

# Letter to the Editor

Feedback



Editor,

*I heartily concur with LTC (ret) Fiedler's letter to the editor published in the Spring 2013 edition of Army Communicator and can illustrate the validity of what he advocates regarding radio-education knowledge. During my own Coast Guard Reserve deployment at the SPOD in Kuwait a number of years ago I served as the assistant landside security officer in a Navy command that had responsibility for overall security at the port. While my primary responsibilities centered on the active duty Navy masters-at-arms who were assigned to me, I worked closely with my O-3 counterpart in the National Guard unit also assigned to the SPOD in order to provide effective landside force protection coverage at the facility. This combined FP force performed typical physical security tasks such as staffing entry control points and providing roving patrol services through quick reaction force assets throughout the areas of the port complex that we were charged to oversee and defend.*

*At one point during my deployment, the VHF communications frequencies on which the ECP and QRF personnel operated became intermittently unusable at various times of the day and in different areas of the port. The dead spots did not always occur at the same locations on the port or at specific times of the day. There were some observable trends (e.g. degradations at times during environmental events like sandstorms or during general times of the day such as afternoon periods), but the trends were not consistent ones. Since the VHF communications were a critical part of the FP posture of the landside security personnel, this problem needed to be resolved.*

*I should note that I was not a trained communications officer -- though I did serve as one previously in a Coast Guard port security unit. When I assumed that role, I realized that I needed to gain knowledge that I expect would be familiar to junior officer and enlisted personnel who go through single-channel radio coursework at the Fort Gordon schoolhouse or similar training venues. Port security units are provisioned with maritime VHF radios as well as SINCGARS-capable VHF radios in their standard tables of equipment. Because at that time the Coast Guard had no formal single-channel radio school identified for PSU communications officers, I took upon myself the task of learning all I could about VHF ops -- radio theory, antennas, radio wave propagation, and other radio-centric topics that would enable me to do basic communications officer tasks (e.g. selecting the proper antennas to use in base stations, understanding how environmental conditions would affect communications in a port area, ensuring that sufficient frequencies were requested for upcoming operations). Along the way, a Coast Guard colleague recommended that I become a licensed amateur radio operator in order to gain the theory and practice knowledge that would serve me well in my role as a communications officer. I did so and benefitted greatly from that decision during my PSU communications officer tenure.*

*In the SPOD-communications situation, I gained enough communications-related knowledge during my self-study and time at the PSU to begin asking basic questions: what type of radio system -- trunked or stand-alone repeater -- was the security force using? How far did the signal have to travel from the hand-held radios and vehicle radios to the repeater(s) that were being used? What did the coverage pattern/envelope from the repeater(s) look like and was that coverage sufficient for the needs of the SPOD operators? During the process of answering these questions with Navy communications personnel from my unit, S-6 representatives at the SPOD, G-6 staff members in the area, and the designated commercial hardware vendor in Germany who had the contract for units in Kuwait, I determined that the SPOD was located at the fringe of the coverage area produced by respective trunked-repeaters utilized at the SPOD and that the problem would be resolved by procuring a non-trunked repeater through the Army's supply channels. The hardware was procured, installed, and the problem was indeed satisfactorily resolved.*

*My experience drove home to me the importance of the type of radio-related knowledge that LTC Fiedler discussed in his letter. I'm sorry to say that while the S-6 and G-6 were quite capable in computing hardware and networking-related topics, they really couldn't help much in the radio domain (especially the propagation-related questions I had). Unfortunately, the only useful information I was able to obtain was hardware-specification information for the trunked system components utilized in the region and the contact information for the vendor-representative in Germany. The rep was quite helpful but I really wished at that time that my S-6 and G-6 co-workers had the answers to my questions.*

*I strongly urge the curriculum manager at the schoolhouse to take heed of the LTC Fiedler's advice in order to give S-6 and G-6 staff members who must support their respective commands the tools they need to have. Computer-based solutions are important in the communications domain, but they are not sufficient tools for the professional Signaleer to provide a complete communications solution to supported commands.*

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