



Soldiers from the 328th Military Intelligence Company, Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion, 3rd Infantry Division, conduct comprehensive training on enemy prisoner of war operations during Marne Fury at Fort Stewart, GA, March 8, 2025.

Marne Fury: Modernizing Interrogation and Language Training

by Chief Warrant Officer 2
Steven Betancourt

Introduction

Human intelligence (HUMINT) collection stands as the oldest form of information gathering in military operations. Despite the military's technological advancements, the human mind remains the most complex and unpredictable element in intelligence collection. Traditional HUMINT operations often face significant challenges from a reliance on interpreters, leading to translation inaccuracies and slower intelligence collection. Marne Fury, a first-of-its-kind field training exercise that offered HUMINT collectors from the 328th Military Intelligence Company a novel opportunity to practice their interrogation skills with "enemy" role players in their native languages, addressed these limitations by integrating direct language proficiency into interrogation operations, boosting efficiency and accuracy. Marne Fury integrated HUMINT techniques with remote instruction, synchronizing interrogation operations and language training to improve operational readiness and intelligence collection.

In her 2014 co-authored study, forensic psychologist Dr. Beth H. Richardson's research demonstrated that linguistic alignment between interrogators and suspects, a technique known as language style matching, significantly improves interrogation effectiveness.¹ By mirroring interrogees' linguistic patterns, interrogators foster rapport and increase the likelihood of obtaining reliable information, especially in high-pressure environments. Military operations increasingly demonstrate that integrating language skills into HUMINT collection yields better, more actionable intelligence. Marne Fury's strategic fusion of language capabilities with interrogation techniques enhanced questioning precision, strengthened rapport, and produced more accurate intelligence under demanding conditions.

The 3rd Infantry Division developed Marne Fury to bridge the gap between theory (i.e., traditional interrogation training)

and the seamless integration of practical language skills in real-world scenarios. This exercise moved beyond theoretical knowledge by equipping Soldiers with dynamic communication skills necessary for high-stress operations. The lessons learned during Marne Fury offer military personnel and decision makers valuable insights into enhancing intelligence-gathering capabilities in complex global environments.

Modernizing Interrogation Operations

Effective interrogation operations play a vital role in military success, particularly in combat situations where timely and accurate intelligence shapes tactical decisions. Successful interrogations reveal enemy troop movements, planned attacks, and adversarial objectives. This intelligence safeguards friendly forces, identifies threats, and supports mission success.

Traditional HUMINT training typically focuses on questioning techniques, psychological strategies, and legal compliance. However, a heavy reliance on interpreters weakens effectiveness. Interpreter dependency slows information processing, introduces translation inaccuracies, and creates communication barriers. These challenges reduce the reliability and timeliness of intelligence. Marne Fury eliminated this obstacle by deploying Defense Language Institute-trained and native-speaking U.S. Army HUMINT collectors. These Soldiers conducted interrogations in the detainee's native languages, including French, Spanish, and Russian, in accordance with Article 17 of the Third Geneva Convention.² Direct communication improved rapport, enabled more accurate assessment of verbal and nonverbal cues, and increased the reliability of intelligence.

A 2021 article in the New York University School of Law's law and policy journal, *Just Security*, emphasizes the importance of rapport building through a discussion of "The Méndez Principles," the United Nations standards and guidelines governing investigations and information gathering.³ The article

argues that trust-based communication significantly improves information reliability. Marne Fury adopted these principles by prioritizing direct engagement with detainees, which improved the quality and accuracy of intelligence collected.

Marne Fury also expanded language training beyond speaking and listening skills. HUMINT collectors analyzed handwritten notes containing misspellings, slang, and cursive writing to simulate realistic conditions. This approach enhanced their ability to interpret captured documents, which play a critical role in intelligence planning and preparation.

Strengthening Interrogations Through Language

Proficiency in detainees' native languages gives HUMINT collectors key advantages that significantly enhance the interrogation process. Direct communication fosters trust and rapport, increasing detainees' likelihood to cooperate. Detainees engage more openly with interrogators who speak their language fluently rather than through interpreters, a connection that leads to more detailed and reliable information. Linguistic proficiency also allows HUMINT collectors to detect subtle nuances in speech, including tone, inflection, and word choice. These details provide insight into a detainee's credibility and state of mind. Understanding cultural and linguistic contexts helps collectors interpret idioms, slang, and dialects that might otherwise be misunderstood or lost in translation.

Eliminating the need for interpreters during Marne Fury reduced the potential for translation errors and biases. HUMINT collectors communicated directly with detainees, ensuring accurate and secure exchanges. Real-time direct questioning, with no translation delays, allowed HUMINT collectors to respond dynamically. They immediately followed up on statements, probed inconsistencies, and adapted their approach based on detainee responses. This agility is a critical enabler in high-pressure situations, where timely intelligence drives tactical and strategic decisions.

Enhancing Language Training Through Immersion

Marne Fury enhanced language training by immersing participants in real-world scenarios. Traditional military language programs rely on classroom instruction, memorization, and scripted conversations. These methods establish basic skills but fail to replicate combat stress and unpredictability. Marne Fury introduced immersion by requiring HUMINT collectors to apply their language skills under pressure. Participants operated in authentic scenarios that reinforced vocabulary, improved fluency, and strengthened their ability to interpret regional dialects and slang.

Marne Fury also introduced a new standard of realism in interrogation training. Traditional exercises often treat detainee handling as a secondary element, simplifying language barriers by using English as the default *lingua franca*.

In contrast, Marne Fury fully replicated real-world conditions. Participants conducted interrogations in a simulated division holding area that mirrored actual deployment settings. Role players acted as enemy prisoners of war, introducing unpredictability and challenging HUMINT collectors. By interacting with native or fluent language speakers in enemy prisoner of war roles, participants strengthened their language skills without fallback options.

Improving Intelligence Collection and Analysis

The direct use of language skills during interrogations significantly enhanced intelligence collection and analysis during Marne Fury. Without interpretation delays, HUMINT collectors responded quickly, probed deeper into detainee statements, and uncovered unexpected revelations. Linguistic proficiency enabled Soldiers to accurately interpret slang, idioms, and cultural references. This skill improved the precision of intelligence assessments and reduced the risk of miscommunication. Marne Fury demonstrated that integrating organic language capabilities into interrogation teams streamlined intelligence collection, making it more efficient and accurate.

Army doctrine highlights the value of deploying HUMINT collectors fluent in local languages.⁴ The doctrine indicates that language proficiency strengthens rapport with detainees, leading to more reliable and actionable intelligence. Marne Fury proved this concept by demonstrating that direct communication enhances both intelligence quality and collection speed.

Department of the Army Support

The Department of the Army Counterintelligence and Human Intelligence Staff Element, also known as the DA G-2X, played a critical role in Marne Fury's success by supporting the Language Infused HUMINT Training pilot. This pilot program paired U.S. Air Force Language Enabled Airman Program, or LEAP, scholars with 3rd Infantry Division HUMINT collectors. The LEAP scholars provided native-language expertise, enhancing the realism and effectiveness of interrogations.⁵

The Language Infused HUMINT Training also partnered with the California Army National Guard to deploy mobile language labs equipped with commercial internet capabilities. These labs allowed HUMINT collectors to receive remote instruction from professors specializing in Russian, Spanish, and French through The Unconventional Training on Request (TUTOR) platform.⁶ This continuous language development strengthened Soldiers' skills throughout the field exercise.

The TUTOR program demonstrably improved HUMINT collectors' language proficiency by utilizing a standardized language proficiency rubric and tracking collector progress across multiple interrogation iterations. Analysis of these scores revealed the following:

- ◆ **Significant Improvement.** HUMINT collectors demonstrated statistically significant improvement in their average language proficiency scores after each four-hour TUTOR session.
- ◆ **Consistent Rate of Improvement.** The program fostered ongoing language development even as proficiency increased, as evidenced by the consistent rate of improvement across multiple iterations.
- ◆ **Targeted Skill Development.** A breakdown of rubric scores revealed specific strengths in vocabulary range and accuracy, as well as in fluency and coherence. This indicates that the program's focus on the structuring of questioning, vocabulary building, and pronunciation directly translated into measurable language gains.

The TUTOR program proved especially effective in expanding HUMINT collectors' vocabulary related to military topics. Pre- and post-program assessments demonstrated a significant increase in collectors' ability to understand and utilize military-specific terminology. TUTOR professors' observations and HUMINT collectors' self-reports further corroborated this finding. HUMINT collectors consistently reported that the TUTOR program enabled them to acquire vocabulary absent from their regular language training, directly addressing a critical gap in their linguistic repertoire.

TUTOR professors noted a marked increase in collectors' confidence and fluency when communicating in the target language, particularly during the interrogation simulations. This suggests that the program fosters a more natural and intuitive command of the language, going beyond rote memorization.

The program also demonstrated the value of language exposure compared to active learning. While continued exposure to the target language in the field is undeniably beneficial, structured feedback, task-based practice, and focused instruction appear to be crucial catalysts for accelerated and sustained language acquisition. Future research should examine the program's long-term impact and explore the potential to integrate similar methodologies into future training opportunities.

The TUTOR program successfully integrated language learning with operational tasks. The results suggest that this approach enhances language proficiency and equips HUMINT collectors with specialized vocabulary and communication skills for success.

Meeting Modern Combat's Language Demands

Future military operations will increasingly require language proficiency. Military forces operating in linguistically and culturally diverse environments must communicate effectively with local populations, allies, and detainees. Language barriers delay decision making, hinder cooperation, and obstruct intelligence gathering. Misunderstandings stemming from

poor communication breed distrust and jeopardize missions. Marne Fury demonstrated that HUMINT collectors must develop language proficiency to meet modern combat demands.

Marne Fury's success highlights its potential for expansion. The Army can scale this model to other commands, tailoring language requirements to evolving mission needs. This approach offers significant applications for counterterrorism, peacekeeping, and humanitarian operations, where effective communication remains critical. Because it reduces reliance on expensive contract interpreters, the lessons learned during Marne Fury offer long-term cost-saving opportunities. By leveraging existing resources such as native-speaking Soldiers and remote language labs, the exercise minimized logistical expenses. Mobile language labs and online platforms reduce the need for costly, on-site language courses, allowing continuous training without extensive travel. This cost-effective model strengthens HUMINT capabilities without straining budgets.

Conclusion

Marne Fury modernized HUMINT training by integrating language skills into interrogation exercises. This approach improved operational readiness by enhancing communication, increasing realism, and boosting intelligence collection efficiency. Its scalability, cost efficiency, and applicability to future operations position Marne Fury as a valuable training model, ensuring military forces remain adaptable and effective in complex global environments. To maximize the benefits of Marne Fury, the Department of War should expand its implementation across multiple commands. Its cost efficiency, realism, and effectiveness make it a valuable model for joint operations, particularly in linguistically diverse theaters. 🌟

Endnotes

1. Beth H. Richardson et al., "Language Style Matching and Police Interrogation Outcomes," *Law and Human Behavior* 38, no. 4 (2014): 357–366, <https://doi.org/10.1037/lhb0000077>.
2. International Committee of the Red Cross Database, Treaties, States Parties and Commentaries, Convention (III) relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Geneva, 12 August 1949, Article 17—Questioning of prisoners, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gcii-1949/article-17>.
3. Laurel Brimbal et al., "The Méndez Principles: Building Rapport and Trust in Interrogations to Elicit Reliable Information," *Just Security*, June 15, 2021, <https://www.justsecurity.org/76920/the-mendez-principles-building-rapport-and-trust-in-interrogations-to-elicite-reliable-information/>.
4. Department of the Army, Field Manual 2-22.3, *Human Intelligence Collector Operations* (Government Publishing Office, 2006), 11-1. Incorporating administrative changes required by Executive Order 14168, effective on April 25, 2025.
5. Mikala McCurry, "LEAP: The Solution to Language, Culture Barriers in Large-Scale Military Exercises," U.S. Air Force website, October 24, 2023, <https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/3566792/leap-the-solution-to-language-culture-barriers-in-large-scale-military-exercises/>; and Air Force Culture and

Language Center, "LEAP—Language Enabled Airman Program," U.S. Air Force Air University, 2024, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/Language-studies/>.

6. "The Unconventional Training On Request," Yorktown Systems Group, 2024, <https://www.theunconventional.com/tutor/>.

References

Baker, M. *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account*. Routledge. 2006. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203099919>.

CW2 Steven Betancourt leads the human intelligence (HUMINT) analysis cell at Fort Stewart, GA. He has held various positions within strategic, U.S. Army Forces Command, and U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command assignments at multiple posts, including Fort Bragg, Fort Sam Houston, Fort Drum, and with the 3rd Infantry Division. He served as a senior instructor for the HUMINT Collector Advanced Individual Training Course at Fort Huachuca, AZ, and has completed multiple deployments, including service as a HUMINT collector, desk officer, and deputy HUMINT operations cell for V Corps in Poland.