly recap, affiliation into the Signal Regiment comes with completion of the officer, warrant officer, NCO or enlisted Signal branch or MOS-producing course. Functional-area officers from other branches may also choose to affiliate with the Signal Regiment. Honorary and distinguished members are awarded as a part of the Regimental awards program. SCRA membership is open to anyone who has an interest in supporting the association’s mission. There is a membership fee to become a member of this private organization, and membership is required for Order of Mercury awards.

Ms. Tuschen has been SCRA’s national manager for four years. She was an Army captain, serving eight years. Also an associate consultant with Booz Allen Hamilton, she holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees in computer information systems from St Norbert College and Boston University, respectively.

*Portions of this article were excerpted from **The Concise History of the Signal Corps** and from the Regimental Division webpage, www.gordon.army.mil/ocos/rdiv/.*

Acronym QuickScan

AR – Army regulation

BOM – Bronze Order of Mercury

BW – Bronze Wahatchee

CONUS – continental United States

CS – combat support

CSA – Chief of Staff of the Army

CSS – combat service support

MSE – mobile-subscriber equipment

NCO – noncommissioned officer

NMS – new manning system

OCOS – Office Chief of Signal

ROTC – Reserve Officers Training Corps

SCRA – Signal Corps Regimental Association

SOM – Silver Order of Mercury

SW – Silver Wahatchee

USARS – U.S. Army Regimental System