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Multi-Function Teams

Before I finished ROTC and commissioned, I was put on orders to the 504th BfSB. Excited about continuing my Army career as a Commissioned Officer, I called the brigade S-1 and attempted to gather more information as to what my new job would entail. I was given the opportunity to meet with the Brigade Commander and Deputy Commander and I learned that I would be leading a Multi-Function Team. I had no idea what an MFT did, let alone how I would lead one. Thus began my research into the task and purpose of MFTs as well as the search for lessons learned from previous deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan.

Multi-Function Teams (MFTs) are the tactical spearhead of Military Intelligence. The goal of the MFT is to provide multi-disciplined collection, exploitation, and limited analysis to generate actionable intelligence, detect, track, and locate targets in support of world-wide contingency missions within assigned areas of the Division, Corps, Joint Task Force (JTF) or Multi-National Force area of operations (AO). The doctrine behind the MFT is that in the COIN environment, MFTs have a direct role in the finding and fixing of targets, and by performing their own secure site exploitation (SSE) MFTs are able to quickly react to newly discovered actionable intelligence and move to a secondary objective and repeating the process ad infinitum. In practice, MFTs are successful at this mission, to a point, relying on doctrine alone; however, leaders must adapt the doctrinal MFT to suite the mission, environment, and resources pertinent to their situation.

The problem for MFTs is that they are still very new to the Army and as such, commanders are unaware of how to best utilize them to their full capability. Another problem is that the MFT leaders themselves are unsure how to best leverage the

intelligence disciplines under their control to most effectively complete the mission of finding and fixing the enemy. Efforts have to be made to combat both of these deficiencies. The former will be naturally resolved over time if the latter is addressed by the young lieutenants who will lead the MFTs.

Former MFT leaders identified the initial difficulties of managing MFTs after returning from being deployed to Iraq. CPT Robert Stover is a 2007 ROTC graduate from Florida State University, and his first assignment was to Alpha Company, 303rd MI BN, 504th BfSB as a MFT leader. He related his experience as an MFT leader:

“The idea was for a team with three core capabilities - SIGINT, HUMINT, and SSE. Essentially, we worked a Time-Sensitive-Target (TST) mission set. These targets were SIGINT initiated and we responded with quick action on those TSTs. Everyone on the team has a specific function, the HUMINTers served as TQs on site, and developed targets through interrogations after returning to base while the SIGINTers used available assets to find the targets’ locations. Everyone was trained in basic DOMEX, but ultimately that fell on the SIGINTers when we returned to base. We had imbedded CAT II interpreters that would help with the DOCEX on the site and that, in conjunction with TQs from the HUMINTers, we were looking for another actionable target.”

Stover explained that his team was attached as general support to a BCT, and from there he served as direct support to one battalion. Furthermore, his MFT was attached directly to a dedicated TST infantry platoon. This allowed the MI Soldiers to focus on the critical intelligence tasks while the infantry Soldiers provided the outer cordon and initial actions on the objective.

“You have to know how your mission will affect the S2’s assessment and battalion’s mission,” Stover said. “Using TSTs to initiate a mission and collect information, F3EAD, pushing intelligence up and down the communication lines in order to assist in the development of additional targets.”

Once actions on the objective were complete, and the element had returned to base, the infantry platoon would recover and be released while the MFT went to work processing detainees, interrogating, comparing collected intelligence with known intelligence, processing materials recovered during the SSE, and inputting that data into the databases, however the MFT would only perform supplemental analysis, the primary mission of the MFT is collection.

“One of the best things about being having a dedicated TST platoon was being able to train tactically with them. We were able to develop our own TTPs in conjunction with the infantry guys so that they would know how we worked and we would know how they worked – it took away a lot of the confusion,” CPT Stover said.

One of the difficulties that Stover’s MFT experienced was manpower. He replaced a MFT of 12 during his RIP/TOA with his team of nine. His team comprised of himself and his NCOIC and seven others, four 35Ms (HUMINT), one 35F (Analyst), one 35N (SIGINT), and one 35L (CI), later on they received two CAT II interpreters. The problem that he identified with having only nine Soldiers is that there was very little opportunity for a rest/recovery period for any member of the team, and there was an increased need for cross training. One of the biggest hurdles to the cross training was the SIGINT (the sensitivities of the SIGINT are beyond the scope of this article).

Working with what he had, and knowing that he faced a deployment, Stover made it his mission to know the capabilities of all of the equipment that he would have at his disposal, and more importantly making sure that every Soldier on his team was adequately trained on all aspects of the MFT mission. The cross training was facilitated both by sending Soldiers TDY for training, and also by having mobile training teams visit him at Fort Hood. Because of the nature of some of his available assets, he was unable to do most real-world training while in garrison with those assets – this made it necessary for the SIGINT Soldiers to go TDY for training.

Another key element of the training was embedding with the infantry platoons of the battalions that the MFT would support. It was essential that the MI Soldiers were capable of accomplishing the basic Soldier tasks required to maneuver effectively with a combat arms element. This built both comfort and respect between both groups. Giving MI soldiers training on Warrior Tasks is essential.

Another need for training is to incorporate the collection assets into BCT level FTXs. The MFT needs to be used as an asset in training so that both the commanders and S2s can know the capabilities, but also so that the MFT itself can hone its skills.

Overall, because of the size of his team, CPT Stover said that the biggest lesson learned from Iraq was flexibility.

“You encompass so many different ‘INTS. You have to be able to influence and guide the S2 and commander’s use of your MFT as an asset. You have to act as a liaison between the Air Force DOMEX, the battalion S2, the brigade OMT, the DHA, other HCTs, other SIGINT assets, law enforcement, and other governmental agencies.

You have to be able to flex into a HUMINT role, into a SIGINT role, into an exploitation role. And you have to not be afraid as a 2LT to stand up to the commander and S3 and make them use the MFT as it was intended to be used and not split off into other missions – don't be afraid to tell an O-6 no.”

References

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Lewis, Michael. Personal Interview Conducted.

ST 2-22.7 (FM 34-7-1) Tactical HUMINT and CI Operations, Apr 02

FM 2-91.4 Intelligence Support to Operations in the Urban Environment, Aug 05

2-91.6 Small Unit Support to Intelligence, Mar 04

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Military Biography:

James McCabe entered the Army in 2003, as a Petroleum Supply Specialist. He attended Basic Combat Training at Fort Jackson, SC, and Advanced Individual Training at Fort Lee, Va. In 2006 he reenlisted to change his MOS to All Source Intelligence Analyst. He was promoted to the rank of Staff Sergeant in 2008 and he was accepted into the Army's Green to Gold program and entered ROTC. He is a Distinguished Military Graduate of Texas A&M University – Central Texas, where he earned his commission as a Military Intelligence Officer.

2LT McCabe's combat deployments include OIF I (2003-2004) and OIF 06-08 (2007). His awards include the Army Commendation Medal (1 OLC), the Army Achievement Medal (1 OLC), the Iraq Campaign Medal (3 campaign stars), the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, the Army Good Conduct Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development Ribbon, the Overseas Service Ribbon (numeral 2), and the Army Service Ribbon.

2LT McCabe lives in Temple, TX with his wife Kabrina and daughter Faith.