

# BATTLE CAPTAINS AND BATTLE TRACKING

CAPTAIN REN ANGELES

**B**attle captains (BCs) and battle tracking play a critical role in the day-to-day operations of deployed maneuver units operating in a combat theater of operations. A lot is riding on how well battle captains perform the job and how well they maintain situational awareness through battle tracking.

Battle tracking is not an easy thing to do; there is no one-way science to it and it can be best learned mostly by doing. It helps a great deal when battle captains have a system that allows for situational awareness at all times. Since it is nearly impossible to know and remember all things happening at the same time, a tracking system is needed to fill in the gaps and record all events that can be referenced when memory fails. There is not much room for error in battle tracking; precise and complete information is needed to prevent misfortune. The maneuver units and commanders at all levels depend on the battle captain for accurate information; the battle captain must be able to provide near accurate information all the time and be able to provide access to assets that can influence the fight as it develops.

The purpose of this article is to share some of the lessons I learned while serving as a battle captain with Task Force 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division (Stryker Brigade Combat Team) during a deployment to Iraq as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom III. It must be noted that some of the tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) used may not apply to all units, but the intent is to share the experience so that others may have a frame of reference and can further refine the TTPs that will fit their units' needs.

## Daily Mission Tracker

The daily mission tracker lists all of the day's events, taskings,

missions, and operations. It is the tool used to track what has to happen, when, and where. It makes it easy to track which unit is responsible for what mission and when they have to execute it. The tracker removes the guesswork of when things have to happen and who is responsible for the execution or tasking. It provides details such as:

- Which area within the area of operations (AO) will patrols be going to;
- Where traffic control points (TCPs) will be executed; and
- When and where raids and cordon and search/cordon and knock operations will be conducted.

It basically gives the battle captain a snapshot of the day's events and the locations in the AO where they will be executed. It provides instant situational awareness and ready access to information with regards to what each maneuver unit will be doing for the day. It is a good way to resolve any conflicting movements within the AO, and also facilitates tasking units with any late, new, or immediate missions.

## Daily Mission/Movement Tracker

The daily movement tracker tracks unit movement coming out of the forward operating base (FOB) on any given day, assigning mission numbers to each mission that goes out. It is a key tool that shows which elements are out, the mission commander, their

Mission Number	Element	Departure DTG	Estimated Return DTG	Mission	Destination	Mission CDR	# Veh	# Pax	Remarks

**Figure 1 — Example Daily Movement Tracker**

current mission and their composition. It removes any guess work. Unit movements can be tracked using the FBCB2 (Force XXI Battle Command Brigade and Below), but when there are multiple movements it can be hard to track everything. The daily mission/movement tracker allows battle captains to maintain situational awareness when they temporarily lose sight of who is still out on missions due to other concerns or events. With this accurate picture, battle captains can direct or redirect available combat power as needed anywhere in the AO.

All current missions are highlighted in yellow, completed missions are highlighted in green, and cancelled missions are highlighted in gray. If an incident happens on any of the missions, the mission number is highlighted in red and the type of incident and any battle damage assessments (BDA) are typed into the remarks block as a quick reference.

The daily mission/movement tracker lists all unit movements in the AO, gives an accurate count of patrols or movements during any given day, and lists what type of missions were performed and when they were completed. It is an effective tool to track all unit movement and missions.

**Convoy Tracker**

The convoy tracker tracks all convoys coming through the AO. This is important because it allows battle captains to track all friendly elements in the AO that might affect operations. Maintaining situational awareness of the AO is a paramount concern of a battle captain because of the impact on missions and security. By knowing who is in the AO, a battle captain can also plan contingency support. In our AO, we track all friendly movement and require units to let us know in advance if they have elements coming through the AO. That

DTG	Unit C2 w/ Phone #	Convoy CDR	Point of Origin	Route/ Mission	Destination	Vehicles
170100-170600DEC			MAF	Toyota, Saab, Lexus	Freedom	2C2, 5GTs, 1 M969 JP-8
171000-171730DEC			Dahuk	Tampa	Diamondback	6 Veh

**Figure 2 — Example Convoy Tracker**

way, we can update them on the current enemy situation and reinforce as necessary and control/direct fires in our AO in support of any contact against the enemy. It is easy enough to track friendly units that have FBCB2 capability; but problems can arise with those units that do not have this capability. In our particular AO, there are civilian security forces that patrol and operate. We don't control them, but we track them nonetheless because when they come into contact in our AO, we provide them assistance. Knowing all movements in the AO is key to avoiding any possible conflict in the movement and execution of missions or operations and also in preventing fratricide. All available assets must be in place to avoid fratricide.

**Significant Activity Tracker**

The significant activity tracker tracks all significant activities during the day. It reports when, where and what happened, to whom it happened, how it happened, actions taken, and any BDA, friendly or otherwise. It gives an account of how many enemy attacks happened during the day and the type of attacks. This can provide battle captains with a historical record of the enemy's pattern or TTPs he is employing

<p><b>Type of Incident:</b></p> <p><b>Enemy/Friendly/Terrain BDA:</b></p> <p><b>Unit Reporting:</b></p> <p><b>Location (Grid &amp; Sector/Relationship to Nearby City):</b></p> <p><b>Description of Incident:</b></p> <p><b>Description of Enemy:</b></p> <p><b>Actions Taken:</b></p> <p><b>Details to Follow Up On:</b></p> <p><b>Results of Follow Up:</b></p>
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**Figure 3 — Significant Activity Tracker**

in the AO.

This tracker can also make reporting to higher easier by having a ready format that can be sent digitally or by FM. The significant activity tracker can give leaders a point of reference on enemy activity with regard to type and location in the AO that has significant intelligence value. It allows leaders to reference recent or past attacks and pinpoints where and what time of day the enemy conducted these attacks. It can also give a reference point for where the enemy is operating and if he moves to a new location. The worst thing that any unit can do is allow the enemy to control certain terrain in the AO. This provides him with a refuge where he can establish a base of operation and have a sense of security. Denying him this ability is very critical.

### **Current Operation Tracker or Execution Checklist**

The current operation tracker or execution checklist tracks all current operations as reported by the maneuver units. It offers an accurate picture of what happened previously and what is currently happening on any given mission. This is all the more important when there are multiple operations/missions going on simultaneously in the AO, such as during a battalion mission in different parts of the AO executed by different companies and attached assets. The current operation tracker allows anyone to see what happened and what is currently going on. This also allows battle captains to report to higher what is currently happening as reported by maneuver units. As in any battalion mission, sometimes the battalion executive officer (XO) or other controlling officer may get distracted by events in one of the sectors and lose track of the others. They can always look back at the current operation mission tracker and reference anything he might have forgotten or missed. This also helps out when any higher-ranking officers come into the middle of a mission. They can just look up and familiarize themselves with the events as they occurred without requiring the battle captain or BN XO to give him a run down of current events.

This tracker is an effective tool that can be used to reference anything about the current operation/mission. Sometimes maneuver units send reports that are incomplete or the battle captain may have a question on; the current mission tracker or execution checklist will allow him to reference the earlier report and get clarification on any report passed on as the situation develops. This is a useful tool because it paints the unfolding situation on the ground as reported by the maneuver units. The

panorama of the operation is tracked in the pages of the current operation tracker or execution checklist. This can also be used for an after action review (AAR) to help identify what went well and what can be improved upon.

### **FOB Map**

The FOB map shows a layout of where everything is on the base. It gives battle captains an accurate point of reference from where they can provide directions or know where the reports are coming from with regards to force protection issues inside the FOB. It allows them to pinpoint the source of the report inside the FOB and direct elements to that location as needed and track their movement. It is a good frame of reference that provides orientation, cardinal direction, and situational awareness when the FOB is too large or complex to accurately know and master. It is easy to take it for granted until the need arrives and leaders realize what a great help the map was in providing directions and tracking movement.

### **TOC Battle Drills**

The TOC battle drills are a series of battle drills used for different events or situations that happen in the AO. It lists all the actions to be performed during certain situations and guides battle captains on what needs to happen or whom they need to inform as the situation develops. These are ready-set drills that BCs follow to cope with certain situations. Sometimes the event is overwhelming and it's possible to have a momentary lapse; these battle drills allow BCs to act on the situation without having to think about what they have to do. Everything is listed as to what should happen and all they need to do is to make it happen. This



Sergeant Jeremiah Johnson



is very effective when dealing with overwhelming or unexpected events. The battle drills list assists battle captains in executing actions that need to happen with regards to the current situation.

### Combat Power Tracker

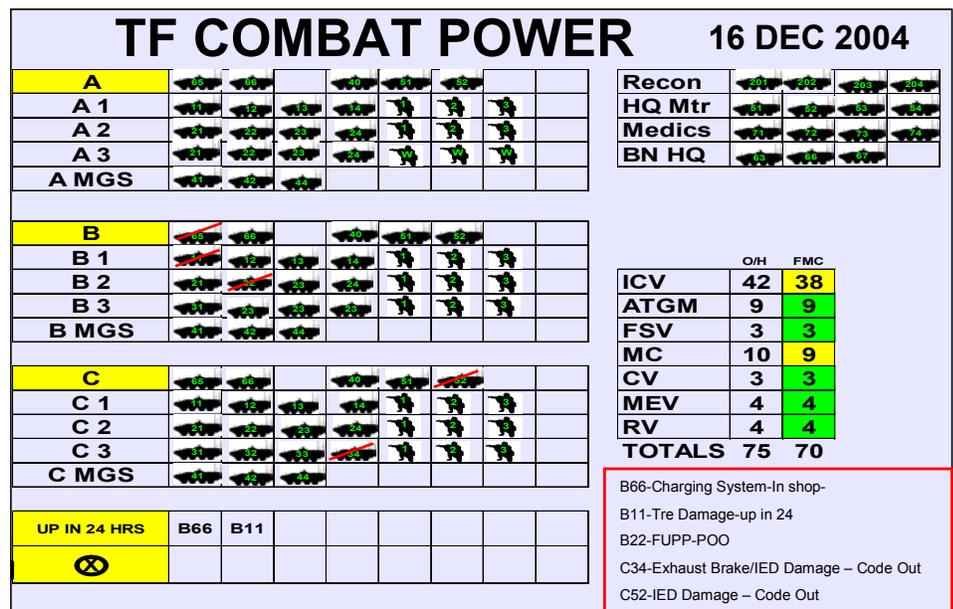
The combat power tracker gives an accurate report of what is currently available in terms of vehicles relative to combat power. In a mechanized or SBCT unit, this is critical because it allows BCs to allot combat power where it is needed and assign tasks to units that have available combat power to execute the mission. It also puts to task the units to report accurately what is and is not working and when they are expected to come up and be available for use. This also applies to other equipment in addition to vehicles. Combat power tracking is important to be able to utilize all available support assets to fix or replace non-mission-capable equipment.

As a rule in our battalion, vehicles with deadline deficiencies do not roll out on missions until they are fully mission capable. Allowing vehicles with a deadline deficiency to roll out and participate on missions is assuming great risk that can have a great impact on mission accomplishment and personnel safety. Any

vehicle or equipment that is not fully mission capable should not be used until it is fixed or back to fully mission capable status. The consequences are not worth the risk. It is plain irresponsible to endanger lives when you don't have to. Taking chances works when the required action is up to the individual not his equipment. It is hard enough to execute missions that require bold and decisive actions; a Soldier's least worry should be that his equipment would fail when it matters most. Maintenance is very important; you have

got to allot time for recovery of men, weapons, and equipment; otherwise there is a risk of exacerbating the deficiency. Getting it fixed at the onset allows getting it into the fight in a far shorter time than you would otherwise. It is hard to balance mission requirement and maintenance sometimes. We all want to have our tools of war with us when we execute missions but the choice of getting the equipment fixed or taking a chance on it is never a safe gamble because it's hard to predict when things will slow down or more importantly when equipment will break down. The difference between failure and success in overcoming an enemy may very well depend on how well your equipment

Figure 4 — Example Combat Power Tracker



System	0600	0800	1000	1200	1400	1600	1800	2000	2200	0000	0200	0400
120mm (4W)	3 - 5 MINUTES											
120mm (FOB DEUCE)	3 - 5 MINUTES											
81mm (FOB DEUCE)	NOT REGISTERED (CAN SHOOT ILLUMINATION)											
Predator (Armed)						0800-1800						
Predator (Unarmed)						0800-1800						
Shadow	UNAVAILABLE											
AH-64	30 MINUTES (BDE PRIORITY OF FIRE)											
155mm Howitzer	30 MINUTES (BDE PRIORITY OF FIRE)											
AC130	30 MINUTES (BDE PRIORITY OF FIRE)											
FW CAS	UNAVAILABLE											
BN RAVEN	WHERE EVER / WHEN EVER											

Figure 5 — Example Available Combat Assets List

steady state operations, but the accurate details of which platoons are currently at which locations are the fine details that BCs are able to know with this tracker. The current task organization tracks short term and the day-to-day steady state of operations as it pertains to companies and attachments. It also shows available combat power that each maneuver unit has at the FOB at any given time. This gives the battle captains ready access to information in order to task sudden missions to companies that have the available combat power to execute them.

works. Taking time for the recovery and maintenance of men, weapons, and equipment has direct bearing on morale, welfare, and ultimately mission accomplishment.

### Available Combat Assets

The available combat assets list is currently available on any given day to support a mission in terms of combined arms and other assets available within the brigade. The SBCT concept of the combined arms fight is truly effective when the available assets are allotted for the conduct of operations or missions. The combined arms assets are not always available, but when they are it can be truly inspirational to see what can be brought into the fight. This tracker allows BCs to summon the available assets for troops or friendly in contact as needed or requested during any given day when they are available. During planned missions, battle captains can request combined arms assets that they will need for the fight, but also for the time when the need arises during a routine mission. It is good to know what is available to help troops or friendly forces in contact. The available assets that can successfully defeat the enemy on any given day sends the message to the enemy that he may choose the time and place, but he will pay dearly every single time with all the assets available to support and fight the fight.

### Current Task Organization

The current task organization lists all elements and attached elements that a battle captain has operational control over. It allows a BC to know who is currently in charge of what task around the FOB and who is currently outside the FOB on fixed sites providing security. It is very important to know at all times where each element is and what they are doing. The current task organization lists what each unit is responsible for and what element is currently at what location. Sometimes it is hard to track who is currently where, especially when reliefs in place occur during a previous shift. This just shows who is where. It is easy to know what company owns what location on

### Communication

The first rule of reporting is that the first report is almost always wrong. It can pay dividends to wait a bit before sending any report to higher about any particular report that maneuver units sends. Of course, a correction to the report can always be sent, but from my experience the first report is almost always wrong. It may have some grain of truth, but it is almost always incomplete. Communication is the most important thing in battle tracking, and battle captains cannot allow maneuver elements or any attached element to leave the FOB without communication. This may be stating the obvious, but it can happen and it has happened. The absolutely worst thing that could happen to an element is to conduct a mission without communication. For out-of-sector missions that are too far away for FM communication, the minimum requirement for our battalion was FBCB2. Communication is very important because it is the only link to pass on reports or information that have critical importance to the maneuver element. This is the only way to send help when the need arises.

### Shift Change Brief

The shift change brief is probably one of the most important things a BC does in the TOC. It helps out to follow a format to ensure that no stone is left un-turned (figuratively speaking) when it comes to passing out all information to the next shift. Battle captains need to inform the next shift of all that has happened, what is currently happening, and what needs to happen. It is critical to transfer all information to the next shift to give them full situational awareness. There should be no short cuts on this because this is far too important to just casually go over it without much thought or preparation. The worst thing a BC can do is not to tell everything. The shift change brief is the transition from one to the next. Depending on how many battle captains are working or how many shifts there are, the other shifts have no clue on what happened during or before their shift, that is why it is a must to paint the whole picture

**SHIFT CHANGE OVER: 251230OCT04**  
**CURRENT MISSION:**  
**BDE FRAGO:**  
**BATTALION FRAGO:**  
**TASK ORG:**  
**COMBAT POWER:**  
**CURRENT FRIENDLY SET:**  
**SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITIES LAST 12 HOURS:**  
**DTG**  
**CURRENT MISSIONS:**  
BN Operations  
Counter Mortar Set 7 and 8  
Apache (A/1-24)  
Maintenance, refit, and prep for combat  
Prep for future operations  
Bulldog (B/1-24 IN)  
Maintenance, refit, and prep for combat  
Prep for future operations  
VIP Security  
Cobra (C/1-24 IN)  
Raid  
QRF  
Hatchet (HHC/1-24 IN)  
Maintenance, refit, and prep for combat  
Prep  
**DUE OUTS FROM HIGHER:**  
**LOG PAC:**  
**RANGES SCHEDULED:**  
**MEDEVAC:**  
**KIOWA/APACHE WEAPONS TEAM STATUS:**  
**LESSONS LEARNED:**

**Figure 6 — Example Shift Change Over Brief Format**

the maneuver units to successfully achieve their missions; and

3) Learning a great deal that will further a person's education and professional growth if he chooses to stay in the Army.

**In Summary**

There are no books to read or classes to take that teach the battle captain's role, duties, and responsibilities. Most of the learning is from experience and the school of hard knocks. Being a battle captain is a pretty daunting task at times. You can learn some pointers from others, but the complexity of the job requires you to learn by experience. It may be a thankless job, but the opportunity to learn makes it a worthwhile enterprise. It gives you a unique perspective on how maneuver units fight, how company commanders employ and fight their companies, how battalion commanders see the battlefield and fight the battalion as a whole. It is truly a unique experience where learning is a by-product, provided you are

willing to learn. It gives you insight on how units execute and fight the battle. As a battle captain, you don't have a full appreciation of what maneuver elements go through during engagement until you experience it yourself. That's why it is important to go out on some of the missions, experience what maneuver elements do, and see the battle space as maneuver units see it. It will provide you an accurate view of what is out there on the ground. The FM radio and FBCB2 does not provide you the elements that are in the field of battle, it actually sanitizes you from these elements. To fully appreciate and empathize you would have to share in the experience, and this can only be gained by going out of the TOC and participating on missions. Firsthand experience and knowledge of the AO are important for the battle captain to perform his duties.

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**Captain Ren Angeles** served as a battle captain for Task Force 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division (Stryker Brigade Combat Team), during the unit's deployment to Iraq as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom III.

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that can provide full situational awareness.

There are different techniques depending on how many personnel operate the TOC. The key is to be able to share the load of work in the TOC; one shift doing all the work or being on station during critical hours of the day will exhaust that shift. Each shift must share in the burden and load. It is hard enough to come in and do the same thing over and over, more so if it is a constant grind. Staffing the TOC is mission and available personnel dependent, but it is critical to allow a periodic break for all individuals in the TOC. It is important to note that even the most motivated individuals will wear out eventually without breaks and a sense of job satisfaction. This is critical if you want keep the individuals working in the TOC motivated. Job satisfaction can only come from three things in the TOC:

- 1) Contributing to the overall effort to successfully achieve the unit's mission;
- 2) Making a difference by supporting



Courtesy photo

*The author, First Lieutenant (now Captain) Ren Angeles, briefs General George W. Casey, Jr., the commanding general of Multi-National Force - Iraq.*