NGC2: Establishing a Mindset for the Next Fight

Decision dominance

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The first warning wasn't an explosion or a barrage of rockets – it was silence. Inside the brigade's tactical operations center, the hum of screens and steady chatter of data feeds faltered. The live drone video froze mid-frame; a convoy of vehicles blurred in gray static. Red icons scattered across the common operating picture like a spreading rash: "NO DATA," "LINK LOST," "AUTH FAIL."

Outside, maneuver companies were pushing into a contested zone, relying on those feeds for targeting and movement. A young sergeant in the signal section didn't wait for orders. He pulled up alternative transport options, rerouted key data packets through a mesh of vehicles on the edge of the formation, and manually authenticated sensor reports to weed out spoofed signals slipping in from the enemy. The fix wasn't perfect – bandwidth dropped, video resolution degraded, and latency lagged. But it was enough. The commander received the fire mission request in time, and friendly forces pressed forward.

What made the difference that day wasn't a shiny new piece of hardware or a flawless network; it was mindset. A Signaleer trained to expect disruption, think critically under pressure, and improvise solutions in the chaos of modern war. This kind of adaptability, resilience, and technical fluency is precisely what the Army envisions in Next Generation Command and Control (NGC2).

Defining NGC2 as a Mindset

When Soldiers hear "Next Generation Command and Control," the first image that comes to mind is often equipment: sleek terminals, resilient networks, or AI-driven dashboards. Those technologies are essential, but they are only part of the story. NGC2 is not just a kit we wait to receive; it is a mindset we must develop (U.S. Army, 2024). At its core, NGC2 is about decision dominance: ensuring commanders can see, decide, and act faster than any adversary, even in environments where communications are denied, degraded, intermittent, or limited (DDIL). Achieving that dominance requires more than advanced systems; it requires Soldiers who are trained to think critically, operate under stress, and adapt when systems inevitably fail (Rand Corporation, 2023). For the Signal Corps, this means a cultural shift. In the past, success was often measured by whether "the radios stayed green" or the network remained up. In the future fight, success will be measured by whether commanders had the right information, at the right time, to make decisions that shaped the battlefield. That shift elevates the Signaleer's role from system operator to decision enabler – professionals who bridge the gap between raw data and actionable insight (War on the Rocks, 2025).

Skills and Training Signaleers Need Now

If NGC2 is a mindset, then the question becomes: "What must today's Signal Soldiers practice now to be ready for tomorrow's fight?" The answer lies in three broad skill areas: technical fluency, cognitive agility, and collaborative leadership.

Technical Fluency Beyond Radios

Tomorrow's networks will be dynamic ecosystems connecting satellites, line-of-sight radios, cloud services, and edge devices. Signaleers need fluency in how these systems interconnect, how data moves, and how to protect that flow from attack or corruption.

Cybersecurity discipline, an understanding of application programming interfaces (APIs), and familiarity with data visualization tools will be as important as knowing how to configure a radio or lay cable. In NGC2, every Soldier is also a steward of the data itself (Alhassan et al., 2022).

Cognitive Agility Under Pressure

The modern battlefield is not neat or predictable. Enemy electronic warfare, cyber intrusions, and physical threats will constantly contest our ability to communicate. Soldiers must be trained to expect disruption and thrive in it. That means building comfort with incomplete information, developing the ability to make rapid assessments under stress, and balancing trust in automated tools with sound human judgment (RAND, 2023).

Collaborative Leadership Across MOSs

Perhaps the most underappreciated skill for the NGC2 era is the ability to collaborate and translate across warfighting functions. Signaleers must be able to explain the operational impact of technical issues to maneuver leaders, coordinate with intelligence and cyber teams on data integration, and work with sustainers to ensure the resilience of command posts in austere conditions. This requires communication skills, mission command discipline, and the confidence to step into the role of integrators, not just maintainers (Edmondson, 1999).

Training and Tools to Build the Mindset

Skills don't develop by chance; they are forged through intentional training, deliberate practice, and the right tools. Preparing for NGC2 means shifting how we train today, ensuring Soldiers are ready to operate in tomorrow's contested and data-rich environments.

Simulations That Embrace Failure

Training environments often assume systems work perfectly. To prepare for NGC2, we must design simulations where systems fail by design: comms drop, feeds are spoofed, latency creeps in, or networks are jammed. These scenarios force Soldiers to practice resilience, improvisation, and quick decision-making.

Cross-MOS Training and Exchanges

NGC2 is not the sole responsibility of the Signal Corps; it is the connective tissue between every warfighting function. Cross-training with maneuver, intelligence, fires, and sustainment units builds shared understanding of how information flows across the battlefield.

Digital Literacy and Data Stewardship

As data becomes the lifeblood of C2, Soldiers must become comfortable reading dashboards, interpreting visualizations, and spotting anomalies in real-time. Even basic exposure to data analysis and visualization tools can give a young sergeant or specialist the confidence to support commanders with insight, not just connectivity (Alhassan et al., 2022).

Leader Development for Integration

Leader development programs must encourage signal leaders to see themselves as integrators, not just maintainers. That means practicing communication with non-technical leaders, framing technical problems in operational terms, and fostering initiative when technology lags behind the fight (War on the Rocks, 2025).

Risks, Counterpoints, and Challenges

As the Army pushes toward NGC2, it is tempting to view the future as a smooth path paved by new technology. But every advance comes with friction, and every system has vulnerabilities. To prepare realistically, the Signal Corps must acknowledge the risks alongside the opportunities.

- **Overreliance on technology.** The same systems that promise faster decision-making also create the danger of dependency. Commanders must retain initiative when technology falters.
- **Pace of change versus training pipelines.** Technology often moves faster than institutional training. Adaptive, decentralized learning models will be critical.
- **Cultural resistance.** For decades, signal success was measured by "green" status icons. The shift to measuring success by decision quality will take a deliberate cultural change across the Signal Regiment. By facing these risks honestly, the Signal Regiment can prevent overconfidence, close vulnerabilities, and adapt faster than adversaries who face similar challenges.

Call to Action: Owning the NGC2 Mindset

The future of C2 will not be written by machines or software alone; it will be written by Soldiers who know how to think, adapt, and lead in the chaos of modern war. NGC2 is more than a modernization program; it is a call to the Signal Corps to prepare now for the demands of tomorrow.

Every Signaleer, from private to senior leader, has a role to play. Practicing degraded communications, building digital literacy, and learning to translate technical issues into operational impacts are not abstract goals; they are daily disciplines that sharpen readiness. Just as importantly, leaders must mentor their formations to see themselves not only as system operators, but as decision enablers who hold the keys to decision dominance.

The fight ahead will be faster, more contested, and more data-driven than any we have faced before. The Army will field new systems, but it is the mindset that will decide whether those systems are decisive or brittle. The Signaleers who can anticipate disruption, think critically under stress, and integrate seamlessly with other warfighting functions will be the ones who ensure commanders never lose the ability to command and control.

NGC2 is not waiting for us on some future fielding date. It is already here – in how we train, how we lead, and how we choose to prepare today. The question is not whether the Army will have the right equipment. The question is whether we, as Signaleers, will have the right mindset to use it.

References

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