Training 26Ys to meet a growing need

by
Lt. Col. William F. Brierly

PROBLEM: The field is only at 43% to 50% of its authorized 26Y strength. The Strategic Satellite Communications Ground Station Equipment Repair Course (26Y) is running triple shift training and has a maximum output of 200 students annually.

This problem has been a constant challenge in the satellite repairer area for the following reasons: DA figures indicate 25% to 33% of the 26Ys leave the service annually; industry is willing to pay trained repairers top dollar; the 26R (operator) was deleted from all TDAs and replaced by the 26Y; cost and density of equipment plus a minimum number of instructor personnel have limited school output to 200 students per year; and course length, while shown as 40 academic weeks, generally runs closer to 54 calendar weeks. Turnbacks, holidays, and hospital are major factors in the extended length.

With the field planning major upgrades in both technology and a drastic increase in the number of new SATCOM Ground Terminals being fielded, it became apparent that something has to change. A DA/TRADOC meeting was held in April 82 at the Signal Center. There was a series of solutions presented, but most required an extensive lead time for procurement of equipment or building construction. Living within the current available facilities became a goal. The question then became one of "how to train the maximum number of students in the shortest period of time."

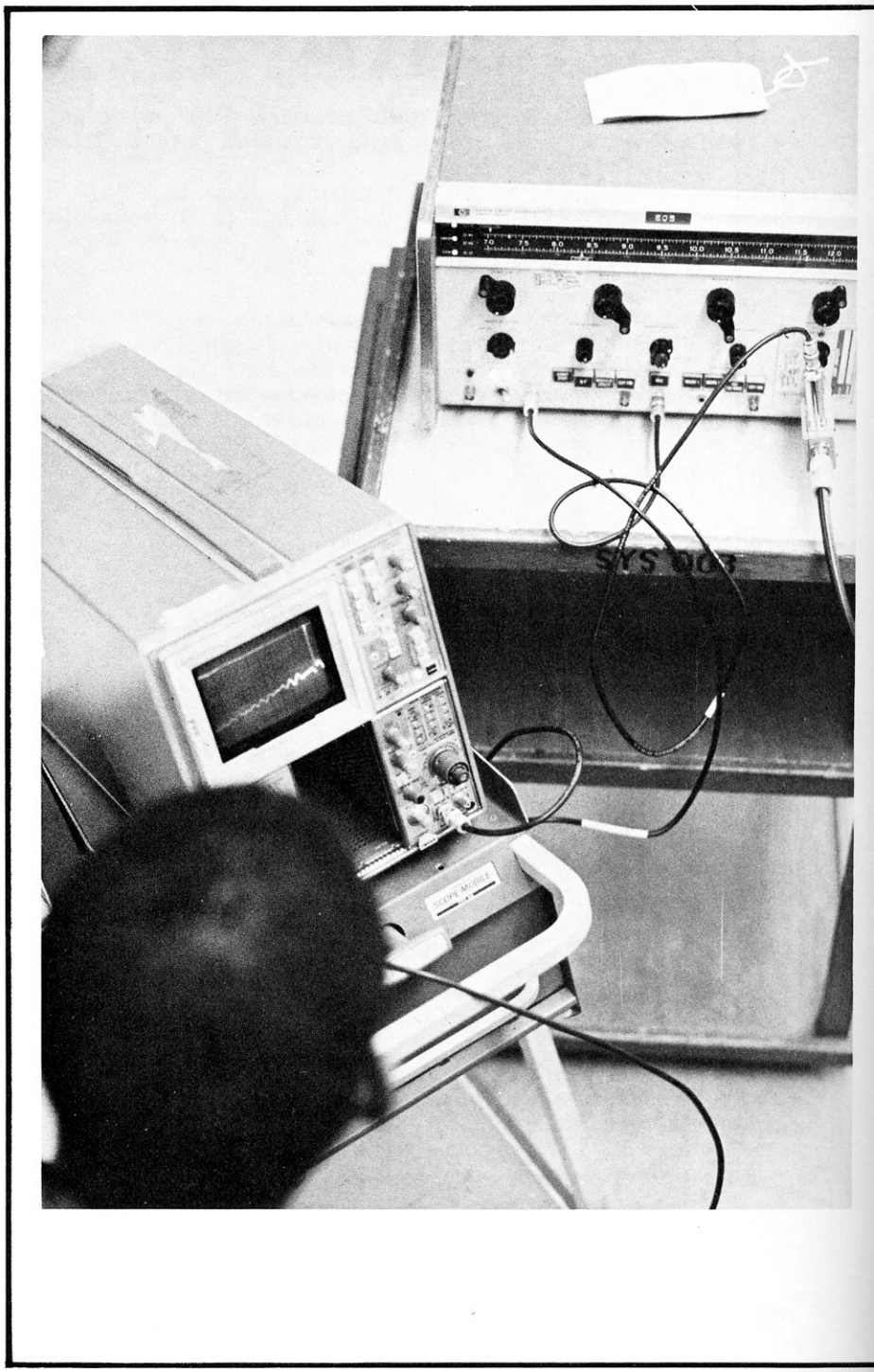
SOLUTION: Assignment Oriented Training (AOT).

If the student can be identified, by name, as going to a specific SATCOM Ground Terminal then we could train him only on that particular terminal. There are some major advantages associated with this concept. Principally, it trains more students in a shorter period; secondly, those trained are not quite as lucrative to industry. It also generates some major disadvantages. The 26Y is not as versatile as past graduates. DA MILPERCEN must manually track the individuals to insure they arrive at the proper site and, secondly, return to Fort Gordon for follow up training as a 26H20. But the concept requires additional instructors, and that requirement places the field in a further stressed position. Additionally, it requires that the equipment used for training at Fort Gordon be maintained at almost 100% availability. The disadvantages are actually problems that had to be overcome before any training changes were made. They were tackled one at a time.

The 26Y10 students are trained on a specific ground terminal, but they first receive basic electronic theory and satellite communications principles. The first 18 weeks of the current POI would remain intact. When the students are in the 16th week of training, a by-name list of students would be furnished to DA. They would then provide the Signal Center with assignment instructions for each individual. That assignment determines what items of equipment the student would then be trained to repair.

Academic failure rules were changed only slightly. Within the first 18 weeks, marginal students can be academically eliminated. After the 18th week, if they fail a portion of the course they will not receive a diploma, but instead they will receive a certificate of attendance, which outlines their weak areas. Administrative and UCMJ actions remain the same. DA MILPERCEN agreed to manually track the students in this program and insure they return to Fort Gordon for 26Y20 training before any further field assignment.

The field agreed to live with an increased shortage of 26Ys by sending qualified technicians to serve as instructors. The price tag was high (approximately 50 individuals), but, with a little shrewd brainstorming, we were able to minimize the loss of 26Ys in the field. The first portion of 26Y training uses the same theory and equipment as the Strategic Microwave Repair Course (26V). The decision was made that 30 of the 50 instructors would be experienced 26Vs and, therefore, only 20 experienced 26Ys would be required. With enough lead time (60 to 90 days) these 50 experienced technicians would become effective instructors.



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Maintaining the equipment at a near 100% operational status is and will remain a constant challenge. The current items used include some trainers; however, most equipment is identical to that used on active sites. Active sites place the equipment on the air, and it generally sits there and cooks until something goes wrong. Training equipment, however, gets pulled, probed and tweaked a minimum of three times each day. This constant training stress drastically increases the equipment failure rate. The supply system, while workable for most normal operations, does not lend itself to the fast response required. The answer is to have the part on hand, but how do you do that if it's not demand supported. Through a TRADOC sponsored meeting, DA DCSLOG, DARCOM, and USACC agreed to use exceptional measures to improve repair parts status. A special technical assistance repair team from the USA SATCOM Agency, Fort Monmouth, N.J., was sent to Fort Gordon. Utilizing some $76,000.00 worth of spare parts and two weeks time, this team brought the satellite equipment up to a near 100% operation. The same approach is currently in progress for the trainers. We realize that this is only a snapshot in time and that equipment status changes daily, but with the entire system mobilized to provide support, equipment operational time will improve significantly.

The bottom line is: high cost in **terms of people, dollars, parts and time. Will it work? It must! What is the end result? From 200 graduates this year to 394 graduates next year.**

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