

Where Do We Go Now

After three years of planning and prep, the merger of 46Q and 46R into 46S, Public Affairs Mass Communication Specialist, is here. Having enlisted as a 46R to continue my passion for radio broadcasting, this benchmark fills my mind with memories of that small blue AFN Wurzburg on-air studio and remote broadcasts in communities scattered throughout the Bavarian region of Germany.

Understanding the merger doesn't mean the end to all the tasks and opportunities associated with the two former MOS's, my thoughts jump to that January 2015 OCPA working group during which we voted for the merger. Discussion that week centered on Army-wide force reductions that included cuts to brigade and division public affairs and sliced some SRC's from the inventory. As we discussed the reductions, it quickly became apparent that Army public affairs would again need to adapt.

From the Army's earliest days, commanders realized the need to communicate with the American public. After Congress denied his request for a small traveling press that would follow his headquarters, General George Washington used parades and troop inspections to show the gathered crowds that the Army was comprised of their sons, they did not pose a threat to colonials, and that the Army was prepared to defend them. These public displays also provided stories for the newspapers and regional magazines scattered throughout the colonies.

Advances in technology and increased media access to battlefields from the Civil War through the Philippine-American War forced commanders to adapt to the changing communication environment and to be more aware of their dealings with the press. Moves toward a formal Army public affairs function picked up steam in the early 1900's as William Howard Taft, then-Secretary of War, started regular engagements with the press, often turning them into formal briefings. Then, in 1904, the Adjutant General's office issued the first press release, and in 1917 Newton Baker, now the Secretary of War, assigned Major Douglas MacArthur as head of the newly established Army Press Release Office at West Point.

The skills traditionally associated with 46Q and 46R took shape between the two world wars as part of Army efforts to educate and indoctrinate Soldiers, manifesting in a variety of brochures, camp newspapers and Army indoctrination videos. World War II saw further advances, including the establishment of the London edition of *The Stars and Stripes*, the Army's newsmagazine *Yank*, and the Armed Forces Radio Service, with our expertise in journalism related skills blossoming through U.S. operations in Korea, Viet Nam and the Cold War. Technology, global operations and the worldwide web continued to shape those enlisted skills right up to that 2015 decision.

As was obvious to those of us in that OCPA working group, those traditional skills remain vital and we cannot let them fade. That said, recent and pending force structure changes, advancements in mobile technology, the ever-growing American information space and the need to operationalize public affairs dictate that we use those skills judiciously as part of deliberate communication strategies. Further, the merger requires us – now more than any other time in our history – to focus on training, dedicated organizational training time that ensures our multi-functional public affairs Soldiers maintain the print, photo and video expertise needed to tell the Army story.

Continue to champion the profession!

*Note: Historic elements of public affairs referenced are from *Raising Our Voice: A History of Public Affairs, 1775-1980**