

# In Support of CoISTs

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In 1994, a lieutenant colonel reflecting on friction points from his first of two Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) rotations identified his battalion staff's inability to receive critical information from subordinate units as an item he had to address before reentering "the box." To address this deficiency he simplified the unit's priority intelligence requirements (PIRs) and designated "white teams" consisting of a couple members of the battalion's headquarters company and essential communication equipment and attached them to each rifle company.<sup>1</sup> This allowed subordinate leaders to focus on fighting their organizations while designated personnel reported critical information, particularly critical intelligence, to the battalion staff to allow the commander to rapidly bring resources to bear or make decisions in real time.

In the 20 years since then-LTC Dan Bolger penned his treatise on fighting at JRTC, driven by ad hoc practice in Iraq and Afghanistan by many companies and battalions, the Army incorporated company intelligence support teams (CoISTs) into the modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) for maneuver units. Generally consisting of two to three intelligence analysts or designated infantry or armor Soldiers, the team proved of great value during a counterinsurgency (COIN) fight as they allowed for intelligence analysis at the lowest possible tactical level. These CoISTs remained on the organizational tables as the Army began training in earnest for a decisive action environment again, but many units struggle to effectively employ the teams when operating without a secure forward operating base, computers and software specifically designed to assist with analysis, and an evolving enemy situation.

## The Problem

CoISTs remain on maneuver unit MTOEs but are often not employed. While training programs of instruction are catching up with the operating environment, if maneuver commanders don't believe in the efficacy of the teams and employ them, the best trained teams will go unused. When units employ their CoISTs, no two units do it the same way. Starting as an ad hoc innovation to provide analysis at a lower echelon than we were organized for, codified



A CoIST analyst confers with multinational allies during Saber Junction 16 at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Germany. (Photo courtesy of authors)

in MTOEs and then optimized for a COIN fight, CoISTs went from incredibly relevant to extra baggage as the Army has transitioned back to a decisive action focus. What went wrong?

Our observations at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) have led us to conclude that there are two challenges associated with effective CoIST employment. First, battalions do not have a codified system for training, equipping, and allocating CoISTs to their aligned units. The second order effect of not standardizing CoIST employment is that the teams do not have credibility with company-level leadership, resulting in underemployment of the asset.

Not covered in this article but worthy of further examination is where CoIST analysts should reside within a brigade's MTOE. Currently assigned to the military intelligence (MI) companies (MICOs) in the brigade engineer battalions, many units seem unaware they still have CoISTs. While the artillery community has proven that habitually attaching forward observer teams to maneuver battalions and companies is an incredible force multiplier, doing so is not without challenges. The Army's recent reestablishment of division artillery (DIVARTY) headquarters (and the vigorous debate as to whether the artillery battalions should be assigned to maneuver brigades or the DIVARTY) is indicative of this complexity. A similar debate and examination of who our analysts are assigned to and when they are attached elsewhere would benefit maneuver formations.

### **Observations of Units**

Over the past 12 months of rotations, only two battalions observed at JMRC have employed their CoISTs. One battalion manned the CoISTs with analysts from the battalion intelligence section, and the other received its habitually attached analysts from the brigade's MICO. Consistent with the theme of different practices in different units, one battalion had neither a formal standard operating procedure (SOP) nor a deliberate system for information sharing or analysis leveraging the CoISTs, and company commanders employed the analysts to varying degrees. The other battalion had a formalized SOP both for training and during operations and used CoISTs to great success.

### **Are They Value Added?**

When properly trained with their responsibilities formally delineated and leveraged by the battalion intelligence officer and company commanders, the answer is a resounding "Yes!" Prior to observing a battalion effectively employ CoISTs, however, our observer-coach-trainers (OCTs) would have said CoISTs had some value during COIN operations but little to none in a decisive action fight. After seeing a forward-leaning battalion intelligence officer establish an effective training program and employ the CoISTs with support from the battalion and company commanders, we would advocate all maneuver units mirror this battalion's best practices. Proper implementation of CoISTs yields value for the company commanders and battalion commander while also benefiting the unit's intelligence enterprise. During execution, they are the company commander's liaison to the battalion intelligence section, not the intelligence section's liaison to the company commander.

A useful way to envision the capabilities the CoIST can bring to a company is to compare them to fire support teams (FISTs). Maneuver commanders inherently understand what a FIST team brings in terms of training, capabilities, and access to enablers. Commanders employ their FISTs because they allow a unit to affect the terrain and enemy either beyond the range of organic weapons systems or with more destructive effects, particularly when combined with other organic and external assets. A CoIST can do with collection assets and analysis tools what a FIST can with indirect fire, attack aviation, and close air support. Employed together, a well-trained CoIST and company FIST truly enhance the lethality of a rifle, Stryker, mechanized, or tank company.

### **Best Practices**

What follows are best practices for training, equipping, and allocating CoIST teams to companies and observations of effective employment during a Decisive Action Training Environment – Europe Combat Training Center rotation. The systems and units described were able to provide common operational picture clarity at both the company and battalion level, facilitate synchronization of fires with maneuver enabled by timely intelligence, and allow company leadership more time for course of action development by completing friendly and enemy situation analysis during troop leading procedures (TLPs). Illustrative of the utility of timely intelligence to the lowest tactical level, the battalion was the only unit observed in the previous two years that expended not only their own basic load of 120mm mortar ammunition, but all additional 120mm mortar ammunition that the brigade support battalion (BSB) held during the nine-day exercise.

A good portion of effective intelligence at the tactical level is based on the credibility and early integration of the

intelligence Soldier. This means that the battalion intelligence officer needs to choose the best-suited Soldiers as CoIST candidates and actively develop the company-CoIST analyst relationship in garrison. The Soldier should be tactically sound, able to brief confidently, mentally agile, and physically capable of completing every task in the company. CoIST analysts also require an understanding of techniques and procedures for intelligence synthesis and dissemination appropriate to the echelon they're operating at.

Battalion intelligence officers should clearly establish expectations and requirements for their CoISTs during planning and execution. By defining what products and bottom-up refinement are required during intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB), CoISTs can facilitate parallel planning and free up the commander to focus on the friendly maneuver plan during TLPs. CoISTs present at the battalion's mission analysis brief can begin to conduct the company-level IPB and Paragraph 1 of the operation order (OPORD). They effectively perform a staff function at an echelon without a formal staff.

During execution, CoIST analysts can transmit all contact reports to battalion over the battalion operation and intelligence (O/I) or command nets, both ensuring the battalion intelligence section and operations sections are receiving critical information. Further details as contact develops can be relayed over the O/I net as well. This decreases the delay in reports, frees up the battalion command net for crosstalk between the commanders, and allows commanders to focus down on contact as they develop the situation. In order to accomplish this, CoISTs must be properly equipped for their job.

*"Early formation allows opportunities to practice and refine SOPs prior to deployment."*

— **Field Manual (FM) 2-0, Intelligence Operations**

One of the best practices that we observed here at JMRC is a memorandum for record that established the support relationship and responsibilities for the battalion intelligence section, the company, and the CoIST analyst. This memorandum was signed by the battalion intelligence officer, the CoIST analyst, and the company commander, establishing agreed-upon standards for all parties. Critical components of that agreement included expected garrison and field support, sustainment requirements, and a methodology for developing a habitual relationship between CoISTs and their supported companies. To balance MOS-specific training and relationship building, CoIST analysts would remain with the battalion intelligence section in a general support role during normal garrison activities; however, they would attend company training meetings and execute weekly physical training (PT) with their aligned company. CoIST analysts were also available for additional training with the companies, provided there was prior coordination. Upon activation for a field problem, the CoIST analysts would be task organized to the companies in direct support.

The battalion intelligence officer's responsibilities included providing T-T+4 training schedules in order to inform companies when the CoIST would be available; rating, training and developing the CoIST analysts; and ensuring quality assurance/quality control of CoIST products. The company was responsible for providing focus and priorities to the analysts, a RT-1523 radio dedicated to the CoIST analyst, and life support. The CoIST analyst was responsible for providing enemy situation templates (SITTEMPs), grid reference guides/graphics (GRGs), maps, imagery, support to the FIST, and other requested intelligence products to their assigned companies. The CoISTs were also responsible for providing their products to the battalion intelligence section as bottom-up refinement in order to create shared understanding across the entire battalion.

*"Communications requirements for the CoIST require consideration by the battalion and company commanders and staff."*

— **FM 2-0, Intelligence Operations**

The most critical piece of equipment to ensure the effectiveness of a CoIST is an adequate means of communication with the battalion headquarters. The system will vary based off of the unit's MTOE, but the CoIST needs a reliable way to routinely update the intelligence section with contact reports and assessments. During a recent exercise, we observed an airborne infantry unit that invested communications equipment into their company CoIST analysts. Each CoIST carried a dismounted manpack primarily operating on the battalion O/I net. This enabled the CoIST analyst to maintain continuous communication with the battalion intelligence officer, adjacent CoISTs, low-level voice intercept (LLVI) teams, human intelligence collection teams, and the battalion's scout platoon without hampering the commander's ability to control the fight on the command and fires nets. The ability to receive real-time information from attached and external collection assets allowed the CoISTs to provide true value to their company commanders.

## Battle Drill Cards and Briefing Formats

To steal a real estate cliché — “location matters.” Who supervises the analysts attached to companies and where those analysts physically locate themselves on the battlefield matters. First, the analyst should be assigned to an NCO for administrative reporting and control. Either the company operations NCO or fire support NCO can fulfill these roles. The physical location of the CoIST will vary by unit type. For light or airborne infantry companies we have seen the greatest success when the CoIST is attached at the hip to the company commander. Within vehicular companies, the CoIST could ride in a commander’s fighting vehicle or collocate with another command post node. Possible locations for the CoIST include inside the company command post tent or in the executive officer’s or FIST’s vehicles. This structure works best when the battalion invests in an O/I net to facilitate the constant flow of information without congesting the command or administrative and logistics nets.

Ultimately, the job of CoISTs is to help paint the enemy picture for commanders. As such, intelligence sections need to have established battle rhythms with clearly defined inputs and outputs to achieve this goal. That battle rhythm should include periodic radio synchronization meetings run by the battalion intelligence officer with all of the CoISTs. A recently observed technique entailed the intelligence officer beginning with a quick summary of the battalion’s current assessment. Then, each CoIST would provide a summary of the contact in their area of operations (AO) as well as their assessment of where the enemy was in time and space. Finally, the intelligence officer would recap with any changes to the battalion assessment. All assigned or attached collection assets, such as the battalion’s scouts and attached LLVI teams, were included in these meetings. These touch points created shared understanding across the entire battalion intelligence warfighting function and fed into the battalion operations/intelligence updates. This enabled the intelligence officer to accurately describe the enemy in time and space to the battalion and company commanders, enabling them to make timely and informed decisions.

## Way Forward

CoISTs proved their worth in countless company headquarters over the past 16 years in Iraq and Afghanistan. As the Army transitions its focus back to decisive action, we cannot fail to capitalize on positive lessons learned from over a decade and a half of experience. Intelligence personnel remain on our MTOE, and leaders with knowledge of best practices discovered through trial and error in contact remain in our force. Units should continue to experiment with employing this invaluable resource and learn from one another to retain our CoISTs.

While CoISTs were developed to fulfill the information collection, processing, and dissemination requirements within a decentralized battalion formation operating in a COIN environment, they remain a viable solution to company-level requirements in a decisive action environment. However, in order to be effective units need to invest in dedicated communications equipment, the right people, and effective training. They also need to invest in creating clear, written expectations and requirements with roles and responsibilities established between the CoIST analyst, the battalion intelligence section, and the company leadership. With the proper investment, CoISTs can provide timely intelligence to company-level leadership so that commanders can make educated decisions and exercise mission command in a communications-degraded environment, ever more important as our adversaries invest in techniques and equipment designed to degrade the U.S. Army’s technical overmatch capabilities.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Daniel P. Bolger, *The Battle for Hunger Hill: The 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment at the Joint Readiness Training Center* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1997), 290.

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