



Fort Stewart/Hunter Army Airfield complex, the U.S. Army's premier heavy force power projection platform on the East Coast, is home to the most highly trained and rapidly deployable mechanized force in the world - the 3rd Infantry Division (Mechanized), the "Iron Fist" of the XVIII Airborne Corps. In February, 2003—only weeks prior to onset of the war in Iraq—the Stewart/Hunter complex deployed Amcom's automated Smart Speech™ Morale Call system for use by its deployed soldiers. The system handled more than 55,000 calls during its first six weeks of operation.

KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH THE FOLKS BACK HOME

The telecommunications center at Fort Stewart is no stranger to the power of a database-driven directory system. In 1999, it began using an automated directory attendant system provided by Amcom through a partnership with General Dynamics Network Systems. The system enabled Fort Stewart to reduce its number of switchboard operators while providing faster, more accurate service to callers.

When Amcom announced a sweeping new call processing technology—speech recognition—Fort Stewart wanted to know more. And after hearing about Amcom's Smart Speech Morale Call application, Fort Stewart was prioritized for early implementation under the PM DCS-CONUS upgrade effort.

The Challenge

Morale calls—15-minute phone calls that deployed soldiers are authorized periodically to make to loved ones back home—can be tricky to manage from a technical standpoint. Murray Meizlish, Telecommunications Site Manager for Fort Stewart, explains: "Soldiers overseas typically use tactical (DNVT) telephones. The keypads on these phones don't generate tones that can be recognized by standard touchtone systems. That means that soldiers had to call into a board, be forwarded to the States, get transferred to an operator, then finally get connected for their morale call."

It was a cumbersome, tedious process—and one that required a generous staffing of operators at the base, especially during wartime deployments.

The Solution

Enter Smart Speech Morale Call Manager. This new Amcom module—which integrates into the directory system already in place at Fort Stewart—takes touchtone and operators out of the equation, enabling soldiers to make their morale call connections simply by speaking to an automated line. The Morale Call Manager module took two days for Amcom to install and verify. Within a week, it was handling more than 1,000 calls a day.

"When we got the Smart Speech Morale Call system at the end of February 2003, it was a Godsend," says Meizlish. "We could let our soldiers in Kuwait and Iraq call in and just say the phone number of the person they were trying to reach."

Meizlish estimates that the Morale Call line has eliminated the need for up to four additional operators. “Before, an operator had to stand by, time each call, and disconnect it in 15 minutes. Now the Amcom system automatically breaks in with a message saying the call will end in 30 seconds.” Not only does this take the burden off the operator, it gives the soldier time to say goodbye.

How It Works

Soldiers from Fort Stewart/Hunter can use any phone or defense switch network (DSN) connection to dial the Fort Stewart automated attendant system. The system will say “if you want to make a morale call, say ONE.” It will then tell the caller to say the number he or she wishes to call. The system then connects the two parties, timing the call and disconnecting it after 15 minutes. If the speech recognition line fails to understand the soldier because of a bad connection, it sends the caller to an operator.

System performance is excellent. “Out of the first 55,000 calls, we only had one complaint,” says Meizlish. “That’s an impressive user adoption rate. I like the management controls of Smart Speech, and I like the way our soldiers can take care of their own calls without an operator.”



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