



By: LTC Joshua Trimble

Being a signal Soldier can have its difficulties. What is the unscientifically calculated most heard phrase at AAR's? "Comms could have been better." The Army's communication gear, with its necessary security standards and ruggedized encasements, is not as simple as operating your smartphone. Your fate is largely sealed by entities and personnel that exist in buildings on the other side of post or out in some high plateau desert whose last time spent in the field was probably for their son's or daughter's scouting adventures.

And, if being a signal Soldier can be difficult, then it is not a stretch that leading and managing one as a S6 in your formation might be something that doesn't come natural. It can be difficult to lead and mentor a Soldier in a skill that is not your own. How do you know what to expect from an "expert" of a service you know that you need in spades but might know little else?

The answer is simple. You should expect from an S6 some of the same things you would expect from any other expert of their warfighting function. The specifics are just a little different. The S6 should be able to provide you with the services that enable mission command. The S6 should understand what their signal portion of mission command provides to operations and planning.

A shared understanding of what to expect of your S6 and what they need from you is indispensable and will undoubtedly benefit the entire formation. Some examples:

It begins with knowing what you have. No artilleryman hesitates when you ask for a roll-up of fully mission capable cannons. Aviators can tell you within split seconds of asking how many platforms and crews are ready. Infantry officers know where and how much of their formation is available. Intel officers know how many lines of unmanned aerial systems will be flying over which targets.

A Digital Battle Roster

A signal Soldier should also be able to tell you how many communications systems and their functionality within your and your subordinate formations. This requires accurate and timely reporting and tracking of the assets. It requires a status of maintenance and trained personnel. Without the ability to know this summary, usually in the form of a digital battle roster, the S6 cannot accurately provide a running staff estimate that builds an Annex H in your order, which builds into enabling operations and mission command. **Expect and require that your S6 has an accurate digital battle roster.** The implied work that goes into maintaining a meticulous digital battle roster promotes an understanding from the S6 of the communications equipment, how it works, if it is working, who are the local experts and the best way to use the assets. If your S6 doesn't know what they have, they won't know how they can support you.

Understanding Outside Support

Understanding what a S6 has to support your formation is the first step, next is understanding who outside your formation are enablers to those communication systems working. The lines between tactical, operational, and strategic do not exist in our communication architectures anymore. In order for your communications systems to work for your formation will require coordination with at least your higher headquarters. These coordinations must also be in congruence of the outside organization's normal working day. This is not foreign to the operations officer requesting land, ammo or ranges for training far enough in advance. And, it shouldn't be foreign when requesting communications support. Chances are the solution is there, but it may not be on your preferred timeline. **Expect your S6 to learn and know these important people to enable the mission, what their business practices are, and you should expect the S6 to bring that to the planning table.**

Be a Planner

A good S6 will always be at the planning table. You should expect your S6 to understand not only how communications enable mission command, but you should expect them to start to understand your warfighting functions unique capabilities and premier qualities. A good S6 provides required communications to enable mission command. A great S6 anticipates the required communications to enable mission command based upon his\her knowledge of operations. **Expect and demand that your S6 is a part of the planning process - that your S6 spends just as much time in the S3 shop as they do in their own.** Another unscientifically verified number of S6s have failed not because they weren't technically competent, but because they failed to integrate with the staff and understand operations.

A Team Player

Integrating with the staff means a good S6 knows what mission command information systems are important to which staff officers. They can prioritize efforts based upon priority of operations and understand the impact if a certain MCIS becomes unavailable. And, that integration is not limited to just handing a cable to the S2 or the fire support officer to plug into their machines. It is about verifying the service is working and the users are able to use their expertise with the connectivity of their mission command information system to defeat the enemy. If they do not integrate with the staff, they will provide just a cable and not a service. **Expect the S6 to be a team member that delivers a service to enable warfighting.**

Always be PACEing

Lastly, you should expect the S6 to use their knowledge of operations and what is available to recommend a PACE plan. They recommend, not issue, a PACE plan because that PACE belongs to the commander. It is developed from the commander's intent that drives the operations planning process. There should be a PACE to higher and a PACE to lower. Have a PACE for each warfighting function or phase of the operation is dependent upon the unit and the mission. But, a PACE is just a prayer if it is not constantly validated. **Expect that S6 to recommend a PACE, and for them to have a plan to constantly validate the PACE is still relevant and operational.** Finding out the medium that is the "A," in PACE should never happen only after the, "P," becomes inoperable.

Communications systems and the networks they transverse can be confusing, but it is well

known they are critical to winning. Commanders help their personnel get through the friction they encounter when trying to enable the commander's intent. Understanding what you should be able to expect from your team, and in this case, the S6, is the first step.

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