The NTC and the Battalion S-2

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The National Training Center (NTC) is the best thing that has ever happened to tactical intelligence, because the training there has underscored the integral role of intelligence as a full partner in the combined arms team. Accordingly, maneuver battalion S-2s have felt tremendous pressure to turn academic theory into a practical means of killing the enemy.

To be effective, an S-2 must learn all he can about Soviet regimental organization, equipment, and tactics; streamline staff planning procedures; and know how to conduct a pertinent intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) at platoon level. He has to be confident and aggressive in selling his analysis to his commander. And he must be forceful, because he is usually a lieutenant who must compete with the S-3, who is a major. In short, to avoid failure, he must be prepared, both technically and psychologically; there is no time for on-the-job research at the NTC.

NTC training subjects a unit's planning ability to the ultimate test. Unlike other training experiences, a commander must follow doctrinal staff planning procedures. He has to base his course of action on the enemy situation, just as he would in combat and his three primary concerns must be: Where is the enemy? What equipment does he have? and What will he do next? He can do nothing until his S-2 answers these questions, which makes him and his staff reliant on the S-2.

Suddenly elevated in importance, the S-2 and all of his systems come under close scrutiny. The immediate future of the unit is in his hands. The way he handles this responsibility will determine whether his unit wins or loses. The techniques he uses will determine how effectively he uses his knowledge.

Given the fast pace of the NTC, he will probably have to modify doctrine, especially as it relates to the IPB and briefings. After the first battle, when fragmentary orders control the scenario, the S-2 will probably go through the five steps of IPB in his head. He should be able to analyze the terrain quickly—particularly after months of studying it back in garrison—and develop the situation and decision support template within 10 to 20 minutes of receiving the brigade warning order.

ANALYSIS

For his staff estimate briefings to the commander, he will find that he does not have the time to spend on a lengthy treatment of each IPB step. The commander needs to see a reasonably accurate depiction of enemy forces immediately following each battle, and the S-2 must be able to meet that need with a hasty analysis. Of course, this will be only a rough estimate to allow the rest of the staff to get moving on their plans. By the time of the operations order, the S-2 will have refined his analysis.

For the same reasons he has to produce a hasty situation and decision support template, the S-2 will often have to brief his commander with little or no preparation. Again he'll have to depend on his own proficiency, and will do most of his analysis on the spot. Fortunately, all the S-2 really needs to know initially is the unit's next mission, its area of operations, and the location of enemy forces. He can surmise enemy strength on the basis of his battle damage assessment calculations from the previous battle, while the brigade close-of-battle intelligence summary can help him analyze current enemy activity.

In the case of graphics, the S-2 may again have to deviate from published doctrine. When he delivers his portion of the operations order, he should give only one overlay to each company commander. This overlay cannot be neatly placed into any one category, because none of the conventional labels apply. It is more than a decision support template, because it accounts for everything—terrain analysis, enemy situation, named areas of interest, and the reconnaissance and surveillance plan.

(Many Military Intelligence officers who have not been to the NTC will disagree with this practice, but at the maneuver company level, commanders don't have the time or patience for a handful of overlays. If the overlay is too busy, the S-2 should decide which information the unit can live without and erase it. One overlay will do.)

A combination of knowledge, experience, and good staff work will put the S-2 on the right track to success at the NTC. Still, everything will depend on the way he presents himself—on whether or not he can sell the intelligence. This, in

fact, is the most important part.

Decisiveness—a leadership trait that all officers should seek and demonstrate—is considered of premium value among combat arms officers. In their dealings with other officers, they expect confidence and aggressiveness. In many cases, young, inexperienced S-2s—through hesitation and a lack of confidence in their own analysis—fail to meet these expectations. This is exactly why the battalion S-2 must establish credibility with his commander. He can best do this by seizing every opportunity to brief, by articulating his analysis with utter confidence, and by driving his main points across emphatically.

The S-2 has to be bold, sometimes even obnoxious, as other officers will undoubtedly "sharpshoot" him. This is especially true if he is competing with a domineering S-3. But if the S-2 believes in what he's telling the commander, then he also has to make his commander believe in it. He has to decide on a probable course of enemy action, sell it to his boss, and defend it to the end—even if it isn't precisely on target. Nobody can always be completely right, but the S-2 must always be confident.

The NTC is one battlefield on which tactical intelligence has proved itself. It is here that the importance of intelligence has become plainly visible to everyone. Yet the success of each combat maneuver battalion depends largely on the ability of its S-2. The S-2 should therefore work hard to become the best. His commander should determine the S-2's skill level far in advance of deploying to the NTC and should get personally involved in correcting any shortcomings. Personal interest on the commander's part is especially critical if he intends to put the S-2 in charge of counter-reconnaissance. In this case, the S-2's responsibilities will greatly increase. If he's weak in the basic skills, the addition of counter-reconnaissance planning and execution will only overwhelm him and hurt the unit.

The commander must know what to look for in a good S-2 and then develop his own accordingly. Command interest, technical knowledge, and a strong dose of confidence will show the S-2 the way toward success. Recent history tells us that the S-2s who have done well at the NTC have had these factors in common.

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Motorized at the NTC

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Since its inception in the early 1980s, the motorized concept has gone through several validation tests. Until recently, however, it had never been exposed to a highly trained opposing force employing Soviet tactics. The 9th Infantry Division (Motorized) was given an opportunity to confront the best opposing force (OPFOR) in existence when its 3d Brigade was scheduled for a rotation at the National Training Center (NTC) in May 1988.

Unlike other divisions based in the continental United States, the 9th Division had had no major NTC experience up to that point and therefore had to set about determining what NTC training was all about. At the same time, the NTC didn't know much about the motorized division and had to start from scratch in designing scenarios and structuring an opposing force of the type that the brigade could expect to encounter.

The doctrinal manuals and the mission essential task lists (METLs) of both the 3d Brigade and its battalions were used as a starting point, in addition to the experience gained from numerous training exercises at Fort Lewis's Yakima Firing Center. A task organization was developed in September 1987; this led to clarifying what the brigade's missions at the NTC would be and the size of the area in which the brigade would be operating.

The authors of the motorized division plan created a task organization in which the battalions were already task organized. Unlike pure tank and pure mechanized battalions, which normally cross-attach their companies on the basis of METT-T (mission, enemy, terrain, troops, and time), the motorized battalions did not have to go through a mechanical reorganization process.

Through the brigade's experience, however, its leaders knew that its own organizational design lacked sufficient dismounted infantry. When the NTC task organization was planned, therefore, the maneuver companies were cross-leveled by using the assets of both of the division's brigades. This meant that, based on the METT-T assessment, more balanced battalions were available.

The initial task organization is reflected in the accompanying box. Unfortunately, the forces marked with an asterisk