Role of the Military Intelligence Company Commander

U.S. Army photo by CPT Jonathon Lewis

The intelligence officer for 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, briefs the command the evening's intelligence update during Swift Response 15 at Joint Multinational Readiness Center, Hohenfels, Germany, August 27, 2015.

by Captain Ryan M. Hardin

Introduction

The military intelligence (MI) company commander is one of the most demanding company grade leadership positions within the brigade combat team (BCT). Units are not all created equal, and the ways with which the MI company is employed varies widely; however, according to doctrine, the MI company commander has two essential roles:

✦ to direct the employment of the company[1] and

✦ to maximize support to the BCT S-2 intelligence cell.[2]

To accomplish these roles, the MI company commander must focus efforts to effectively integrate collection enablers assigned to the company. Doctrine provides general guidance but offers diminutive practical advice to assist commanders in this role.

All MI company enablers operate under various support relationships within maneuver units and require careful planning, specific tasking, and leader-driven coordination to collect accurate, timely, and targetable intelligence. This task challenges all units in a decisive action training environment. Not only do they fight a highly proficient peer enemy on his home turf, but they must also contend with rugged terrain, system vulnerabilities, and fragile communications plans. Despite the difficult training environment, MI companies have demonstrated some successful techniques for finding and targeting opposing forces.

Observations and after action reviews of the strengths, challenges, and characteristics of MI company commanders over the course of four rotations at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) have revealed four fundamental

principles that, if followed, will lead to effective enabler integration and MI company mission success:

✦ Preparation.

✦ Planning.

✦ Location.

✦ Delegation and battlefield circulation.

What follows is an examination of those principles, citing Army doctrine and rotational vignettes from JMRC during 2018. In the interest of anonymity, each MI company has been assigned a letter (A, B, C, D), and the corresponding rotational names have been omitted. This article seeks to emphasize the four "keys to success" for MI company commanders and to inform brigade engineer battalion and BCT staffs how to employ them.

Military Intelligence Company Organization

The MI company, organized as shown in Figure 1, "provides the majority of intelligence personnel to the BCT to collect, analyze, and disseminate intelligence. The MI company must task-organize with the BCT intelligence cell to form the [brigade intelligence support element] BISE…The MI company commander directs the employment of the company in accordance with missions and guidance from the BCT headquarters."[3]
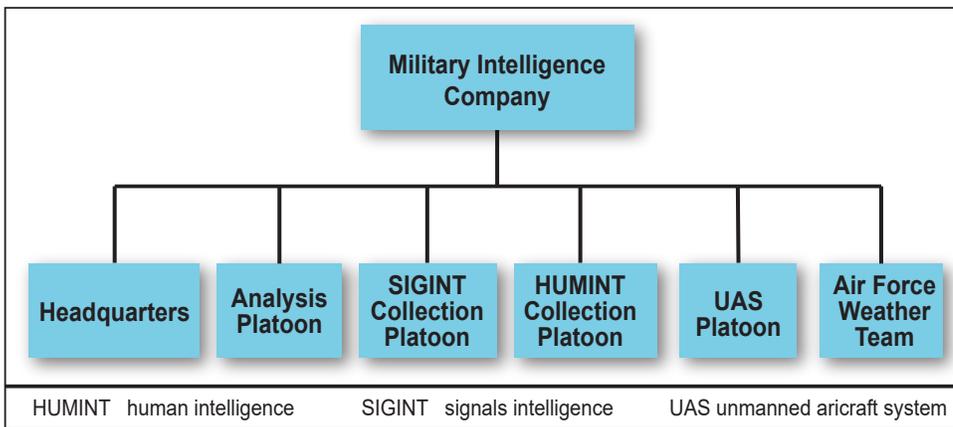

Figure 1. Military Intelligence Company Organization[4]

Military Intelligence Company Fundamental Keys to Success

Successful MI company commanders focus on four key areas—preparation, planning, location, and delegation and battlefield circulation. Specifically, these commanders—

✦ Train their formation and execute disciplined maintenance programs. (Preparation)

✦ Are involved with brigade staff planning early in the military decision-making process and remain tied in throughout execution. (Planning)

✦ Position their command post in close proximity to the brigade headquarters. (Location)

✦ Maintain the autonomy to reallocate personnel and resources to mitigate friction and delegate accordingly. (Delegation and battlefield circulation)

Preparation

> **Preparation**
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> "MI company commander duties and responsibilities include—Ensuring MI company Soldiers are trained in individual and collective tasks…Participating in any brigade engineer battalion and BCT staff planning exercise as required...Ensuring readiness through command supply discipline and maintenance."[5]

Much of what happens in execution is a direct result of preparation. Successful units demonstrate tactical and collective task proficiency during an exercise because they followed a thorough training plan leading up to the event. With the Army-wide implementation of the MI Training Strategy, MI company commanders now have a guidebook and organizational framework to effectively train their formations. Of course, implementation at the unit level requires brigade engineer battalion/brigade support, external resourcing, coordination, and deliberate planning.

Each intelligence discipline can also benefit from tactics, techniques, and procedures for better integration with maneuver elements. During a rotation with exceptionally mild weather, the tactical unmanned aircraft system (UAS) platoon from MI company A achieved success with an astounding number of flight hours—a compliment to the fully manned, trained, equipped, and proficient platoon. Tactical UAS platoons will also benefit from training with other MI companies or aviation units that typically fly the Shadow in support of manned/unmanned teaming. Instead of only conducting training flights for operator progression, Shadow platoons should also fly in support of maneuver training (situational training exercise, live-fire exercise, etc.) throughout the year to practice intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance techniques. Not only will the brigade engineer battalion staff assist with this, but the MI company commander should also coordinate with fellow commanders across the brigade for these training opportunities.

A focus on equipment proficiency, maintenance, and readiness is paramount to effective collection. The MI company fields systems with incredible capabilities to detect,

U.S. Army photo by SPC Von Trimble

Soldiers assigned to Delta Company, 1st Engineers Battalion, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, push an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) onto a launching ramp during UAV training at Trzebien, Poland, May 7, 2019.

Rapid Response Information Package because nobody had requested satellite time.

In both exercises, steps were taken to correct malfunctioning equipment, but some systems simply never became fully operational. The Prophet (SIGINT) system is especially complicated. It requires constant equipment and software updates to remain functional, and because it operates at the Top Secret level, proper security measures must be maintained in order to connect to requisite networks. Due to real-world missions throughout Europe that did not require their organic systems, the SIGINT platoon from MI company C had not maintained their equipment for several months before the exercise. As a result, most of their equipment failed, and when their trucks broke down, enemy forces captured the systems and their crews. Successful MI company commanders prepare their company through the execution of robust training and the enforcement of rigorous maintenance schedules to preserve functionality of critical intelligence assets. They should leverage all available resources, including the local Foundry program, division G-2 leadership, and field service representatives.

analyze, and transmit, but they must also be functional to provide value to the intelligence enterprise. The Soldiers who operate them must understand their capabilities and train to proficiency. MI company C exemplified this when the signals intelligence (SIGINT) and electronic warfare teams collectively received, processed, and disseminated more than 100 reports in just 5 days. Not only did the teams collect numerically more than any other unit at JMRC over the past 2 years, but the reports also fed into the collection and targeting cycles with great results. This was a direct reflection of the high levels of equipment readiness (the systems performed as they were supposed to) and of training (operators went to advantageous collection positions).

Systems training, maintenance, and upkeep are often neglected, resulting in system failure before and during training rotations. This includes collection equipment and communications systems, both of which are crucial for intelligence enablers. After all, what good is it to detect enemy positions if you cannot tell anyone about it? Likewise, if you place a multimillion dollar sensor in a vulnerable position near the forward line of own troops but the sensor fails, how do you remain relevant? While every MI company struggles with this, MI companies A and D had particular challenges stemming from a lack of systems training, mismanagement of maintenance priorities, and inadequate planning. For instance, during their rotations, Soldiers lacked basic radio skills and troubleshooting techniques for their assigned communications equipment. In one exercise, human intelligence (HUMINT) collection teams were without their primary method of reporting via the Global

Planning

> **Planning**
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> The MI company commander develops "relationships with the BCT and battalion intelligence cells to provide guidance on capabilities and employment considerations of the MI company… Recommends task organization and command and support relationships to the BCT staff for optimum use of MI collection assets."[6]

Successful MI company commanders ensure their teams can perform their intelligence collection functions in a tactical environment whether they are attached to a maneuver unit or are deployed from the brigade rear or forward command post. Since the majority of an MI company comprises brigade enabler teams, it is crucial to integrate them seamlessly into the collection plan and the maneuver unit that supports and is supported by them. Although easier said than done, it starts with command-support relationships.

They must be identified in planning, defined in operationorders (OPORDs), understood by gaining unit and enabler teams, rehearsed during the preparation phase, and overseen by the MI company commander. Collaboration among the brigade collection manager, brigade assistant S-2 or intelligence planner(s), and the MI company commander is tremendously beneficial. The brigade collection process will be most effective if these three maintain a positive working relationship, understand their roles, and synchronize their efforts.

Teams are also integrated early in the planning process with their parent units and the brigade. There are three key events during which enabler teams should be tasked (in warning order 1) not only to attend but also to expect to brief their mission:

✦ brigade combined arms rehearsal,

✦ information collection/fires rehearsal, and

✦ the MI company OPORD briefing.

They should also attend the OPORD briefings of their supported units when applicable. For example, a low-level voice intercept team attached to a troop within the cavalry squadron offers an incredible capability to the squadron and brigade commanders. If that team is absent from the unit briefings or internal combined arms rehearsals, they are more likely to be forgotten or neglected during execution. On the other hand, MI companies during rotations B and C were successful because their teams were engaged in those significant events.

After the information collection/fires rehearsal, MI company commander B held a separate company back brief to ensure all enablers understood the plan. Although not a traditional OPORD briefing, the back brief achieved the same effect: **shared understanding.** MI company commander C facilitated the information collection rehearsal (fires had a separate event) for the brigade. With all brigade intelligence leaders present, each enabler briefed his portion of the mission as directed by the MI company commander. He and the BCT S-2 were able to resolve questions and issues on the spot, which paved the way for effective asset integration and information collection. This is

a "best practice" for MI company commanders to consider as they prepare their company for deployment or a combat training center rotation.

Positive working relationships among the brigade engineer battalion staff, battalion S-2s, *and* **maneuver company commanders** across the brigade cannot be overstated. While the MI company commander has the resident subject matter expertise of warrant officers, he or she must advocate for SIGINT and HUMINT collection teams, often acting as the "salesman" to maneuver leaders. When they are assigned operational control to support a maneuver element or provide general support while a maneuver unit secures them, the MI company commander should ensure they are fully integrated. The coordinating instructions of the base OPORD must articulate the tasks, purposes, and command support relationships. Although published guidance helps make intelligence collection flow smoothly, units should rarely review reporting criteria, methods, and chains for all teams and rehearse at home station. Enabler checklists are useful tools for supported units and collection teams to better integrate with each other.

U.S. Army photo by SPC Josselyn Fuentes
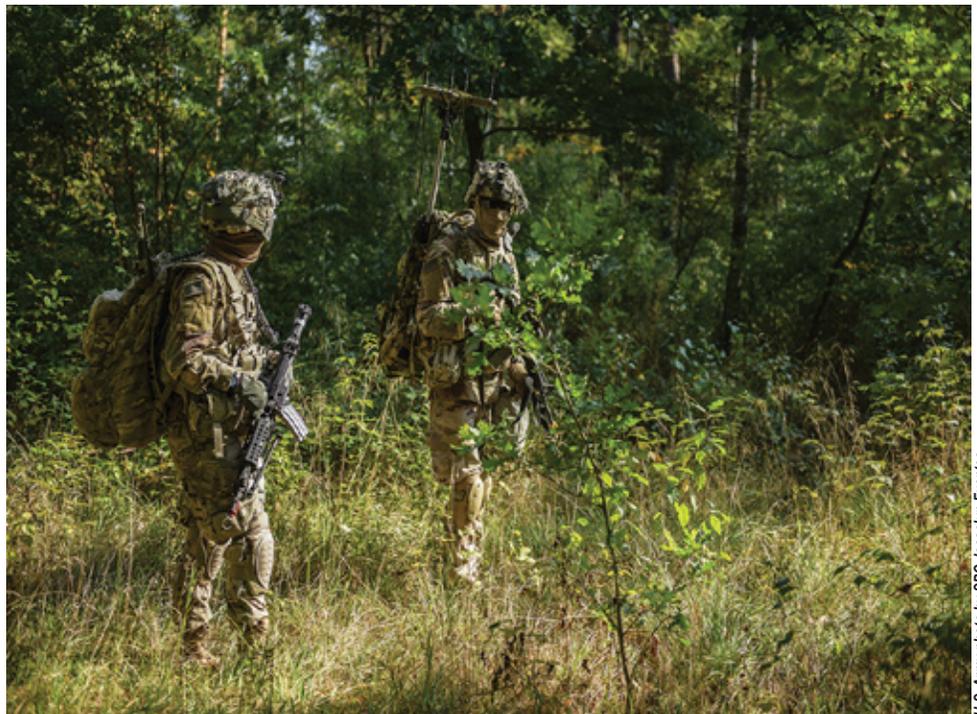
Sky Soldiers with Combat Electronic Warfare Intelligence Platoon, Delta Company, 54th Brigade Engineer Battalion, provide actionable signals intelligence to help the 173rd Airborne Brigade win the fight during Saber Junction 18 in Grafenwoehr, Germany, September 15, 2018.

Despite many units not formalizing a process for integrating enablers, commanders took a few discernable steps that delivered positive results. For instance, MI company commander C went face-to-face with each of the maneuver company commanders to whom the SIGINT and HUMINT teams were attached. Not only did the teams themselves

conduct capabilities briefings with new parent units, but the MI company commander also reinforced their role within the brigade information collection plan. He underscored their need for support in the field and the level of autonomy they require for maximum collection opportunity. This was particularly relevant for the SIGINT teams partnered with the electronic warfare teams— also brigade enablers assigned to a supported unit—which must push close to the forward line of own troops and position on high ground to effectively conduct their mission.

While the brigade S-2 creates the collection plan, ultimately, the brigade commander tasks the assets, and company com-

U.S. Army Photo by SSG Billy Brothers-Rodrigues

U.S. Soldiers from Delta Company, 55th Brigade Engineer Battalion, 173rd Airborne Brigade, talk with a simulated local national while conducting a human intelligence gathering scenario during exercise Saber Junction 16 at the U.S. Army's Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany, April 19, 2016.

manders must understand their role within the plan. MI company enablers are successful when collection tasks receive the same level of attention and respect as maneuver tasks. During rotation C, those teams collected and disseminated more reports than **all** collection teams during the other three rotations combined.

Compare this to the use and misuse of HUMINT collection teams during rotation A when HUMINT collection teams conducted key leader engagements in only one town, which yielded paltry intelligence at best. Although some interrogations did occur, the HUMINT collection team at the detainee collection point was held in reserve to conduct convoy security, rather than deploy forward for better collection opportunities. This led to Soldier fatigue, low morale, and intelligence gaps at the brigade. HUMINT collection teams remained in the brigade rear area instead of properly integrating into the maneuver unit and pushing forward to engage with populations in other towns. They would have gleaned valuable information leading to enemy composition, disposition, and battle plans, further bolstering brigade targeting.

Upon learning of their misuse, the MI company commander could have made recommendations to the operational management team, the BCT S-2, the brigade collection manager, and the maneuver company commander to better use the HUMINT collection teams. However, he was limited

in his ability to stay tied in to the intelligence fight and influence the reallocation of this collection asset.

Successful intelligence collection often links directly to commander engagement in staff planning at all phases. MI company commander D played an active role in coordinating with the BCT S-2 and the BISE staff—which led to better collection as the exercise progressed. During rotation B, the brigade commander assigned MI company commander B as "chief of recon." The unit achieved above average success with integrating collection assets because, in this role, the MI company commander not only assisted the brigade intelligence staff but also wrote Annex L (Information Collection) to the brigade OPORD. Having her embedded with the BCT staff proved beneficial because she understood the plan, personally knew the collectors she tasked, and remained linked to the feedback chain when reports came in from the field.

Location

> **Location**
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> "The MI company commander directs the employment of the company in accordance with missions and guidance from the BCT headquarters. The commander locates where to best exercise mission command of company assets…The MI company command post is usually co-located with the BCT main command post to facilitate control of company assets and maximize support to the BCT intelligence cell."[7]

Mission variables often dictate where the MI company commander establishes the command post; however, typically MI company commanders have the greatest opportunity for success the closer they are to the brigade headquarters. For example, MI company commander D collocated the command post near the brigade headquarters. The commander was able to command the company, realign assets when possible, and remain tied in to the brigade intelligence fight. Presence within the BISE and proximity to the BCT S-2 led to better integration of the enabler teams attached to maneuver units. While not able to mitigate all friction, once aware of problems, the commander was able to leverage resources to fix them.

MI company commander A set up the command post within the brigade engineer battalion tactical assembly area, which enhanced the ability to maintain situational awareness because of its proximity to the battalion headquarters, which came with robust communication packages. Not only did the command post include a small company headquarters but also a "rear BISE" comprised of all-source and geospatial analysts with their requisite equipment, with the mission to provide deep fight threat analysis. However, it was unable to stay nested within and connected to the overall brigade intelligence plan, thereby becoming irrelevant. After discovering these shortfalls, the MI company commander unofficially assumed the role of rear BISE chief—normally a position reserved for an experienced all-source intelligence warrant officer. This ultimately distracted the commander, which exacerbated other issues percolating among intelligence enabler teams spread out across the battlefield.

As the chief of reconnaissance, MI company commander B personally remained in the brigade tactical operations center and plans cell for the duration of the exercise, while the first sergeant and executive officer set up a command post in the vicinity of the tactical UAS platoon. Instead of fulfilling the traditional/doctrinal role, the commander planned and executed the brigade's information collection plan and provided targeting recommendations to the fires and operations cells. Although this maximized support to the BCT intelligence cell, it prevented the MI company commander from the direct management of collection teams during operations. To mitigate this, during the information collection/fires rehearsal, the MI company commander and brigade collection manager briefed the intelligence portions while all collection teams moved in sequence across the terrain model.

MI company commander C set up a command post approximately 300 meters north of his tactical UAS platoon.

This was close enough to have "hands-on" influence of the brigade's organic intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance platform (the Shadow RQ-7b) while also maintaining situational awareness of other collectors across the battlespace. On one occasion, the commander was able to visit the brigade headquarters but discovered it was better to support the brigade intelligence cell by controlling the company from the command post. In this case, the MI company was more effective with the commander separated from the brigade headquarters, as long as communications with collection teams were maintained.

None of the aforementioned MI company employment techniques should be considered "wrong," but some units were more successful than others. Doctrine suggests locating within the brigade command post; however, it does not always yield more effective information collection, as evidenced during rotation D. In 2018, the most effective employment of an MI company during a rotation at the JMRC was during rotation C, when teams collected more information of intelligence value and generated more reports than all teams during the other three rotations combined.

The most unique, but also effective, technique was the command post without an MI company commander during rotation B, which relied heavily on the executive officer and first sergeant to run the company. Regardless, the commander's geographic proximity to the brigade was ultimately an effective part of the company's technique. This connection to the brigade can occur through physical placement of the MI company command post within the brigade tactical assembly area or close to the tactical UAS platoon because of its importance as the primary sensor in most collection plans. With the numerous processing, exploitation, and dissemination requirements for collection assets, MI company commanders should help mitigate communication challenges from sensors to the BISE, which often means physically placing themselves or a subordinate leader in the vicinity.

Delegation and Battlefield Circulation

> **Delegation and Battlefield Circulation**
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> "As part of exercising mission command, the MI company commander visits company elements deployed with forward units, maintains situational awareness of all team positions, and performs required administrative functions."[8]

MI company commanders have the ability to "multiply" themselves by planning, administering direct guidance, and empowering junior leaders. They must find ways to get "ground truth" from enabler teams spread out across the

battlespace. This may come in the form of placing leaders within maneuver units and/or conducting battlefield circulation as feasible. MI company commander A was the only commander in four rotations who conducted battlefield circulation. Through deliberate planning, the commander was able to resource enough crew-serve weapons-equipped vehicles to safely move around the rear area to meet with the Shadow UAS platoon, forward BISE, and brigade tactical operations center.

These visits were particularly important because the UAS platoon was attempting to conduct split operations by placing a ground control station near the brigade tactical assembly area. The commander helped mitigate some of the friction involved with getting the "right" people and the "right" equipment to the "right" place at the "right" time. This reallocation of assets proved useful to the brigade commander and staff because, with the UAS platoon leader now collocated, he could attend intelligence planning and fires sync meetings, while the BCT S-2 gave face-to-face guidance and adjusted collection plans and priorities as needed.

Successful MI company commanders cultivate a culture of empowered leadership within their organization and have the autonomy to visit troops, increase morale, and increase awareness of collection teams. Battlefield circulation plans require time, energy, and resources such as security vehicles, which MI companies do not always have, to safely transport command teams. In lieu of this, successful commanders place junior leaders where they can maximize their effectiveness at mitigating the inevitable friction.

For instance, during planning, MI company commander D recognized the inability to conduct battlefield circulation. Instead, the commander leveraged the SIGINT platoon leader and platoon sergeant by placing them with the cavalry squadron command post. This gave platoon leadership closer access to their teams with whom the squadron provided direct support. This initiative and ability to anticipate future issues proved helpful, despite the unit working through strained primary, alternate, contingency, and emergency plans and fragile communications systems. While serving as chief of reconnaissance, MI company commander B directed the SIGINT platoon leader to the cavalry squadron command post, which put the platoon leader in a position to mitigate some of the friction between collection teams and the maneuver unit. Recognizing that the commander would be incapable of fulfilling the normal role, the executive officer and first sergeant received explicit written guidance of the duties and responsibilities they would need to assume. All these delegation techniques reflect decisions based on the "art of leadership" and should be considered during the predeployment process.

Conclusion

This review highlights many of the challenges MI company commanders face when employing their company. MI company commanders must prepare the company by implementing thorough training plans and maintenance schedules to keep equipment operational. They should be involved early and often in the brigade planning process. They should locate the command post close to the brigade headquarters to stay tied in with operations and intelligence collection planning during all phases of the exercise. They must find ways to gain perspective from Soldiers at the team level through delegation and battlefield circulation.

While there are too many points of friction for one person to anticipate and personally fix before and during a JMRC rotation, MI company commanders who focus on these four fundamental keys to success, which lead to *effective asset integration,* are more likely to succeed in directing employment of their company and maximizing support to the brigade intelligence cell.

Endnotes

1. Department of the Army, Army Techniques Publication 2-19.4, *Brigade Combat Team Intelligence Techniques* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 10 February 2015), 2-6 (common access card login required).

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 2-5–2-6.

4. Ibid., 2-6.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., 2-6–2-7.

7. Ibid., 2-6.

8. Ibid.

CPT Ryan Hardin is currently pursuing a master of science in strategic intelligence at the National Intelligence University. He most recently served as the military intelligence company senior trainer for the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany. During his tenure, he coached three U.S. battalion S-2s and five company commanders to execute their combat training rotations. Previous assignments include headquarters company commander, battalion S-2, forward logistics element platoon leader (deployed to Afghanistan), mobile gun system platoon leader, battalion planner, and rifle platoon leader.