

Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield: Company Commanders Must Do Their Part

by LTC James W. Welch and CPT M. David Riley

Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 2-01.3, *Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB)*, defines IPB as “the systematic process of analyzing the mission variables of enemy, terrain, weather and civil considerations in an area of interest to determine their effect on operations.”¹

It is a central piece of the military decision-making process (MDMP) and, when done correctly, IPB gives the commander and staff a thorough understanding of the battlefield and the enemy. As one might expect, the staff S-2 (intelligence) conducts the preponderance of work that goes into IPB and leads the other staff sections throughout the process. As such, ATP 2-01.3 states, “The intelligence staff at the battalion develops all the IPB products the company commander needs to do [troop-leading procedures (TLP)]. The commanders should not need to do any other refinement of these products.”²

For a variety of reasons, we contend that this statement is far from accurate; company commanders must refine IPB products to have a complete understanding of their area of operations. In this article, we explain why company commanders must conduct their own IPB, what they should expect from their battalion S-2 and how they can refine those products to support their mission.

S-2 section

Let us first disabuse the reader of any notion that all S-2 sections are created equally; they are not. While many military-intelligence (MI) officers have a tremendous amount of experience in combat-arms units or previously served as combat-arms officers, you may very well have an S-2 who comes from a more strategic background. If your S-2 has spent most of his or her career working at the National Security Agency or the Defense Intelligence Agency, chances are they will have a steep learning curve when it comes to tactical-level analysis. This does not mean they are incompetent, merely that their ability to conduct IPB may take time to improve. On the other hand, those S-2s with combat-arms experience should have a thorough understanding of tactics.

Compounding the problems that may arise from a lack of tactical experience, the battalion S-2 section may not have adequate manning or experienced noncommissioned officers (NCOs) to help guide the S-2 officer in charge (OIC). In addition, the S-2 section will likely have a number of new Soldiers with no experience whatsoever. Whether those Soldiers are experienced or not, they may be conducting other tasks that take them away from supporting IPB efforts. Unfortunately, it is common practice for command teams to task staff Soldiers with non-military-occupational-specialty specific tasks such as guard duty or performing as opposing forces during training exercises. This is not necessarily a bad thing but rather a reality that one must take into account when working within a staff section.

Even if a battalion S-2 section is fully manned with experienced Soldiers, NCOs and officers, time constraints may force them to focus on the battalion’s decisive operation. While they will most likely conduct IPB for the entire battalion, the level of detail and granularity may not be the same throughout the course of their analysis. This may not be the case if a unit has ample time to prepare for an operation, but it is definitely the case during hasty MDMP and more fluid situations. The priority of effort will obviously go to the decisive operation and the battalion commander’s priorities.

Company commanders must also remember the analysis conducted by battalion S-2 sections will not normally go down to the appropriate echelon needed at the company level. Battalion-level IPB will more than likely go down to the platoon level. While this may be satisfactory for the company commander to conduct TLP, it is not adequate for the squad leader. This is where the company commander’s more exhaustive analysis must come into play. The commander must take the products provided by the S-2 and refine them to the level needed by subordinates.

Intelligence products

As for the products the S-2 section should provide, ATP 2-01.3 proposes that the standard products should include:

- Enemy situation overlays and course of action (CoA) statements;
- Terrain and weather products;
- Tactical decision aids (such as the modified combined obstacle overlay (MCOO) and the evaluation of terrain effects, weather forecast/weather effects, and light-data tables); and
- Civil-consideration tools and products.³

Although this is a decent start, we believe this list is too broad and suggest it should be more detailed to ensure company commanders get the right products. First, as implied in the tactical decision aids above, commanders must receive a thorough terrain analysis in the form of a MCOO. Given the capabilities that reside in a brigade S-2 section and higher echelons, a battalion S-2 should provide company commanders with detailed analysis of the terrain from geospatial experts. While the battalion analysts may start their analysis using analog products such as acetate and overlays, they must also provide company commanders with more technical products.

The same can be said for weather products because the weather officer on the brigade staff should provide very detailed weather analysis to the brigade's subordinate units. This analysis must describe the impact weather events will have on both friendly and enemy capabilities. Simply cutting and pasting the weather forecast for the local area is inadequate for a commander and is unacceptable.

Personnel roles

Second, when evaluating the enemy threat, the S-2 section must use all the subject-matter expertise that resides within the battalion staff. While the S-2 section may be composed of very intelligent Soldiers, its IPB analysis will not be complete unless everyone on the staff contributes to the effort. For example, before finalizing threat CoAs, the S-2 should coordinate with the S-3 to ensure the proposed enemy tactics make sense. The S-3 is the tactics expert in the battalion, not the S-2. The S-2 must conduct the same type of collaboration with other members of the staff. At the very least, the S-2 should synchronize his analysis with the S-4, S-6 and fire-support officer (FSO). This will provide a complete picture to commanders about threat logistics capabilities, supply routes and threats to friendly communications, and it will help better identify high-value and high-payoff targets.

When this is done correctly, the S-2 should spell out how the enemy will operate without regard to terrain and display this on a threat template. The S-2 will then combine the information from his MCOO with the threat template to create situation templates (sitemps). There should be a sitemp for each enemy CoA. Along with the sitemp, there should be CoA statements for each CoA as well as the high-value target list. The S-2 section will provide other information based on timing and the situation. However, the aforementioned items are not negotiable, and company commanders should expect to receive them from their battalion S-2 section.

This may seem like enough information for a company commander to continue with his TLPs. However, this may not necessarily be the case. At a minimum, a company commander should review the terrain analysis provided by the S-2 section and ensure it makes sense. For example, the S-2 section may have templated key terrain that is important for the brigade or battalion but failed to indicate key terrain that is important to a company commander. Key terrain for different echelons is rarely the same. In addition, the MCOO provided by the S-2 may have incorrect or outdated information. Likewise, the civil-consideration information provided may be incomplete or altogether wrong. In sustained combat operations like those in Iraq and Afghanistan, no one will know the local area better than the company commander on the ground.

All this being said, the S-2 section will likely have a number of all-stars who truly want to help. However, unless you tell them what you need, they may not know to give it to you. Successful commanders build relationships with staff sections and explain what they need to succeed on the battlefield. Strong relationships between commanders and the S-2 encourage frank discussions about the S-2 section's analysis. With this in mind, the relationship between commanders and staff officers must be collegial and not adversarial.

Finally, combat-arms commanders must make full use of their company intelligence-support team (CoIST). These teams can be invaluable assets and can take a tremendous amount of work off the commander's shoulders. However, leaders must properly staff, equip and train the CoIST to realize the team's true potential. Do not staff your CoIST with sub-standard Soldiers or inundate them with additional duties. Work with your battalion S-2 to ensure your CoIST has the proper equipment and, if it is not already being done, ask your S-2 to help develop a training plan for your CoIST. When empowered and used properly, your CoIST will produce great results.

In closing, IPB is not rocket science, but it does take some time, energy and knowledge. With tactical expertise and an understanding of one's environment, a company commander should be able to "imagine one's self in the enemy's place" and conduct a decent IPB analysis. Remember, although your S-2 section is likely to have stellar Soldiers, it will also have impediments that get in its way. For that reason, its analysis should not necessarily be taken as gospel. Commanders owe it to their Soldiers to do their own level of analysis and refine battalion IPB products to fit their needs. Those who fail to do this will not have a complete understanding of the battlefield. Worse yet, they may needlessly endanger their Soldiers' lives and fail in their mission.

LTC James Welch serves as senior MI instructor/writer, Command and Tactics Directorate (CATD), Maneuver Center of Excellence (MCoE), Fort Benning, GA. As such, he instructs the Maneuver Captain's Career Course (MCCC), Armor Basic Officer Leader's Course (ABOLC), Infantry Basic Officer Leader's Course (IBOLC) and Officer Candidate School (OCS) students. Previous assignments include brigade S-2, 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, Fort Benning; Stability Operations Information Center director, RC-South, Kandahar, Afghanistan; division collection manager, 3rd Infantry Division, Fort Stewart, GA; and S-2/intelligence trainer, Iraqi Federal Police Adviser Team, Baghdad, Iraq. His military education includes the Air Force Command Staff College, Military Intelligence Captain's Career Course and the Infantry Basic Officer Leader's Course. LTC Welch holds a bachelor's of arts degree in political science from the University of Central Arkansas and a master's degree in public administration from Georgia State University. He is currently pursuing a doctorate degree in public policy from Auburn University.

CPT David Riley is an MI instructor/writer in CATD, MCoE, Fort Benning. There he instructs MCCC, ABOLC, IBOLC and OCS students. Previous assignments include commander, Alpha Company, 743rd MI Battalion, Buckley Air Force Base, Aurora, CO; commander, Headquarters Operations Company, 743rd MI Battalion, Buckley Air Force Base; battalion S-2, 19th Engineer Battalion, Fort Knox, KY; and OIC of CoIST/FSO, Bravo Company, 1-18 Infantry Battalion, Fort Riley, KS. His military education includes the Military Intelligence Captain's Career Course and Field Artillery Basic Officer Leader's Course. CPT Riley holds a bachelor's of arts degree in accounting and management from Wilmington College. His military awards and decorations include the Bronze Star Medal, Meritorious Service Medal and the Iraq Campaign Medal with triple bronze-star device.

Notes

¹ ATP 2-01.3, Washington, DC, Nov. 10, 2014.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.