

The Lost Art of Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield

by MAJ Joseph Byerly and
CPT Brian Harris

Proper planning for combat operations at all levels of command is vital. While adaptability within the execution phase can overcome various challenges, proper planning can reduce or eliminate some of these roadblocks before the mission commences. As Cavalry Leader's Course (CLC) instructors, the authors have noticed several trends regarding lack of mission analysis, specifically intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB), as leaders plan operations. This article will address the most commonly identified issues with the hopes of educating current and future company-level leaders as they prepare their units for the complex battlefields of the future.

Lack of IPB

IPB is the cornerstone on which our friendly course of action (CoA) is built. Failure to properly conduct IPB can result in mission failure or increased casualties. Field Manual (FM) 2-01.3, *Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield*, contains the fundamentals regarding proper mission analysis for commanders and their staffs. While a valuable resource for battalion-and-above level staffs, company commanders must also execute mission analysis as outlined within the manual.

It is important to note that the absence of a staff at the company level does not relieve the commander's responsibility to plan and resource his unit the same way a higher headquarters staff does. Company-sized elements do not require a staff, as the unit's size is within the commander's span of control; that is, one person can effectively manage the unit without the addition of a staff. The result is the commander's requirement to function as his own staff. While the company

first sergeant and executive officer assist the commander in planning, these individuals do not comprise the commander's staff at the company level, no more so than the battalion executive officer and command sergeant major function as the battalion staff.

Product development: wasted time or value added?

"I think I ran out of planning time because I was trying to get my MCOO perfect." –multiple CLC students

The U.S. military is on the cutting edge of technology and looks for ways to enhance its capabilities through use of the latest in visual systems and simulation. While these are effective in enabling leaders to visualize and describe elements of a plan to subordinates, leaders must evaluate the cost against the reward when developing briefing products. Leaders cannot focus on products for display at the expense of a properly developed plan.

At company/troop level, leaders who spend time creating products to display their analysis generally find that analysis to be devoid of real substance and relegated to "covering the bases," as opposed to adding value to the planning process. The result is, of course, time wasted on briefing products with little practical application for execution. The most common product to drain a student's time in CLC is development of the modified combined obstacle overlay (MCOO).

FM 2-01.3 states, "[T]he MCOO provides the basis for identifying air and ground avenues of approach and mobility corridors. It integrates into one overlay all obstacles to movement. ... The MCOO depicts the terrain according to mobility classification." In other words, the MCOO is a product created

during mission analysis that assists planners in depicting the effects of terrain in a single source document. It allows all participants to be "on the same page" with regard to their understanding of the terrain – as opposed to their independent assessment of the map and topography sources. However, the MCOO is not intended as a briefing tool, nor should it detract from planning through time spent on its development.

A well-done MCOO will not guarantee mission success, nor does a poorly done MCOO mean the plan is doomed to fail. At company level, leaders typically operate in a time-constrained environment. Leaders must focus their efforts on what gets them the most return on their investment. The likelihood of a well-developed MCOO being shown in a brief, or having a dramatic effect on the execution of mission tasks by subordinates, is low. Instead, leaders must use their time wisely. Evaluation of available maps, satellite imagery and other topography resources, coupled with understanding of friendly and enemy capabilities, will enable the leader to plan effectively without wasted time on slides and unnecessary map overlays.

Key terrain

"If everything is important, than nothing is." –Pat Lencioni

Key terrain, as defined by Joint Publication 2-01.3, is any locality or area whose seizure, retention or control affords a marked advantage to either combatant. Not every mountaintop, tall structure or government building, however, is key terrain. Leaders at all levels must take time to **study** the map to determine what is and isn't key terrain based on their mission, the enemy's capabilities and the characteristics of the terrain itself.

Key terrain varies by echelon. Terrain that may not give a marked advantage to a battalion might be key for a company. Also, because company commanders should plan the enemy's disposition two levels down, there might be terrain that gives a squad-sized element a marked advantage that wasn't identified by the battalion staff. While commanders should let subordinate leaders know what higher headquarters considers key terrain, they should also develop their own within the scope of their operation.

Failure to evaluate the threat

"Know [your] enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril." –Sun Tzu

Leaders must understand the threat and evaluate its capabilities, intent and possible actions. The rote memorization of threat weapons system ranges does not constitute a complete evaluation of the enemy. Without analysis of where the enemy plans to position his weapons systems or to focus his combat power, such knowledge is nearly useless. Leaders must assess the enemy in total to effectively develop his tactical plan.

FM 2-01.3 states that enemy analysis must be conducted two echelons down. This means the commander cannot simply reissue his higher headquarters' analysis as his own. He must further refine the enemy situational template to the squad/section level. This level of detail allows for a greater allocation of company organic and supporting assets, providing overmatch to the company. Simple analyses of enemy platoon locations at the company level do not provide focus for the commander to employ combat power.

Developing 1 CoA

"History repeatedly demonstrates that the threat/adversary often surprises those who predict only one [CoA]." – FM 2-01.3

Commanders must develop enemy CoAs based on a combination of his understanding of the enemy's capabilities and intent, coupled with his own tactical experience and knowledge. Multiple CoAs are essential

for commanders to properly plan for enemy reactions to friendly actions. Too often junior officers expect the enemy to operate in a singular manner, with limited reaction expected. At the same time, however, these same officers will expand on their own "adaptability" and claim they will be able to react quickly to changes on the battlefield in a fluid manner. Will the enemy commander not also attempt to adapt to friendly actions? By discounting the enemy's ability to conduct multiple CoAs and having more than one option, the commander can create a false sense of security concerning his own plan's effectiveness.

By considering multiple CoAs, the commander can further prepare for enemy reactions, as well as the differing possibilities of initial disposition. Analysis of only one enemy array prevents preparation, limits reconnaissance focus and places the burden of reaction on the subordinate leaders. Contrarily, by assessing multiple CoAs, the friendly commander can employ his organic and supporting elements in a manner that allows greater flexibility once contact is made. It enables the commander to quickly shift combat power and seize the initiative upon making contact vs. focusing on one enemy template and reacting to unexpected contact. In essence, assessing multiple enemy CoAs enhances a commander's ability to adapt; he has already considered the "what ifs" and can rapidly shift forces in response to enemy actions.

Conclusion

The importance of mission analysis cannot be overstated. Without proper assessment of the terrain and weather, a leader cannot maximize his organic and supporting assets capabilities. Without analysis of the enemy, both capabilities and intent, a leader cannot position his forces quickly and risks granting his opponent the initiative. Failure to consider multiple enemy CoAs is to embrace ambiguity at a dangerous level and risks mission failure and catastrophic loss to friendly forces. The enemy can and will attempt to outmaneuver friendly forces. Leaders must anticipate these actions and leverage friendly capabilities quickly. Proper enemy analysis shortens the reaction time and enables leaders to

maintain the initiative in contact.

MAJ Joe Byerly is a student at the Naval War College, Newport, RI. He previously served as an instructor at CLC, 3-16 Cavalry Regiment, Fort Benning, GA; plans officer, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, Fort Stewart, GA; commander, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1-64 Armored Regiment; commander, C Troop, 3-7 Cavalry Regiment; squadron plans officer, 3-7 Cavalry; and platoon leader, A Troop, 2-1 Cavalry Regiment, Fort Lewis, WA. MAJ Byerly's military education includes Armor Officer Basic Course, Scout Leaders' Course, Maneuver Captains' Career Course and CLC. MAJ Byerly holds a bachelor's of science degree from North Georgia College and State University in criminal justice. He is the recipient of Fiscal Year 2011 General Douglas MacArthur Leadership Award, Bronze Star (one oak-leaf cluster) and Meritorious Service Medal (one oak-leaf cluster).

CPT Brian Harris is course manager/instructor for CLC, 3-16 Cavalry, Fort Benning. He previously served as commander, A Troop, 1-17 Cavalry, 82nd Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, NC; assistant S-3 plans officer and tactical operations officer/pilot-in-command, B Troop, 1-17 Cavalry; and mortar-platoon leader, HHC, 2-72 Armored Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division, Camp Casey, South Korea. CPT Harris' military education includes Pathfinder School, Airborne Course, CLC, Aviation Captains' Career Course, Joint Firepower Course, Army Aviation Tactical Operations Officer Course, Aviation Warrant Officer Basic Course, Initial Entry Rotary Wing Course/OH-58D FSXXI Course and Armor Officer Basic Course. He holds a bachelor's of arts degree in history from University of Central Florida and is a recipient of the Bronze Star Medal, Purple Heart and four Air Medals.

Acronym Quick-Scan

CLC – Cavalry Leader's Course
CoA – course of action
FM – field manual
IPB – intelligence preparation of the battlefield
MCOO – modified combined obstacle overlay