

“Rethinking Tactical HUMINT in a MAGTF World”

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“Rethinking Tactical HUMINT in a MAGTF World”
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“The Iraq Campaign is a fight for Intelligence....”

Lieutenant General James Mattis, Commanding General of 1st Marine Division

Although commanders and the intelligence community understand the importance of successful Human Intelligence, as identified in numerous after-action reports from operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Marine Corps has not provided relevant changes to correct this deficiency. As a result of fundamental shortfalls in task organization, training, operational integration, and employment of human exploitation teams (HETs) continue to operate the ongoing Global War on Terrorism. Over the last several years, operations in Africa, Iraq, and Afghanistan demonstrated the capabilities, limitations, lethality and validity of Human Intelligence and specifically the Human Exploitation Teams HETs are tasked to conduct tactical and operational HUMINT as independent units in general support (GS) of the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) or in direct support (DS) of a task force, regiment, or battalion.

Unfortunately the availability of teams, providing trained / experienced teams or linguists, and successfully employing HETs has been reported in after-actions by HETs and operational combat elements as “Hit or Miss”. Generally speaking, due to a lack of education and integrated training regiment commanders, battalion commanders, and company and platoon commanders do not have a comprehensive understanding of human intelligence operations and the employment of this intelligence asset. Equally, most HETs do not have much training in conducting operations in conjunction with squads, platoons, companies, or battalions. Consequently HETs are constantly being misemployed or not used altogether. More troubling is that the Marine Corps, as a whole, has been slow to react from lessons learned in Africa, Iraq, and Afghanistan and it has not give the counter intelligence (CI) community all the necessary tools to allow HET operations to dominate the Human Intelligence mission. Against an active, analytical, and unconventional enemy, HETs have faced shortfalls in manpower and trained operators limiting effective operations. Equally, their “trade- craft” training predominately

focuses on permissive-overt collections, and leadership of the teams is often junior lieutenants and staff non-commissioned officers (SNCOs). Even plagued by all these challenges, HUMINT operations by HETs have been credited with consistent and continuous success in the “War on Terrorism”.

Setting the stage

Selection into Marine Corps Counter Intelligence (CI) Human Intelligence (HUMINT) specialty occurs utilizing two methods: recruiting enlisted Marines and assigning the MOS to new 2nd lieutenants. For 2nd Lieutenants, the process starts after six months of intensive school training at The Basic School (TBS) and being selected to attend the Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) CI Basic Course in Damneck Virginia. After completing the seventeen weeks of basic CI training the Lieutenant receives the MOS of 0204, Human Source Intelligence Officer. The Lieutenant then departs to his CI/HUMINT company serving in both counterintelligence (CI) and HUMINT billets. His duties may include serving as CI platoon commander, Interrogation (IT) platoon commander, and eventually company executive officer within the HUMINT company, as well as serving as a division or MEF staff officer. Normally potential enlisted Marine candidates for CI/HUMINT are recruited directly through the efforts of the CI company. Within this recruiting and selection process, members of CI companies have recruiting road shows that travel to the tenant commands on the base. Focus on recruiting weighs heavily on non commissioned officer (NCO) Marines from combat arms units since many of the Marines have deployed, have real world training or operational experience, have made corporal and completed 4 years of military service (a minimum requirement), and normally have a detailed performance record that the CI recruiting team can review. In theaters and halls, the CI recruit teams provide briefs to the “poolies” focusing on the role and mission the Marines would have.

Mission responsibilities would include: being involved in all facets of planning and conducting tactical CI and human intelligence operations and activities-designed to locate, identify, and neutralize hostile intelligence and terrorist threats to the command and Fleet Marine Forces within the continental United States and units deployed abroad. An additional collateral duty for CI specialists would be conducting human intelligence operations to collect information of intelligence value to the commander as members of a CI subteam, detachment, or HUMINT Exploitation Team (HET). Counter Intelligence specialists would be expected to possess a working knowledge of the organization, operations, and techniques employed by foreign intelligence services and terrorist organizations.¹ The poolies are also informed that after completing the (MAGTF) CI Basic Course the Marine would receive the MOS of 0211 and a lateral move into the Counter Intelligence community. Unfortunately to this young group of testosterone filled infantrymen, this MOS usually does not sound glamorous or exciting and to exacerbate the challenges faced to the CI Recruit Team, commanders and SNCOs are not thrilled at the idea of losing their seasoned, experienced and operationally ready NCOs to an MOS the leaders don't know much about, would result in a manpower reduction for that unit, or detracts from the platoon's or company's mission readiness.

Should a perspective "poolie" be interested in lateral moving, make the prescreening requirements, successfully attend the MAGTF CI Basic Course and receive his 0211 MOS, he returns to a CI/HUMINT company the same way the 0204 lieutenant arrived...fresh out of school, textbook answers to HUMINT operations in hand, and no where near ready to deploy into a high intensity conflict or unconventional war against seasoned and indigenous insurgents.

¹ United States Government, MCDP 2-6 Counter Intelligence, Washington D.C., Dept of the Navy, USMC, 5 September 2000. page 8-1,2

Iron Curtain doctrine.

The updating of doctrine, tactics and training is another challenge for the CI community. The MAGTF CI Basic Course provides instruction in DOD, national, theater, and organic Marine Corps intelligence assets. The course also provides instruction on:

- CI application of the combat intelligence cycle
- CI hostile threat; terrorism
- CI/tactical HUMINT operations
- surveillance techniques
- interview skills and interrogations
- espionage, sabotage, and subversion
- photography
- terrorism investigations
- intelligence report writing.²

Within the course curriculum, a specific deficiency falls in the area of collection, surveillance, and source “Trade Craft”. This area of training predominately focuses on operations in an overt and permissive environment. There is no question that the course is thorough and an extensive syllabus is taught to the lieutenants and enlisted Marines, but the focus is at the entry level.

During the execution of the CI Basic Course emphasis is placed on amphibious operations with follow-on missions and completion of level 1 of the force protection course. The level one class trains the CI Marines how to support a unit or command’s force protection

² United States Government, MCDP 2-6 Counter Intelligence, Washington D.C., Dept of the Navy, USMC, 5 September 2000. pages 8-5,6

requirements in the continental United States prior to and during the conduct of port visits, training missions, or real world contingencies. This CI effort is continuous while Marine units may be exposed or threatened by exploitation by intelligence and or security services, and or terrorist actions targeting the force.

After graduation, the lieutenant or the enlisted Marine join their CI/HUMINT company and normally conduct “peacetime” training. Training is a matter of the command’s operational tempo and manpower availability. All CI Marines must participate in a myriad of training including annual sustainment training, no different than other Marines. However, CI Marines also have three levels of CI sustainment training as published by MCO 3500.32, Intelligence Training and Readiness Manual. Training within the MAGTF command or division command post exercises, the company usually constructs a scripted opposition force and conducts efforts to detect, collect, analyze, and exploit this threat. After action reporting indicated that normal operations tempo within the company restricts the level and quantity of participation due to rotation of forces being deployed with MEUs or in support of contingency operations. However, training received by Special Operations Training Group, the unit assigned to train and prepare the MEUs during workups for the deployment, developed and executed sound training packages to exercise the HET teams individually and in conjunction with units from the Battalion Landing Team assigned to the MEU, but much of this training focuses on mission execution within an overt and permissive environment.³

³ Nussberger, Major, U. S. M. C., “After Action Interview of Human Exploitation Operations” 23 November 2005.

Changes at the roots to set the stage

Many commanders, from the regiment level down to the platoon commander level, intelligence officers and chiefs, at all levels, and Marines from within the CI/HUMINT command have returned from operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other countries reporting that the HUMINT effort is critical and that the employment of HETs is challenging, complex and with mixed reporting of successes and failures. A couple of key issues come to the surface, while examining the problem, including the level of preparedness for immediate deployment of these Marines upon graduating the MAGTF CI Basic Course. The Marine Corps makes presumptions by assessing the enlisted Marine, now given an 0211 MOS, as an operationally experienced Marine that normally has an infantry background, sound tactics and is emotionally and mentally mature. Equally the lieutenant, receiving his 0204 MOS, also has presumptions made as to his operational readiness, tactical savvy, and maturity even though he has not attended Infantry Officers Course nor had the benefit of any deployment experience. As a result of current operational tempo within the Marine Corps, both 0204s and 0211s come to a CI/HUMINT Company, are placed within a team or staff position, and rapidly deploy to conduct operations in direct support or general support of forces operating against an active and seasoned enemy operating for an unknown period of time.

A stemming and critical issue regarding this failed thought process, the relatively inexperienced lieutenant is now expected to be ready to brief and explain the proper employment of his team(s) to an S2 and commander, from company command level up to division command level, on how best to employ themselves on the battlefield or within an area of responsibility (AOR). Again this lieutenant, unless a veteran with prior deployments, now must also be prepared to discuss tactics and operational control with those forces the HET teams are working with within an

(AO). In considering the validity of discussing tactics, this young officer has credibility issues as soon as his lieutenant bars catch a Commander's eye, especially if he is talking to a regiment or battalion commander. What tactical or operational experience is this young lieutenant drawing from?

Its all about combined arms execution

The next glaring concern is the fact that many battalions and regiments have inconsistent training standards with HETs. In the case of MEUs, an individual MEU and BLT Commander, with the help and guidance of the S2 and the senior Marine from the CI/HUMINT attachment, decide how and when to employ the HETs. Many times the employment of HETs does not come from a fixed training standard in employment. Employment becomes a personal decision which the commanders may correctly or incorrectly decide. Unless SOTG, the S2, and CI/HUMINT officer have developed a sound integrated working relationship and coordinated task organization and training standards for HET and the individual companies, employment is improvised with mixed results. Task organization and employment of HETs should be incorporated with every MEU mission during battalion workups and throughout the special operations capable certification. From the infantry perspective, HUMINT operations and employment of HETs is a textual concept at TBS and IOC. At no time during the period of instruction are HET teams attached and then incorporated to the training or any practical exercise. Once in the fleet, the platoon commander's, executive officer's and the Company Commander's level of understanding and experience with HETs is a matter of the S2 conducting training classes and arraigining for HET teams to attach to Company and platoon training. Again there is no Marine Corps directed standard in the Infantry Training Standards (ITS) or Mission Essential Task List (METLs) to conduct integrated training with CI/HUMINT elements. No

different then practicing close air support or combined arms, the infantry and CI/HUMINT community must integrate training from the platoon level and higher to set the stage for mission success. Due to normal operations tempo with MEU deployment rotations, Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, infantry battalions are struggling to meet basic ITS and METL standards and to pass MEU(SOC) qualification requirements before deploying. Unless the Marine Corps steps in and sets training and operation standards to ensure integrated training with CI/HUMINT assets commanders will only have the experience of deployment and real world contingencies to understand and incorporate this critical asset into their day to day mission execution. Taken the fact that new Marines may be on these teams with limited an unquantifiable level of previous experience, the successful integration of infantry with HETs is a recipe for blunders.

Conclusion

Current and future threats necessitate that the Marine Corps modify and modernize the Human Intelligence program with the counter intelligence companies, transitioning from cold war era doctrine and tactics to incorporate high intensity conflicts and unconventional warfare. Headquarters Marine Corps directed selection and recruiting into the Counter Intelligence community will improve sustaining task organization manpower and the quality of Marines transitioning into the counterintelligence companies. Modifying doctrine and occupational specialty training will enhance HET Marine's ability to conduct operations in an unconventional or conventional battlefield; conducting integrated training with maneuver units and their respective commanders will develop employment and HET utilization. The lessons learned from veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan have been captured in numerous after action reports and these lessons learned have been battle tested against an intelligent and elusive enemy.

It is the responsibility of the Marine Corps and the intelligence activities to lead the way by training and employing the next generation of Marines, improving their capability to exploit the enemy, winning the “fight for intelligence”, and using combined arms approach that can brought against the current enemy to achieve tactical and operational successes in a fluid battlefield.

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