

Activating the Army's Newest Signal Brigade

From Europe to the Pacific

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22nd Corps Signal Brigade

On Nov. 22, 2021, while our nation was steeped in a fight with COVID-19 and our military was dealing with the effects of the nation's withdrawal from a decades-long war in Afghanistan, a significant change came to Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM), Washington, and the Pacific theater.

In a small gym, with Soldiers donning face masks and few in attendance due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Army's newest signal brigade, the 22nd Corps Signal Brigade (CSB), was activated. While this small ceremony made few headlines, it was significant to I Corps and the Army's pivot to the Pacific. On that day, I Corps not only gained a signal brigade, but received the 51st Expeditionary Signal Battalion (ESB), which was realigned from 35th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade under the XVIII Airborne Corps.

The brigade was originally constituted on Nov. 14, 1945, as Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 22nd Signal Service Group, and activated one month later in Germany, where it would go through multiple deactivations and subsequent reactivations over an 80-year period. It was most recently deactivated in Germany in 2007, as the country saw the closure of multiple Army units. The brigade's activation in November 2021 was not the first time it served under I Corps and not its first service in the Pacific theater.

The brigade's first service outside of Europe came during the Korean War from November of 1951 to May of 1955, where it received multiple campaign credits during the period while assigned to I Corps. With this most recent activation, the brigade would be the first unit to be re-designated as a corps signal brigade, where it was tasked with executing command and control of expeditionary signal assets supporting United States Army Forces Command (FORSCOM), United States Army Pacific (USARPAC), and I Corps that are capable of engineering, installing, operating, and maintaining their portion of the unified network with a focus once again on the Pacific theater.

While the brigade was officially activated on Nov. 16, 2021, the activation process on JBLM began in the previous spring with the unit receiving its first members in early summer. With only 37 Soldiers on activation day and a temporary facility inside I Corps' footprint to call home, the brigade began the process to not only physically establish itself on the installation but to build relationships across I Corps, FORSCOM, the Pacific region, and the signal community.

In the first 30 months, the brigade built a unit from scratch, establishing its headquarters infrastructure along with the standard operating procedures required to conduct the normal operations of any Army unit. In addition, the brigade participated in multiple Operation Pathways rehearsals, conducted engagements with leaders around the Pacific theater and the Army, converted the 51st ESB-E, and then planned and executed its deployment to Southwest Asia as the first ever full ESB-E to deploy. Throughout this process, the brigade faced challenges that required them to lean on the skills and talents of not just its few members, but of their adjacent units, their headquarters, and the signal community at large.

As with any task, the first thing that must be done is to decide what the desired end-state is, then build a plan to achieve it. While the end-state of the 22nd CSB was a fully operational headquarters able to execute its mission, the plan to build it from scratch wasn't something laid out in any doctrine or military publication. With much to do and no checklist to follow, the best option was to build one; but with many of the personnel who possessed specialty knowledge of their warfighting functions not arriving prior to activation, the brigade had to frequently look elsewhere for assistance. The staff utilized expertise from Corps' staff, Garrison, other units on JBLM, or other CSBs to establish the foundation for how they would operate. This led to the development of an activation checklist that broke down each staff function and the actions required to be undertaken through each phase of activation. With the establishment of this foundational document, it allowed the commander to track the unit through the activation process and reprioritize different actions as the unit grew and onboarded personnel with subject matter expertise.

With the lack of doctrine available to define the activation process, had the brigade not established it as a living document from the beginning, there would be no measurable way to establish the foundation and core functions required to operate any Army unit. Following the completion of activation, this document, along with the after-action report, will be provided to the Center for Army Lessons Learned so that future activating units will have a reference point from which to start their process.

After activating in November 2023, the brigade was eager to get engaged quickly and begin contributing to I Corps, JBLM, the Pacific, and the signal community. It quickly saw the need for a CSB and an ESB to support everything I Corps and its units were doing. With

multiple Operations Pathways rehearsals, local unit training exercises, and support for training center rotations and warfighters, the need was everywhere. The problem is that with only 37 personnel at activation (one quarter of those assigned to S1), the lack of manpower and skillset didn't allow it to organically execute all its activation tasks, severely limiting its ability to plan and execute communications support for these missions. During the early months, the brigade would have to work within its limitations and use the resources available to execute both.

With a fully operational subordinate battalion with a larger staff, the brigade was dependent on their assistance along with the I Corps G6 planners to assist in mission support planning, because it lacked the expertise of the region and available personnel. With assistance from the battalion and I Corps G6, the brigade successfully integrated itself and developed an understanding of how I Corps and USARPAC conduct mission planning while still being able to conduct the activation tasks. Initially, this placed additional pressure on the battalion to bear a more significant load by operating outside their normal planning procedure. But by the summer of 2022, the influx of personnel provided the brigade with the manpower and skillsets required to no longer need external assistance and to define their internal processes that nested with I Corps.

Early on, there is always a desire to contribute as part of the team, but working within the given limitations, in this case available manpower and talent, and seeking assistance from those best positioned to help understand the environment and the process allowed the brigade to learn and build their processes with an understanding of the system they operated in.

Before you can contribute to positive change in your environment, you must understand it. Albert Einstein is known for saying, "If I had an hour to solve a problem, I'd spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and five minutes thinking about solutions."

With minimal understanding of the theater and the problem it faced, the brigade understood from its inception that it must quickly engage with every stakeholder and participate in as many engagements as possible to learn about the challenges it would be asked to help solve. Leadership from all levels of the brigade attended not just engagements within I Corps but expanded to events and activities across the Pacific theater and the Signal Regiment. Leaders from the brigade developed an understanding of the priorities of different commanders and key stakeholders that would affect the unit's operations as it continued to grow in its capabilities. Leadership attended the NETCOM Pacific Theater Synchronization Reviews to better understand the ongoing initiatives and needs affecting the strategic network in the Pacific. They participated in

the FORSCOM G6/S6 Quarterly Forum and the bi-annual G6Summit to understand the communications challenges commanders faced at the operational level. They attend the AFCEA Indo-Pacific TechNet, where leaders and thinkers from across the joint force provide insight on the challenges and opportunities in the region. These and many more events provided an in-depth understanding of the challenges not only to communications but also to the customers the brigade would be tasked with supporting.

To better understand the local JBLM community and build relationships, individuals from the brigade integrated themselves into local associations that stewarded the profession, building connections with fellow Soldiers and civilians who shared unique experiences and ideas. Leadership from the brigade helped reinvigorate the AFCEA Pacific Northwest chapter, reactivated the Mt. Rainier Signal Corps Regimental Association chapter, and served in leadership roles in the Sergeants Major Association and the Sergeant Audie Murphy Club. Additionally, the brigade created a connection with the City of Puyallup and the Salt Lake City Recruiting Battalion, giving Soldiers the opportunity to engage with the communities those areas serve and share their Army experience. Engaging early and often at all these activities, events, and engagements over the first 30 months helped prepare the brigade for the final 5 minutes, where it would now be tasked with contributing to the solution.

With the pending deployment of 51st ESB-E to Southwest Asia, leaving the brigade without any subordinate battalion, their attention now shifts to preparing for the next transition in the history of the unit. In the summer of 2024, the brigade will see the departure of almost all original members, all in key staff positions, and the departure of the commander who oversaw the reactivation. In a profession hardwired for change, the brigade will fully shift its focus away from activation tasks and continue to refine the concept for how a CSB provides support to a corps headquarters in the Pacific. The brigade's concept of support for I Corps, which will be exercised as part of Warfighter 25-02, will provide feedback directly to the Signal Corps and the Army on the best employment of the CSB and its subordinate assets in the future.

As the Army continues its pivot towards the Pacific while transforming in contact, and deploying forces to support operations around the globe, the 22nd CSB is now ready to provide trained and ready Soldiers to support whenever and wherever they are called to. With the activation behind them, the Eagle Brigade looks forward to the next chapter in its storied history, this time, with its eyes on the Pacific.