

Applying Expertise: Tankers, S2s, and Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield

by Major Chris Tatarka, Major Casey Carey, and Major Brian Poe

“There are only two results to military operations: maneuver successes or military intelligence failures.”

– A battalion task force S3,
BCTP rotation

“Hey S2, go do some of that IPB crap and tell me what the enemy is going to do!”

– A maneuver brigade
commander, JRTC rotation

Although these quotes are meant to be humorous, both frequently reflect the relationships between maneuver experts and their intelligence battlefield operating systems (BOS) counterparts. Too often, staff officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) relegate intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) to the S2. Frequently, the S2 section fails to integrate their maneuver counterparts' expertise into the IPB process. The Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) recently noted that during training at the National Training Center (NTC), “Brigade S2s generally conduct the intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) without any input from any of the other brigade staff members.”¹ Unfortunately, this lack of teamwork results in too many intelligence failures.

This article provides insight into why and how armor officers and noncommissioned officers must provide invaluable expertise to the S2 to ensure that maneuver operations, at all levels, are successful for the entire combined arms team.

Since our military decisionmaking process (MDMP) begins with the S2 representing the enemy and terrain, it is critical that other staff members provide input for the IPB process.

Seeing the Enemy

Intelligence officers learn very early in their careers that intelligence drives op-

erations, and this often-repeated phrase serves as both a motivator and a challenge for the intelligence BOS and military intelligence professionals. Being the proponent for IPB and having the responsibility of being the enemy staff expert means that battalion/brigade S2s play a critical role in the commander and staff's ability to not only see the enemy, but also to determine how to use friendly forces to defeat him.

To be an effective S2, the intelligence officer must be an excellent enemy S3 and see the battle from the enemy's perspective. Unfortunately, as numerous anecdotal war stories and CALL pamphlets note, maneuver commanders and their S2s frequently fail to gain a solid

appreciation for the enemy and see what the enemy is likely to do. As one experienced commander notes, “You have to focus on the enemy. You have to think like the enemy, and that's really the most critical piece of battle planning. But we pooh-pooh that all the time.”² Unfortunately, this often happens as a result of how the enemy is depicted by the S2 and staff during the MDMP.

Ultimately, the battalion staff is responsible for telling the maneuver commander where the task force should kill the enemy. During an attack, the staff provides a template of how the enemy will be arrayed in the defense. Conversely, during defense, the task force



4th Brigade, 85th Division (TS) Photo

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cannot defend everywhere; the S2, bolstered by the other staff members' opinions, must "put the bony finger on the map" and recommend to the commander where the task force should focus its efforts. The sequential nature of the MDMP ensures that if the S2's "bony finger" is inaccurate or his read of the enemy incomplete, the ensuing plan and execution will be corrupted from the onset. A great plan based on an inaccurate enemy course of action is likely to fail when an S2 does not have an appreciation for the enemy's capabilities in certain types of weather and terrain.

Tankers Must Help the S2 See the Enemy

Since intelligence drives operations, and units and their maneuver commanders often fail to see the enemy, then certainly the S2's ability to successfully do his job is as critical to the tankers' success in an engagement as ensuring there are enough main gun rounds on hand. However, CTC data suggest that many S3s and other staff experts are frequently reluctant to get involved in the S2's IPB process and

enemy course of action development.³ This is unfortunate for many reasons, including the S2's lack of experience and scarce manning of the S2 section.

Usually, battalion and brigade S2s have less than 8 years of experience as commissioned officers. Although some S2s have maneuver experience as a branch detailed officer, many have never actually spent any appreciable amount of time in a tank turret. However, these generally inexperienced officers are the proponents for arguably the most critical aspect of the MDMP — enemy courses of action (ECOAs).

Time hinders the S2 section's ability to devise a comprehensive ECOA. In most maneuver units, the S2 section is smaller and less experienced than the S3 section. After receiving a mission, the S2 must create a lengthy array of graphic IPB products, determine enemy capabilities and his most likely and most dangerous courses of action, develop a collection/reconnaissance and surveillance plan, and analyze and update incoming information and intelligence. If the unit is engaged in a fight, the S2 section must execute both current and fu-

ture operations with an extremely small section. It is important to note that the enemy the S2 is trying to see is not the static doctrinally bound force that too many military professionals would prefer to fight. In other words, neither their plan nor ours survives first contact with the enemy. The enemy, like our forces, will only follow his most likely COA until it becomes untenable, at which time he will audibly, based on knowledge of friendly forces through reconnaissance and tactical success or failure. This clearly requires the S2 to remain close to the current fight during tactical operations, which will hamper the section's ability to determine enemy COAs for future operational planning. Given these limitations, plus tracking enemy battle damage assessments and generating intelligence summaries (INTSUMs) for higher and subordinate units, CALL finds it miraculous that S2s can do a reasonably good job of seeing the enemy, templating his actions, and staying in the current fight.⁴

Although unit S2s can adequately tread water during operations, the idea is for the intelligence BOS to move forward — swimming into future operations. This is where the armor community can play a role. Instead of watching S2s pull out their hair and virtually drown beneath the crush of preparation for mission analysis, armor and other staff BOS experts should participate in the IPB process, just as our doctrine states.

Where S2s Need Help

At the same time the S2 section conducts its IPB, a number of subject matter experts are on hand in the tactical operations center (TOC). Tankers, engineers, and air defenders can provide valuable input into IPB and preparing ECOAs. For example, very few S2s can truly understand the impact of terrain on armor operations better than an armor officer or NCO who has spent considerable time in a tank. A quick glance around a battalion or brigade TOC will show that a number of these experts, such as battle captains, assistant S3s, and staff NCOs, are on hand. However, units fail to capitalize on the available expertise. Since S2s are the staff proponent for IPB and enemy templating, this lack of integration is often blamed on the S2. However, pointing fingers



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after the battle is lost will not turn a unit's failure into a success.

Where/How the Armor Officer or NCO Can Provide Expertise

After receiving a mission from a higher headquarters, S2s have very little time to carry out their required duties before the mission analysis briefing. IPB is a methodical, step-by-step process in which steps cannot be skipped or shortcuts taken. S2s generally know how to conduct IPB and where to save time. What does not help is a pool of experts rushing over to offer opinions about the enemy as soon as the order is received from the higher headquarters.

Instead, the armor — and other staff BOS experts — should allow the S2 the time and space to go through the IPB process. One technique that will aid the S2 section is for the staff to provide short bullet comments on a 5x8 note card or a preformatted reverse BOS worksheet to the S2 section as each staff element does its own IPB. The intent of the reverse BOS worksheet is to see the terrain and weather from the enemy's perspective, thus taking advantage of the knowledge available from the S2's peers in the TOC.⁵

The comments on these note cards or worksheets do not need to be exhaustive and need not state the obvious. Comments like, "Enemy tanks are incapable of fording the river with a depth of fifty feet," are unnecessary. It is more useful to identify any subtleties that are only apparent to an expert. A good example might be a tanker who notes in the enemy capabilities section of the reverse BOS worksheet, "because of the narrowness and shallow depth of the river at this point, the enemy will mine the potential ford site and cover it with direct fires." In the equipment/capabilities section, appropriate information may be something as simple as, "enemy tanks can't navigate through the terrain at WA123456, but recon vehicles can, and probably will, use this route. This may be a good NAI for counterrecon."

This technique works because it provides information to the S2 in a system that is both push and pull. Experts push information about the enemy to the S2. He can then use this information whenever he needs it within the methodical process of IPB. When he is ready to in-

tegrate the expert knowledge into IPB, the S2 can look at the information, analyze it, and ask necessary questions. This works far better than an expert providing information during the IPB process when the S2 is too overwhelmed to process the data. This method is also far superior to forcing the S2 to seek out the experts who have a myriad of other tasks for which they are responsible; the other soldiers in the TOC are frequently under demanding time constraints as well.

Likewise, this technique is elegant in its simplicity. It does not require lengthy briefing or discussion, but rather passes the critical, expert based, IPB information to the IPB proponent — the S2. The only challenge of implementing this system is forcing officers and NCOs to adopt this new procedure, and then ensuring that each expert develops an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their S2 sections, so that the information passed fills the gaps in the S2 section's experience/knowledge base.

The IPB process is far too important to a unit to be left solely in the hands of the unit S2. Armor units should use their expert knowledge in battalion and brigade TOCs by ensuring that IPB is done by the entire staff. Because the S2's development of an ECOA is the first critical step in developing the friendly unit plan, an error in this process corrupts the unit's entire plan and execution.

One significant way to improve IPB and ECOA development is to use the experts in the TOC to help facilitate IPB. The push/pull technique of reverse BOS worksheets or IPB note cards will go a long way in developing good ECOAs and success in planning and execution. They may also help ensure that every mission is not just a military intelligence failure or maneuver success.

Notes

¹Center for Army Lesson Learned (CALL), *TA 5.2.1 NTC Trends Compendium 3d Quarter FY 98-4th Quarter FY 99* (May 2001), online at http://call.army.mil/products/cte_bull/01-11/01-11toc.htm

²Rick Lynch, "Pick Up the Red Pen First," *66 Stories of Battle Command*, Command and General Staff College Press, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 1999.

³CALL, *TA 5.2.1 NTC Trends Compendium 3d Quarter FY 98-4th Quarter FY 99*.

⁴Ibid.

⁵CALL, *Joint Readiness Training Center Leader Training Program (LTP) Observations* (March 2001), online at <http://call.army.mil/products/newsletters/01-4/page7.htm>

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