

335th Signal Command Relies on SolarWinds for Mission-Critical Network Readiness and Awareness

Headquartered in East Point, Georgia, the 335th Signal Command is one of the Army's four vital theater signal (communication) commands with soldiers from the United States Army, Army Reserve, the Active Guard Reserve and Department of the Army Civilians.

As the senior signal organization, the command is responsible for managing the telecommunications infrastructure for Southwest Asia, an area covering 25 countries, in support of the U.S. Third Army/ Army Central Command and U.S. Central Command's peacetime and contingency operations. As an operational and functional command, the 335th provides command and control to nearly Army all of the Reserve Signal assets, 80 percent of Army Reserve chemical assets, and other units in preparation for missions both home and abroad.

Network Management Challenge

The 335th's need for real-time information and communications supported by 24/7 network uptime is not only a requirement, but could mean the difference between life and death.

To effectively and efficiently oversee the command and control of the 335th's network and assets as well as reduce training time on the steady cycle of new recruits coming in, the 335th needed a network management solution that was reliable and powerful yet easy to deploy, learn and maintain.

Solution

Like many other IT professionals, former 1st Lt. Luc Roy of 335th US Army Signal Command inherited the legacy network management software keys and licensing. Fortunately, for Roy, one of the solutions in place was SolarWinds and he quickly realized its many benefits - easy to use, easy to deploy and cost-effectiveness.

According to Roy, change management is a big shortfall in military networks. Using SolarWinds Network Configuration Manager (NCM), Roy was able to simplify the management of the 335th's network configuration files with a highly intuitive web interface that offers point-and-click simplicity and easy access to configuration data.

"NCM saved the day and night in Afghanistan. Someone had restored a config back to where they thought it had come from, but they restored one from a previous year and there were enough significant changes that it took down the network," said Roy. "Using NCM, we were able to quickly and easily identify what changes had been made. Without it, it would have taken us days to restore some critical systems and determine an explanation to what happened."

Compounding the task of change management, the military is challenged by many different types of data and level of importance. With SolarWinds NetFlow Traffic Analyzer (NTA) as Roy's solution to quantify exactly how the 335th's network is being used, by whom, and for what purpose, he has been able to see exactly what dominated the network and what was being crushed by unimportant, and in some cases, unapproved traffic.

"NTA specifically helps with packet loss, and figuring out where the bandwidth choking is happening," said Roy. "Not all routers are identical, so being able to look at this router and that switch to see which one is dealing with types of packets better and being able to adjust their quality of service so that we can give voice more on this switch or that switch has been extremely helpful."

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Results

Over the years, Roy has seen SolarWinds evolve into a much more simple to use product, and after comparing its portfolio of products to some of the other tools in this field, including CA Spectrum, HP Openview and JNMS, Roy is a SolarWinds-convert.

“With all the solutions and different packages out there, you have to use two-three software applications to get all the functionality accomplished in one SolarWinds solution,” said Roy. “Even when I was supposed to be using something else, I was using SolarWinds in the background to do the real work.

“Given our network changes so rapidly and the number of new recruits, it’s a challenge to keep network engineers trained and ramp up those coming in,” Roy continued. “SolarWinds helps us to bridge the gap. By being able to map the network and visually represent what’s going on, we can bring someone up to speed in a matter of minutes versus a matter of days. From the time saved training to the time saved troubleshooting, it all means money in the tax payers’ pockets.”



SolarWinds NCM notifies users in real-time when configs change, helping to quickly determine which changes could potentially cause network issues.



SolarWinds NTA enables users to quantify exactly how the network is being used, by whom, and for what purpose.

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