



Signal Corps milestones

By Steven J. Rauch

The announcement that LTG (P) Dennis L. Via has been nominated for promotion to the rank of general marks an important milestone in the history of the U.S. Army Signal Corps.

LTG Via's promotion will make him the highest ranking Signal Corps officer in the branch's 152-year history. Once promoted, LTG (P) Via will join the ranks of three other Signal officers who broke through a general officer rank barrier during the course of Signal Corps history.

After the founding of the branch in 1860, 20 years elapsed before the founder of the Signal Corps Albert J. Myer achieved the rank of brigadier general on 16 June 1880.

Twenty-six years later, Adolphus W. Greely attained the rank of major general in 1906. He went on to assume command of Army organizations outside of the Signal Corps. In 1958 a Signal officer advanced to the next level when MG James D. O'Connell, who had become the 19th Chief Signal Officer in 1955, attained the rank of lieutenant general, 52 years after MG Greely's achievement.

The position of Chief Signal Officer remained, however, a two-star billet. The post held by the Army's chief communications officer would not permanently attain a three-star rank until its designation as the assistant chief of staff for information management in 1984. Since 1958, due to numerous reorganizations of U.S. Army force structure, it has long been a possibility that a Signal officer

would achieve the rank of four-star general. Now some 54 years after the first Signal Corps lieutenant general was appointed; an exceptionally distinguished Signal officer will attain the Army's highest current rank.

As the commanding general of U.S. Army Materiel Command, LTG (P) Via will become the senior logistician for the U.S. Army, a position for which he has been prepared in his capacity as AMC deputy commanding general since 1 May 2011.

As commanding general, his duties will encompass a broad array of responsibilities ranging beyond dealing primarily with Signal-related issues.

Given this historic event, it is worth studying those officers who attained each general officer rank for the first time as well as the organizational changes which paved the way for the next rung which LTG (P) Via will attain upon his promotion to general.

BG Albert J. Myer

For many years Albert J. Myer was the only officer and member of the organization known today as the Signal Corps. On 27 June 1860, Myer was appointed to the position of Signal Officer of the Army (a staff position akin to that of Army G-6 today) by President James Buchanan.

At the time, the Army authorization documents reflected only one position for a Signal officer, thus Myer was truly a "Signal Corps of One." During the first half of the Civil War, additional personnel were obtained for Signal duty through a branch detail of

officers and Soldiers from infantry, artillery, and cavalry regiments to serve as "acting" Signal officers, sergeants, and Soldiers. However, this detail system made for a very uncertain structure.

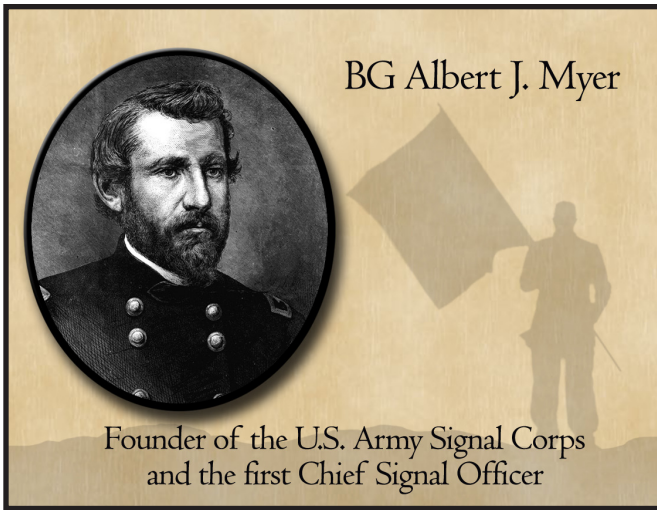
Finally in March 1863, Congress passed legislation to authorize a separate and distinct structure for Signal Corps personnel, to include authorizing the senior position of the branch to be titled Chief Signal Officer, with the rank of colonel.

For a brief period during the Civil War, Myer held the position as colonel under a recess appointment by Congress. However in 1863 he was relieved from the position by Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton for failing to obtain authorization to hire licensed civilian telegraphers for the Signal Corps.

When his commission as colonel expired without action, Myer reverted to his permanent rank of major, while other officers assumed the duties and position of Chief Signal Officer. After the Civil War when the Army reorganized in 1866, Congress authorized a small Signal Corps.

Myer solicited the support of LTG Ulysses S. Grant, then commanding general of the Army, for reappointment to the Chief Signal Officer position. Myer was reinstated in 1866, and held the position at that rank until the twilight of his career.

Historical records, however, reflect Myer using the rank "Brevet Brigadier General" on correspondence throughout the period. He did so because he had been awarded the brevet rank on 13 March 1865 for organizing and training



the men of the Signal Corps during the war. The award of a brevet accorded officers permission to wear and use that rank in correspondence. But they continued to be paid at their lower permanent rank. Thus documents signed by Myer during his career reflect his status as a brevet brigadier general, and he was referred to as "General Myer" by officers and Soldiers.

In 1880 the U.S. Army reorganized again and as a result several branch chiefs' positions were increased to the rank of brigadier general. War Department General Orders No. 57, dated 2 July 1880, authorized a Signal Corps budget of \$375,000 for Fiscal Year 1881, added 50 privates to the force structure, and increased the rank of Chief Signal Officer to brigadier general.

Thus Myer was promoted to the rank of brigadier general with an effective date of 16 June 1880. Unfortunately, Myer did not enjoy much time to savor the accomplishment due to his death from nephritis on 24 August 1880 at the age of 51.

MG Adolphus W. Greely

Beginning with his service as a volunteer Soldier during the Civil War, Adolphus W. Greely established a stellar career as one of the few officers serving in the post-war Signal Corps. From 1866 to 1887 Greely proved himself to be a diligent, adaptable and demanding leader. His most notable exploit was his arduous mission to conduct weather research in the Arctic Circle as commander of a 24-man expedition from 1881 to 1884. Despite the terrible hardships and the loss of 19 of his men, LT Greely brought back all of the expedition's records containing important meteorological observations. In June 1886, at the age of 42, he was promoted to captain in the Regular Army after serving 19 years as a first lieutenant. Upon the death of Myer's successor BG William B. Hazen in 1887, the well-

known Greely received the coveted appointment to Regular Army brigadier general and the position as Chief Signal Officer of the U.S. Army in March 1887. For the next 19 years Greely would enthusiastically lead the Signal Corps during a challenging Army paradigm shift from a continental focused organization to that of an expeditionary Army of a growing international power.

Greely's performance as Chief Signal Officer during the Spanish-American War established his reputation in the minds of the nation's leaders, particularly President William McKinley and his successor, President Theodore Roosevelt. Thus on 10 February 1906, President Roosevelt promoted Greely to major general making him the first Signal officer to achieve that rank. He was then assigned to command the Department of the Pacific, one of several geographic commands of the U.S. Army, with responsibility for command and control of all Army units and organizations within the area. This promotion marked a milestone for an officer who had spent almost his entire career within a technical service but who was seen as possessing the universal qualities required to command one of the Army's geographic areas.

Greely had barely pinned on his second star when he was presented with the challenge of the great San Francisco earthquake on 18 April 1906 which devastated that city. As department commander, Greely was responsible for the recovery and relief efforts, to include the repair and restoration of communications systems.



MG Greely

To accomplish this mission he made use of one of the Army's first automobiles to enable faster hauling of supplies, food, the sick and wounded and anything else that needed to be moved.

Greely was subsequently assigned as commander of the Northern Division and ended the Ute Rebellion in 1906 without bloodshed. His final assignment was command of the Department of the Columbia.

Thus Greely proved to be a leader far beyond the traditional role of a Signal officer. Greely retired from the Army in 1908 and enjoyed a long and productive retirement. On his 91st birthday, 27 March 1935, he was awarded a special Medal of Honor for his many contributions to the nation during his long career. He died on 20 October 1935 at Walter Reed Hospital and was

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buried with full honors at Arlington National Cemetery.

LTG James D. O'Connell

In May 1955 MG James D. O'Connell assumed the position of 19th Chief Signal Officer of the U.S. Army. O'Connell was a 1922 West Point graduate who was commissioned into the infantry. After initial assignments to posts in Michigan, O'Connell attended the Signal School at Camp Alfred Vail (later Fort Monmouth) N.J. Upon graduation in June 1925 he was assigned to duty with the 35th Infantry as the regimental communications officer (S6).



LTG O'Connell

He later was assigned to the 24th Infantry but in December 1928 he returned to the Signal School as an instructor. On 31 May 1929 he transferred to the Signal Corps. In August 1929 he entered the Sheffield Scientific School at Yale University where he graduated with a Master of Science in communication engineering in 1930.

During the 1930s and 1940s, O'Connell served in a variety of assignments related to communications technology at the Signal Corps laboratories at Fort Monmouth. In 1941 he was appointed head of radio communications projects in the office of the Chief

Signal Officer in Washington, D.C. During World War II he served in the Signal section of the headquarters 12th Army Group as the chief communications officer (G6).

After the war he became director of the Fort Monmouth laboratories until 1947 when he was appointed as the signal officer (G6) of the Eighth Army in Korea until 1949.

Upon his return from Korea he served as the deputy Chief Signal Officer from 1951 until 1 May 1955 when he became the 19th Chief Signal Officer.

On 11 July 1958 he was selected for promotion to lieutenant general, the first Signal officer to ever hold that rank.

After his retirement in April 1959, O'Connell spent several years as vice president of the General Telephone and Electronics Laboratories in California. In 1964 he joined the staff of President Lyndon B. Johnson as the special assistant to the president for telecommunications and director of telecommunications management in the Office of Emergency Planning. He died in July 1984 and was buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Army Reorganizations Pave the Path to four-Stars

In the early 1960s Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara directed a thorough review of the Army's organizations and staff relationships.

This resulted in a significant reorganization approved by President John F. Kennedy in 1962 that enacted major shifts in tasks performed by the Army staff and the previously stove-piped organized technical services. In an effort to centralize personnel, training, research and development, and supply operations, most of the technical services were abolished.

The positions of the Chief Chemical Officer, the Chief of Ordnance, and the Quartermaster General completely evaporated. The Chief Signal Officer and the

Chief of Transportation continued to perform their duties, but as special staff officers instead of branch chiefs.

Later the Chief Signal Officer obtained a seat on the Army Staff, but was called the Assistant Chief of Staff for Communications-Electronics beginning in 1967.

From 1967 until the present, the Army staff position continually changed names, among which were Director of Telecommunications and Command and Control (1974-1978); Assistant Chief of Staff for Automation and Communications (1978-1981); Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans (Command, Control, Communications, and Computers) (1981-1984); Assistant Chief of Staff for Information Management (1984-1987); Director of Information Systems for Command, Control, Communications and Computers (1987- 2002); and Chief Information Officer/G6 (CIO/G6) (2002 - present).

Generally the officers holding this position were lieutenant generals, beginning with LTG Thomas M. Rienzi in 1972. On occasion, however, non-Signal officers would be assigned to this position, thus it was not exclusive to the Signal Corps.

For a short time in 1987, the Signal Corps had six lieutenant generals in various positions throughout the Army. These included LTG Thurman D. Rodgers (ACS for Information Management); LTG Emmett Paige, Jr., (CG, U.S. Army Information Systems Command); LTG Vaughn O. Lang (Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Mobilization Planning and Requirements, OSD); LTG Clarence E. McKnight, Jr., (Director, C3 Systems/Director Joint Strategic Connectivity Staff, JCS); LTG James M. Rockwell (Deputy Director, NATO Communications Information Systems Agency - Outgoing) and LTG Robert J. Donahue (Deputy Director, NATO Communications Information Systems Agency - Incoming).

This constellation of lieutenant

generals reflected how the special leadership skills of Signal general officers were recognized by the nation's leaders and entrusted with positions of responsibility far beyond those of just Army communications.

The road to the next level – four-star general – became possible due to the 1962 reorganization. Most of the functions of the Signal Corps transferred to the US Continental Army Command and to two new commands, the Army Materiel Command and the Combat Developments Command. The impact for the Signal Corps was that the CDC became responsible for Army doctrine; CONARC took over schools and training; and AMC acquired authority for research and development, procurement, supply, and maintenance. Under AMC all Signal-related research, development and acquisition was organized under a sub-command which would evolve through time to become the Communications – Electronics Command or CECOM as it is known today. Thus the commander of CECOM, a major general command, could eventually attain the experience and leadership proficiency which could be applied across the wider scope of the AMC mission. Consequently, a former CECOM commander could advance to become a higher staff officer within AMC or potentially, the AMC commander. Thanks to the 1962 reorganization, a former CECOM commander, LTG (P) Dennis L. Via has now advanced to the point where he will achieve command of an organization he knows well, the Army Materiel Command and thus he will attain the rank of four-star general.

LTG (P) Dennis L. Via

Unlike the predecessors mentioned here, LTG (P) Via's career reflects that of primarily a Signal officer in training and assignments through lieutenant general. Myer had once been an Army surgeon, Greely had once been an infantry Soldier, and O'Connell had been commissioned as an infantry officer. LTG (P) Via is a 1980 graduate of the ROTC program at Virginia State University and has attended the Signal Officer Basic and Advanced Courses, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, and the Army War College. His assignments began in January 1981 as a signal platoon leader in Company A, 25th Signal Battalion. Following completion of the Signal officer advanced course in March 1986, he was the Chief, Switching Section, Operations Branch and later Aide-de-Camp to the Chief of Staff, Allied Forces Southern Europe in Naples, Italy.

LTG (P) Via served as the Operations Officer, J-6, for the Armed Forces Inaugural Committee from June 1988 to March 1989 and then became the assignment officer for Functional Area 49 (Operations Research/Systems Analysis) at the U.S. Army Personnel Command. Following attendance at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College he served as Assistant Division Signal Officer, 82d Airborne Division and then S3 and XO for the 82d Signal Battalion at Fort Bragg, N.C. He would later command the 82d Signal Battalion from July 1996 to July 1998. Upon graduation from the US Army War College in 1999, LTG (P) Via became the Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff, G-6, III Corps at Fort Hood, Texas and in June 2000 assumed

command of the 3d Signal Brigade. From there Via returned to Washington DC where he served in the Army G-8 and then as Director, Global Information Grid Operations/Commander, Defense Information Systems Agency and Global Operations/Deputy Commander, JTF-Global Network Operations, DISA. He was promoted to brigadier general in that position on 1 January 2005.

In August 2005 LTG (P) Via became com-



LTG(P) Via

mander of the 5th Signal Command/Deputy Chief of Staff G-6, U.S. Army Europe and Seventh Army. During his next assignment as the CG U.S. Army Communications-Electronics Life Cycle Management Command, he was promoted to major general on 2 June 2008. LTG (P) Via was promoted to his present rank on 3 August 2009 when he became Director for C4 Systems, J-6, the Joint Staff. In May 2011 he assumed his current position as Deputy Commanding General/Chief of Staff U.S. Army Materiel Command at Redstone Arsenal, Ala.

As LTG (P) Via breaks new ground as a general and commander of AMC, he will no doubt illustrate to the entire Army the superb leadership skills that members of the U.S. Army Signal Corps have been fortunate to have been associated with since his first day in the Signal Officer Basic Course in 1980. Whatever legacy he leaves as a general will become an integral part of Signal Corps history alongside that of Myer, Greely, and O'Connell. He is no doubt up to the challenge. Good luck, LTG (P) Via!

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