



(U//FOUO) Birth of the Cryptologic Support Teams

FROM: John E. Hill
Future Operations Branch, Office of Military Integration (S13)
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A quick look at how it all happened... (U)

(C) S13 has a long history of providing warfighter support to deployed areas, some extremely dangerous. In early 2004, S13 had about 60 civilians and military deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Horn of Africa. These individuals were deployed primarily as tactical Cryptologic Support Groups, the usual configuration of NSA deployments since the Balkans Conflicts of the mid-late 1990's. At the time, however, we may have taken for granted how important and effective our teams have been in helping win the war on terrorism and the war in Iraq. That case was made quite clear to our office when, in March of 2004, the US Army came to Fort Meade requesting an increased SIGINT capability in the field. The concept that was born of these discussions was the Cryptologic Support Team (CST).

(S) The Army wanted an increased capability for national SIGINT within their division-level units scattered across Iraq. At the time, NSA elements were mainly concentrated at the corps or headquarters levels, providing SIGINT to the Army and Special Operations commands within Iraq and Afghanistan. As a result of these rumblings in the Army, Dr. Eric Haseltine began a long TDY documenting the realities and needs of tactical SIGINTers waging the war in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

(S) Dr. Haseltine observed that while the JTFs* and Marine Corps units were in excellent shape, the Army division-level units were lacking the tools and training to even know they needed additional SIGINT capability. The reality was clear: NSA needed to help the Army do a better job in pushing SIGINT from the national level down to the tactical. MG Quirk proposed that CSTs augment the Army's SIGINT capability for two years, at all of their divisions in Iraq. The Army accepted and the CST program was created.

(U//FOUO) The initial discussions on how NSA would build this capability were heated. Where would we get the people? How would we establish secure communications at multiple sites? Could NSA take on the responsibility of training an additional 25 deployers every six months? These were legitimate concerns, but through the heated debate and discussion a plan began to emerge. While S13 would still solicit volunteers from NSAW and the Extended Enterprise, we also made the case to the Cryptologic Centers that their active support was an outstanding way to get into the fight.

(U//FOUO) Over the course of the next four months, NSA teamed with the all of the Cryptologic Centers to develop a deployment plan. The CC's were to provide the bulk of the personnel for the teams, while NSAW would provide the training, funding and "ringers" -- seasoned deployers who had previous experience. As the deployers began to arrive at NSAW, they were in-processed and scheduled for training.

(S) All deployers were given a two-month training program, consisting of GEO Boot Camp, in-depth analytical training within the [MOC](#), small arms training, and NBC* training. Additionally, those deploying as Officers-In-Charge visited CENTCOM* headquarters and NSA/CSS Georgia (nee GRSOC) for in-person consultations and training with regional experts. At the end of the two months, our teams were ready to go. Their deployments were staggered over several weeks to lessen the strain on forward elements in Qatar that were providing the bulk of the logistics support.

(U//FOUO) Our first deployments occurred in August of 2004 and went off without a hitch. In our office's experience of deploying hundreds of NSA personnel since the Balkans Conflict, it was

without a doubt the smoothest we had ever witnessed.**

(U//FOUO) The result has been nothing but praise by US Army field commanders and a tremendous increase in our capabilities to support and protect the warfighter. So much so, that two additional teams have stood up since the original four teams formed in August of 2004. Our CSTs have been lauded by Army units consistently since their inception. They have been responsible for countless mission successes and have been a major factor in saving American lives and defeating terrorists and former regime elements throughout Iraq.

(U) We have many personal successes as well. We have seen one Bronze Star awarded and countless Joint Service Commendation medals and cash awards for the many military and civilian personnel who have deployed to the region.

(U) I was proud to be a part of this initiative but the real credit goes to all the people who made the deployment possible, and to the troops and civilians who went to a war zone for six months and made our whole agency look great!

* (U) Notes:

JTF = Joint Task Force

NBC = Nuclear, Biological and Chemical

CENTCOM = Central Command

** (U//FOUO) It is important to note how many moving parts were involved in setting these teams up. The training portions alone demanded the coordination of several major elements of the Agency including Q (Associate Directorate for Security and Counterintelligence), SID/Counterterrorism (S2I), GEOCELL, [MOC](#), [COBRA FOCUS](#), NSA/CSS Georgia, NSA/CSS Representative (NCR) CENTCOM and [Army TCAE](#). The NSA Deployment Center, in coordination with NIST (National Intelligence Support Team) and NCR CENTCOM Forward, was able to deploy 25 people (on top of the usual 10) in the space of 30 days! Sure, there was the occasional error or mistake in the deployment process, but to almost triple your usual output in a space of 30 days with little or no disruption is a credit to the skill and competency of our soldiers and civilians who make up the agency workforce.

(U) See other recent articles about CSTs:

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