An M109A2 Paladin crew assigned to 1st Battalion, 5th Artillery Regiment, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division cleans the gun's tube following a Table XVIII live fire event in Torun, Poland, April 2019. (Photo by MAJ Christopher Collins)

THE BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM S-2: KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR SUCCESS

BY LIEUTENANT COLONEL CHRISTOPHER M. COLLINS

Introduction

I initially drafted this article in 2019 while serving in Poland with the 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team (ABCT), 1st Infantry Division. At that time, a good friend was transitioning to a brigade combat team (BCT) S-2 position and asked me to share any insights and best practices from my experience as an S-2. I shared with him observations that focused on four critical areas for a BCT S-2:

- ✦ Intelligence systems, personnel, and architecture.
- ✦ Intelligence and fires warfighting functions integration.
- ✦ Information collection and the cavalry squadron.
- ✦ Role as a coach, teacher, and mentor.

Intelligence Systems, Personnel, and Architecture

Serving in a BCT provides a unique experience for military intelligence (MI) officers due to the complexity of the equipment used, the military occupational specialty (MOS) diversity, and the communication architecture. In 2018 and 2019, 1st ABCT was equipped with Portable Multifunction Workstations, Geospatial Intelligence Workstations, Intelligence Fusion Servers, the Tactical Intelligence Ground Station, the Intelligence Processing Center, the Prophet System, and the Trojan System. The 1st ABCT was manned by human intelligence, signals intelligence (SIGINT), geospatial intelligence, all-source intelligence, and intelligence systems integration and maintenance warrant officers, noncommissioned officers, and Soldiers. Each of these disciplines has its own training challenges, and they each have critical missions to accomplish. For me, the challenge early on was understanding unfamiliar systems that were unique to 1st ABCT.

The first of these systems was the Intelligence Fusion Server, which was fielded in a stand-alone version but also functions as a component of the Intelligence Processing Center.[1] The Intelligence Fusion Server connects laptop-style Portable Multifunction Workstations to a secure network and provides analysts with tools to conduct processing, exploitation, and dissemination of intelligence information.[2] One challenge for the BCT is ensuring that the Intelligence Fusion Server can function properly by connecting to a higher echelon's server and communicating with the BCT's workstations. Having an aggressive and innovative team of MOS 35T (MI systems maintainer/integrator) noncommissioned officers and Soldiers helps ensure the Intelligence Fusion Server is working as designed for the BCT. Additionally, field service representatives are available to assist with troubleshooting the system.

The second system I was unfamiliar with was the Prophet system. The 1st ABCT had three Prophet systems mounted on mine-resistant ambush protected all-terrain vehicles. The Prophet is a ground-based tactical SIGINT and electromagnetic support sensor system.[3] Crewmembers who operate the sensor are SIGINT voice interceptors and SIGINT analysts. Our unit's SIGINT analysis technician helped me with navigating the complexities of the brigade's SIGINT mission and equipment. This warrant officer provided the expertise and leadership needed to train our Soldiers during National Training Center (NTC) rotation 18-10, and he also enabled the brigade to complete a critical equipment readiness test while supporting Operation Atlantic Resolve.

One of the communication networks the BCT S-2 uses to receive and distribute information is the Mission Command Network, which consists of two components: the upper tactical internet (upper TI) and the lower tactical internet (lower TI).

I was familiar with Command Post of the Future and Force XXI Battle Command Brigade and Below from earlier assignments, but at 1st ABCT, the terms upper TI and lower TI were used extensively. The use of lower TI systems, such as the Joint Battle Command Platform and high-frequency radios, was very effective and became the primary communication method due to their low bandwidth capability.[4] Ultimately, the S-2 receives, analyzes, and disseminates information to enable the destruction of the enemy; therefore, they must be familiar with both components of the Army's mission command network.

Intelligence and Fires Integration

A second lesson learned for me was the important relationship between the intelligence and fires warfighting functions. Specifically, I learned three things that an S-2 must do to facilitate the targeting process:

- ✦ Know and understand the enemy's capabilities.
- ✦ Determine how the enemy will employ those capabilities in a fight.
- ✦ Conduct information collection to locate and later confirm that fires has destroyed the enemy's capabilities during conflict.

These actions are a standard part of intelligence preparation of the operational environment, but they require more analysis and integration with fires to enable the targeting process.

Any new BCT S-2 must study and understand their adversaries. This requires extensive observation of their equipment, doctrine, and tactics. I discerned quickly that the opposing force (OPFOR) 1st ABCT faced during NTC rotation 18-10 was much different from what I had encountered in my 2007 NTC rotation. This OPFOR fought in formations like the Division Tactical Group and Brigade Tactical Group. They utilized systems such as the 1L220 Zoopark-2 counter-artillery radar system and the 2S19 Msta-S 152mm self-propelled howitzer, and employed either an integrated attack or a dispersed attack.[5] Existing understanding of the systems and tactics used by the OPFOR can be lost after years of serving in a broadening assignment, so one must prepare and study well in advance of subsequent training rotations.

A comprehensive understanding of the enemy's capabilities includes knowing the maximum range of their weapon systems. For example, the OPFOR's indirect fire system, the 2S19, has a maximum range of 29 kilometers;[6] a crucial fact to know when assessing where the enemy is likely to position their howitzer batteries on the battlefield. Answering how the enemy fights will help determine what weapon systems are likely to be present during the counter-reconnaissance phase of an operation and in the exploitation force. Information collection will aid in confirming or denying the initial analysis of the enemy's course of action.

Information Collection with the Cavalry Squadron

The 1st ABCT commander emphasized the importance of using the 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment as the primary platform for information collection during large-scale combat operations. The 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment is an all-weather sensor unit whose mission is to conduct reconnaissance and security operations in support of the brigade. The unit has three troops and one tank company in its task organization. The troops are equipped with organic optic capabilities that allow them to see up to 8 kilometers from their positions when conducting a screen in unrestricted terrain (see figure). The BCT S-2 section, however, relied more on overhead sensors to meet information collection requirements, rather than using the cavalry squadron, which we endeavored to remedy through brigade-to-battalion staff training.

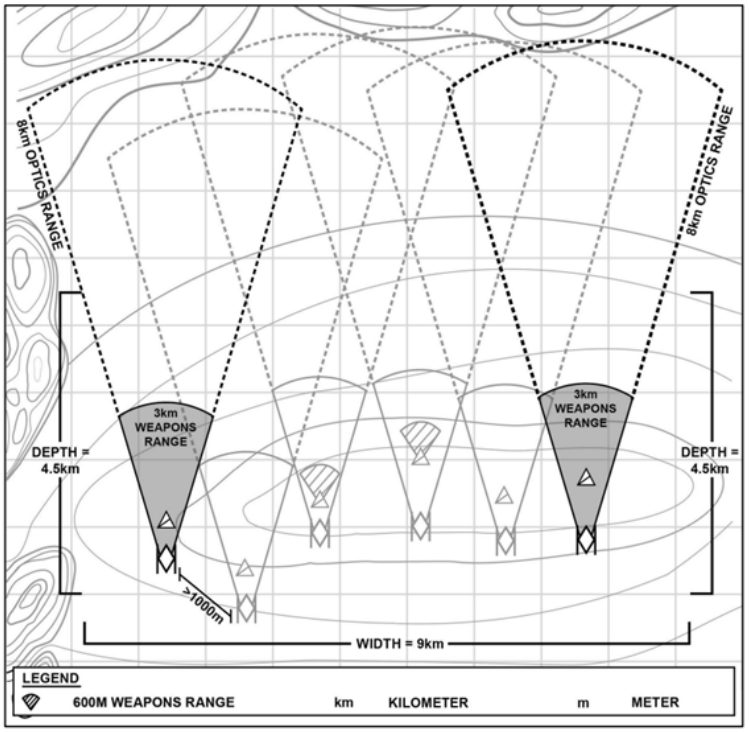

Figure. Armored brigade combat team scout platoon in unrestrictive terrain[7]

The leaders of the 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment were receptive to conducting training to increase awareness of the brigade's organic collection capabilities. During a brigade-to-battalion staff training event, the executive officer provided a capability briefing to several intelligence professionals covering the squadron's mission, equipment, and task organization as well as lessons learned from NTC rotation 18-10. Other intelligence professionals provided capability briefs to the operations officer and other staff officers on the Prophet and Shadow systems, human intelligence, and geospatial intelligence. This training event was a first step toward improving information collection processes between the cavalry squadron and members of the brigade staff and MI company.

The S-2 and S-3 for the 2nd Squadron, 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment (Tennessee Army National Guard) conducts a wargame in preparation for a combined arms live fire exercise at Bemowo Piskie Training Area, Poland, March 2019. (Photo by MAJ Christopher Collins)

Coach, Teacher, and Mentor

The fourth and final lesson learned relates to the BCT S-2's role as a coach, teacher, and mentor. I had several opportunities to experience this, the first being when 1st ABCT provided observer controller/trainer support to the 2nd Squadron, 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment's combined arms live fire exercise at Bemowo Piskie Training Area, Poland. This opportunity allowed me to work directly with a subordinate S-2 section and apply lessons learned from my experience as a battalion and brigade S-2. The undertaking was extremely rewarding, and I learned a lot in the process.

Later, I had the opportunity to work with "Hamilton's Own," 1st Battalion, 5th Field Artillery Regiment, 1st Infantry Division Artillery during their Table XVIII live fire event in Torun, Poland. This experience allowed me to observe how the battalion maneuvered their M109A2 Paladin 155mm turreted self-propelled howitzers during live fire, and it helped me understand the challenges faced by their S-2 section. At that time, I was augmenting the 1st Infantry Division Artillery, which had training and oversight responsibility over the division's field artillery battalions. This was a learning point for me as well, and it was gratifying to learn from the division's artillery commander and his staff during the live fire exercise.

The 1st ABCT Best Intelligence Team competition at Zagan, Poland, presented a third opportunity to coach, teach, and mentor. This event, named Operation Rescorla in honor of the late, retired Colonel Rick Rescorla, brought together 65 officers, warrant officers, noncommissioned officers, and Soldiers from across the BCT. It included MI, aviation, engineering, and fires personnel. The competition consisted of a land navigation course, a round-robin event for weapon disassembly and assembly, first aid, a knowledge test, radio operation, a physical challenge, and vehicle maintenance. The final event was a graded intelligence brief during which each team had two hours to analyze a scenario. This event recognized the best intelligence team of the day, and it improved intelligence teamwork across the BCT.

For recent graduates of Command and General Staff College or MI officers leaving a broadening assignment, these lessons learned will help prepare you to serve as a BCT S-2. Understanding the MI systems, personnel, and architecture will help you speak the correct language. Integrating with fires personnel and using organic capabilities will help you focus on how to find and kill the enemy. Embracing your role as a coach, teacher, and mentor will enable you to develop others and advance your professional career. Seek those opportunities whenever possible. The BCT S-2 role is challenging, yet rewarding, and it will provide valuable insights into your development as an MI leader.

Endnotes

1. U.S. Army Intelligence Center of Excellence (USAICoE), Military Intelligence Publication (MI Pub) 2-01.2, *Establishing the Intelligence Architecture* (USAICoE, 2014), 1-4. The Distributed Common Ground Station-Army intelligence fusion server enables intelligence staff to manage and replicate multidisciplinary intelligence databases. It includes a suite of core applications for analyzing and storing intelligence, as well as disseminating intelligence products to all echelons.

2. Department of the Army, Training Circular (TC) 2-19.403, *Military Intelligence Training Strategy for the Brigade Combat Team Tier 3* (Government Publishing Office [GPO], 2020), 1-7.

3. "Tactical Spectrum Warfare: Prophet Enhanced," PM Electronic Warfare & Cyber, Program Executive Office Intelligence, Electronic Warfare & Sensors, last modified August 7, 2025, https://peoiews.army.mil/pm-ewc/.

MAJ Christpoher Collins awards the Army Achievement Medal to a geospatial intellignece imagery analyst on the team winning the Best Intelligence Team competition in Zagan, Poland, June 2019. (U.S. Army photo)

Soldiers from the S-2 for the 1st Battalion, 5th Field Artillery Regiment, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division pack their equipment at the conclusion of the Table XVIII live fire event in Torun, Poland, April 2019. (Photo by MAJ Christopher Collins)

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6. Neil Ritchie, "Russian Ground Forces Receive Upgraded 2S19M1 Msta Howitzers," Land Platforms, Defence Today, August 31, 2022, https://www.defencetoday.com/land/land-platforms/russian-ground-forces-receive-upgraded-2s19m1-msta-howitzers/.

7. Figure A-1, Department of the Army, Army Technical Publication 3-20.97, *Cavalry Troop* (GPO, 2024), 112.

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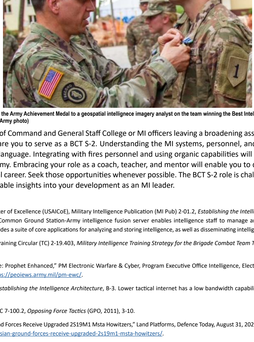

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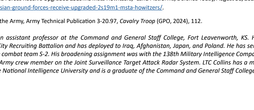

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