

Beware the wrath of COMSEC

by CW2 Thomas D. Holmes

COMSEC or Communications Security is a commodity used by many but understood by few. Briefly, COMSEC is the protection resulting from the application of cryptosecurity, transmission security and emission security measures to telecommunications along with the application of physical security measures to COMSEC information. These measures are taken to deny unauthorized persons information of value which might be derived from the possession and study of such telecommunications.

COMSEC material may range from an FOUO training key list to TOP SECRET key cards for an AUTOSEVCOM circuit. In the past, COMSEC material was very limited in scope and relatively few people were involved with its handling and use. These personnel were highly trained and few problems or insecurities occurred.

With new state-of-the-art design, however, COMSEC equipment is appearing in many new areas. This large proliferation of equipments and associated COMSEC aids is greatly increasing the

number of personnel who now have access and control over COMSEC material. In fact, the number of COMSEC accounts in the Army has more than doubled to over 1,800 COMSEC accounts and over 3,300 COMSEC sub-accounts.

By regulation, an individual was designated as a COMSEC Custodian as an additional duty and formal training was not required. The formal enlisted training of COMSEC clerks was eliminated in the early 1970's, and the COMSEC training received by officers was only in the form of overviews rather than the detail needed to properly handle and account for the material. COMSEC training was being conducted at Ft Devens, Massachusetts, for COMSEC inspectors and at Bad Toelz, Germany, for COMSEC custodians; however, this training was limited in scope. With COMSEC state-of-the-art quickly bypassing the skills of the untrained personnel handling it, COMSEC insecurities became the rule rather than the exception. In 1981, for example, there were over 1,300 reported

COMSEC insecurities. The causes of these insecurities — poor judgment and lack of experience — have always been a concern to those of us who work with COMSEC. The Department of the Army recognized the problem, and in April 1982, the Director of the Army Staff directed that the HQDA ODC-SOPS coordinate the establishment of a standardized course of instruction for COMSEC custodians. An initial conference, hosted by DA and attended by elements of the MACOMs, was held to establish training objectives, course duration and training philosophy. The establishment of a standardized course of instruction for all COMSEC custodian personnel was the unanimous recommendation of all attendees. Such a course was to produce qualified and officially certified custodian personnel and to be offered at several locations.

The Signal Center was identified as the proponent for COMSEC accounting training, and in November 1982 the first working group met to assist in developing the program of instruction and to review available lesson plans.



The working group consisted of members of the MACOMs, HQ FORSCOM, HQ TRADOC, HQDA National Guard Bureau, HQ Intelligence and Security Command (HQ INSCOM), HQ Communications Security Logistics Activity (USACLSA), HQ 66th MI Gp, and USASC&FG. The group met again in July 1983 and established a task cluster annex for the Standardized COMSEC Custodian Course.

In December 1983, the Warrant Officer Division of the C-E Leadership Department at Ft Gordon was tasked to write and prepare the lesson plans and visual aids for classes to begin in April 1984. The Warrant Officer Division under the supervision of Chief Warrant Officer Larry Donaldson and Project Officer Alan Steves, completed the training material in March 1984. The working group had also identified that the Standardized COMSEC Custodian Course should be taught at Bad Toelz, Germany; Yong San, Korea; Ft Huachuca, Arizona; Ft Devens, Massachusetts; the National Guard Facility at Little Rock, Arkansas; and WEST-

The first class of the Standardized COMSEC Custodian Course (left) graduated 13 April 1984. Since then, additional classes have graduated, and the training of instructors for the satellite schools continues.

COM, Hawaii. Complete training packets were completed and forwarded as instructors were trained. The training received at satellite locations is identical to that received in residency at Ft Gordon. Therefore, the certification of COMSEC Custodians is standardized.

The first class of 20 students graduated on 13 April 1984 and included members of the COMSEC school staff at WESTCOM and Bad Toelz. Three additional classes have been completed, and the training of instructors for the satellite schools continues. Currently, TB 380-41 and AR 380-40 state that COMSEC Custodians should be school trained or receive formal OJT before appointment. AR 380-40 is being rewritten to state that before becoming a COMSEC Custodian, an individual must be certified by the Standardized COMSEC Custodian Course either at Ft Gordon or one of the satellite schools. Project Development Identifier Code E1 has been approved to identify trained officers/warrant officers and enlisted personnel until an Additional Skill Identifier (ASI) for COMSEC Custodians can be established. Once established, TOEs and TDAs will be changed to reflect an ASI where a COMSEC account exists.

Those individuals eligible for the Standardized COMSEC Custodian Course are enlisted members E-5 and above, civilians GS-4 and above, and warrant or commissioned officers. Training is for active duty as well as Reserve and National Guard components. The individual must be programmed for assignment as a COMSEC Custodian or alternate, COMSEC Officer or COMSEC inspector. A security clearance of SECRET is required, and the individual must have twelve months retainability in a long tour and 9 months in a short tour assignment. Individuals in short tour areas should be identified as soon as possible and trained at satellite locations. However, until the satellite courses are operational, anyone meeting the prerequi-

sites may attend in residence at Ft Gordon. The scope of instruction will include safeguarding and destruction of classified COMSEC materials; documenting reports; and establishing, transferring and closing COMSEC accounts. It will also include threat and security awareness programs, COMSEC emergency procedures, accounting and all major duties required of COMSEC Officers, Custodians and Inspectors. The two week course is scheduled to be given 20 times a year at the Signal Center in addition to the classes at the satellite locations. Individuals desiring training should contact their unit training NCO and submit a DA 4187, Request for School Quota.

Attendance at the course will help the Custodian educate the user and bring COMSEC out from behind the "Green Door", thereby greatly increasing our security readiness. The only mistakes that will not be tolerated are those which arise from ignorance.

