



TSM STRYKER/BRADLEY CORNER

Lessons Learned from Stryker Battalion Commanders in Combat

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On 18 January 2005, the United States Army Infantry Center (USAIC) led a collection effort consisting of various Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) schools, material developers, and other subject matter experts in an attempt to determine relevant lessons learned from 3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division's (Stryker Brigade Combat Team 1) recent Operation Iraqi Freedom rotation. Although the USAIC is continuously interviewing the field in an effort to update systems across the DOTLMPF (doctrine, organizations, training, leadership and education, material and facilities), this effort was unique in that the 3rd Brigade, 2nd ID was the first Stryker-equipped unit deployed to combat operations.

The SBCT is a unique, self-contained combined arms organization. In its design architecture, the SBCT was specifically optimized for rapid deployability, small scale contingencies, and combat in compartmentalized terrain. The SBCT provides the combat commander with a highly-lethal, highly-mobile, digitally-enabled Infantry heavy force that can accomplish multiple missions.

The following is a summary of key lessons learned from the perspective of the first SBCT battalion commanders to lead this formation, and its vehicle variants, in sustained combat operations. This article takes their pertinent comments from the interview and places them into appropriate major DOTLMPF categories. The comments below define the consensus among the commanders present.

Doctrine:

1. The base doctrine for the employment of SBCTs is sound.
2. The major doctrinal issue (some would argue this is a TTP-tactic, technique and procedure) is the execution of Information Operations at the battalion level. From the SBCT (brigade) perspective, Information Operations (IO) consist of three major areas:

- Identifying all of the stakeholders in the zone of operations and their individual motivations;
- Identifying the specific measures of effectiveness to determine if the IO effort is functioning as designed;
- Fully integrating all aspects of Information Operations into the targeting meeting cycle and determining the desired "effect" the operation will have on the populace.

3. The SBCT brigade is fully resourced to conduct these operations, but it becomes difficult in terms of execution at the

battalion level. Although the battalion has responsibility for IO in its area of operations, the battalion is not fully resourced to conduct extensive IO. The resulting problem is that the brigade can make the "read" and produce an adequate assessment, but (due to lack of resources at the battalion level) the unit is not agile enough to get the desired effect. The central doctrinal question in terms of See First, Understand First, Act First, and Finish Decisively is "How do we ACT first?" in terms of Information Operations?

4. The consensus among the commanders is that the enemy was winning the IO campaign as the enemy had the ability to "outpace" and react to incidents in the area of operations faster than our forces. The enemy has the capability to "spin" IO related stories and themes and executes much faster than coalition forces. Additionally, IO cannot be reactionary. Coalition forces must use all available assets in a proactive manner rather than constantly attempt to react to new enemy IO themes. Coalition forces must also be fully aware of the clan or tribal based "rumor mill" and how this word of mouth network affects coalition operations.

5. An additional pertinent comment is that we tend to communicate with the populace using "Americanized Arabic." Due to major dialect differences, the local population can tell immediately that the message is from Coalition forces. The TTP used to overcome this was to hire local nationals to translate IO themes into non-Americanized, stylistic Arabic.

6. It is imperative that units have the capability to "change the message" immediately given the current tactical situation. The desired endstate is for the commander on the ground to have the capability to assess the current situation and to produce a message to the populace that provides an advantage to coalition forces.

7. As with many units executing the stability and support mission set, this unit struggled to determine the appropriate amount of emphasis on IO operations. At times, it was the clear main effort with traditional combat operations solutions as the supporting effort.

Organizations:

1. The SBCT design is excellent. The formation allows for an integrated combined arms fight at the company level.

2. The greatest challenge of the design is in the reconnaissance platoons in the infantry battalions and in the reconnaissance squadron. In both cases, the commanders felt that they did not have adequate dismount strength in these recon platoons to

accomplish the assigned missions. Currently, the recon vehicle is manned with a driver and a vehicle commander with the potential to dismount three scouts. Given their experience and the mission sets they were asked to accomplish, this number was insufficient for both internal force protection and combat operations in urban terrain. Infantry battalion commanders were in some cases resistant to cross-attach rifle companies with reconnaissance troops due to this lack of dismount capability.

3. The current SBCT modification table of organization and equipment (MTOE) does not reflect the requirement for a deputy brigade commander. This position is critical in sustained combat operations. Additionally, MTOE changes are needed to fill Stryker vehicles with reconnaissance troop executive officers, battalion command sergeants major, and company first sergeants.

4. The use of contract maintenance personnel was a huge success story. The contract maintenance personnel were consistently available and provided the best possible services to the unit.

Training

1. It is imperative that the unit be able to communicate with the populace (per IO operations above). This unit created additional tactical human intelligence (HUMINT) teams (taken from the recon squadron) to fulfill that need. These Soldiers trained with the unit and worked hard to master the intricate crime link and association diagrams affiliated with the local populace. Even with the addition of these teams, the commanders also felt a need for trained tactical interrogators.

2. Tactical questioning is a critical leader task. The desired endstate for junior leaders is the ability to conduct tactical questioning on the spot and then be able to quickly analyze the newly found data coupled with the ability to then execute a “sequel” to the operation. The leader must be able to communicate with a suspect, determine the validity of the data, and then plan subsequent missions (or cancel subsequent missions) based upon this questioning session. This is a time-



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A Stryker team from the 3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division (Stryker Brigade Combat Team) conducts a routine mission in Mosul, Iraq.

sensitive task in that the unit only has limited time (about 30 minutes) from the beginning of the questioning to beginning the execution of a potential sequel or else the “actionable” intelligence value may potentially be lost as the enemy (or target) moves or flees.

3. Although the SBCT is fully digitized, the true value of the digital backbone to the battalion commanders was found during mission planning and subsequently during consolidation and reorganization after the mission. The example used was of an hourglass where the unit makes maximum use of digital enablers during the planning and mission preparation phase of the operation, then primarily uses FM voice coupled with Force XXI Battle Command Brigade and Below (FBCB2) during the execution of the mission, followed again by maximum use of digital systems during the consolidation and reorganization phase of the operation.

4. Patrol debriefings are critical. The vast majority of the commanders prefer to use the debriefing format found in the Ranger Handbook as a base. The battalion/squadron staff would then attempt to draw commanders critical information requirements (CCIR) from the debriefing and pass them to the SBCT for further analysis.

5. The ability of a junior leader to negotiate with key members in the local populace is also a critical leader skill. The commanders felt the negotiation process began with squad leaders and felt this skill was of paramount importance at the platoon sergeant (PSG) level. The PSG must be able to not only negotiate, but also be able to understand the local information network and the “power brokers” within that local network. Many of the “power brokers” were not necessarily those in official positions such as the police chief or the mayor, but were often the cousin of somebody. Having a PSG with strong negotiating skills allowed for problems to be resolved at the lowest level and also enabled complex negotiations to begin at that level prior to working their way up the coalition chain of command.

6. Although the subject of issuing digital cameras and videotape capability to the squad is

primarily a material issue, it also has training impacts. The unit felt it was important to photograph and videotape its actions during search operations. The photographs were later used as evidence against a potential insurgent and were also used in the IO campaign to prove that Coalition forces did not damage a house or the belongings of a local family. This was especially important when units hit a “dry hole” or did not find either the intended target or evidence. Additionally, Soldiers needed to be trained on evidence collection. When a suspected insurgent was taken into custody, it was important to insure the appropriate statements and documents (in law enforcement terms: establishing a chain of custody) were included. This enabled the coalition to effectively and efficiently prosecute the insurgent and also helped teach the rule of law throughout the society.

7. The commanders also spent time training and educating Soldiers on the rules of engagement (ROE). The ROE is an enabler as opposed to a restriction or constraint. Additionally, commanders expected junior leaders to have the ability to internally manage their force protection requirements without significant oversight from higher headquarters. All leaders must be able to conduct a risk assessment and



Sergeant Jeremiah Johnson

A 3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division (Stryker Brigade Combat Team) Soldier fires at the enemy during combat operations in Tall Afar, Iraq.

determine those things needed to mitigate the risk to both the mission and their Soldiers.

Leader Development

1. Leaders must understand the inherent value of humanely treating detainees. Leaders must be trained and educated on the value of the “unmolested capture.” Given this circumstance, the enemy is more receptive to immediate interrogation and tactical questioning. Additionally, leaders within the SBCT constantly reinforced to their Soldiers that everything the unit does sends a message to the local populace, and that if detainees are treated humanely, then the unit is sending a positive message. This is especially critical for those detainees that are subsequently released due to lack of hard evidence. Per above, the commanders believe more emphasis is needed in institutional training on tactical questioning and negotiation skills.

2. The commanders do not feel that the Advanced NCO Course was challenging their current and future platoon sergeants. Consensus among the commanders was that the PSG is a critical billet in sustained combat operations requiring broad-based training and education.

Material

1. The upper level digital tactical interface (TI) (specifically MCS) compatibility with the lower level digital tactical interface (FBCB2) is poor. Certain MCS-L graphics cannot be loaded into the FBCB2. Additionally, the digital architecture needs the capability to pass multiple digital photographs between the upper level TI and the lower level TI. This is especially critical when a battalion is conducting multiple missions on the same night and when attempting to execute a sequel based upon obtaining actionable intelligence. The FBCB2 is a superb system, but it needs more multi functional capabilities such as the ability to accept an external hard drive allowing it to be used as another computer, and facilitating the use of digital photographs and digital mapping.

2. The unit equipped its squad designated marksman (SDM) with the M-14 rifle and preferred this weapon system due to its precision penetrating ability. The commanders believe a requirement exists for the ability to penetrate windshields on

vehicles, to penetrate drywall, and to penetrate the rear of a vehicle and kill enemy rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) gunners or snipers who are using the vehicle as cover. In an urban environment, the need is for precision penetrating power. Although the unit was well-equipped with M240 machine guns, they preferred not to use them due to the high density of civilians in the area. The current equipment (M4 with current 5.56mm) was insufficient to produce the desired effects. They also stressed that they are not looking for a sniper-type weapon or ammunition, and wanted the SDM to remain a member of the rifle squad where his primary responsibility remains as a rifleman; the SDM cannot become so specialized that he fails at his primary mission of rifleman. In their view, the SDM weapon must also be compatible with the other squad weapons while engaged in the four-man stack series of drills, and must be short enough in overall length to be advantageous in confined areas. However, they felt the M-14 provided the capability to be used in the support

by fire role and did not take away from the primary rifleman mission. Their recommendation was to use the SR 25 rifle.

3. The requirement exists for seamless communications (plug in and plug out) for leaders between the vehicle and on the ground. They felt the need is for one dual-purpose helmet as opposed to a CVC type helmet and a separate combat helmet when dismounted from the vehicle. This communications system must provide for adequate hearing protection during combat operations as it is difficult to hear FM radio transmissions over the noise of combat.

4. An asset that could assist the Stryker battalion in communications with the local populace is the mounting of external speakers and a sound system on select Stryker vehicles within the formation. The system would be similar to what is currently in use by Tactical Psychological Operations Teams (TPT) and would have the ability to play from a menu of prerecorded messages. This would assist the unit in keeping the populace out of the way while conducting operations and assist in crowd control after motor vehicle accidents. This capability would also enable echelons as low as the platoon or company to broadcast messages in line with the IO campaign plan.

5. Although the commanders used the ATGM (Antitank Guided Missile) Stryker variant for the maximum tactical advantage, they all clearly preferred the Mobile Gun System (MGS). The ATGM variant provided the required firepower but due to the limitations of TOW missiles over water and wires in an urban environment the MGS capability is preferred.

Overall, these commanders were highly satisfied with the Stryker formation and design. Their lessons learned and their combat observations are provided in this article as a means of stimulating thought and debate within our profession, as well as a means of educating the force on pertinent combat lessons from their recent experience in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

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