

Targeting at the Infantry Battalion level: Observed gaps in practice and doctrine

By MAJ John Fridlington and MSG Douglas J. Hurst

Infantry Battalion staffs often culminate in regards to a perceived capability while conducting just the bare minimums of the Military Decision-Making Process (MDMP) due to the lack of doctrinal knowledge on targeting and creativity. They often fail to capture and synchronize the intricate details of the “who, when, where, and how” of what they want to kill during the planning process. Not utilizing the Targeting Methodology during the MDMP process leads to a lack of detailed plans. Infantry Battalion staffs do not utilize the Targeting Methodology due to lack of trained personnel to focus on the targeting process, the perceived lack of sensors and delivery assets organic to the Infantry Battalion, the lack of Targeting Working Groups (TWGs), and lack of doctrine covering targeting at the Battalion level. All the above reasons degrade the Commander’s ability to thoroughly plan and synchronize the targeting of the enemy thus limiting his ability to effectively shape the enemy before direct fire contact.

Observer, Coach or Trainers (O/CTs) at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) observed numerous general trends related to Targeting from Infantry Battalion staffs during the Fiscal Years 2020 and 2021 Decisive Action Training Environment Rotations. One observed trend is the Battalion Staff and ground sensors are not privy to the Named Areas of Interest (NAIs) and their associated Information Requirements (IR). The Battalion S-2 creates a generally sound NAI plan but does not ensure thorough shared understanding. Often, only the Battalion Commander and Battalion S-2 understand the plan. At best, the Scout Platoon seniors might

also understand the NAIs and IRs. This lack of shared understanding leads to unobserved NAIs and unanswered IRs preventing the proper shaping of the enemy at the right time.

Another trend observed by O/CTs is the lack of utilization of Forward Observers in the collection plan. Forward Observers generally stay co-located with their Platoon Leaders and serve essentially as an additional Radio Telephone Operator with a Fires net. Rarely do Forward Observers deliberately occupy Observation Posts (OP) and overwatch NAIs but when they do, they lack the IRs to provide an observation that will help the Commander make decisions. The Intelligence Collection and Synchronization Matrix (ICSM) usually just mirrors Brigade and above assets with minimal Battalion asset input.

Oftentimes, the lack of integration between the Battalion S-2 Section and the Battalion Fire Support Element (FSE) causes the gaps in Forward Observer integration as well as the ability to target at the Battalion level. The Battalion S-2 generally conducts Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield independently of the FSE, leading to the Fire Support Officer (FSO) placing “cross-hairs on the red diamonds” rather than truly determining what, where, when, and how to best destroy the enemy. The lack of integration does not stop in the plans tent. The S-2 and FSE often lack crucial communication while conducting dynamic targeting on the Current Operations floor. Battle Damage Assessments (when provided at all) often do not make it from the Fires Desk to the Intel Desk degrading the S-2’s ability to continually update the Enemy Common Operating

Picture and make assessments to provide the Commander. This crucial breakdown in staff integration prevents determining what needs to be killed and integrating the detection and delivery assets necessary.

A final general trend observed across Infantry Battalion staff is the lack of a common collection matrix understood by all necessary players. The S-2 usually creates the ICSM including collection assets, NAIs, and collection times during initial MDMP at the Initial Staging Base or Rotational Unit Bivouac Area. The product rarely makes its way to the FSO or subordinate Commanders. As the rotation continues, the product becomes more and more scarce and often nobody on the staff knows what is currently collecting where.

Fire Support O/CTs looking deeper into the details of the friction Infantry Battalions experience in Targeting observed certain trends and proposed ways ahead to increase the lethality

of deliberate and dynamic targeting in support of the Battalion Commander's vision and intent.

First, Battalion staff personnel do not receive adequate training in the Army's Targeting Methodology of Decide, Detect, Deliver, Assess (D3A). In the best-observed Battalions, the Commander, FSO, and S-2 understand the methodology but do a poor job of utilizing it. The assigned "Targeting NCO" in the FSE always serves more as an assistant Fire Support NCO rather than integrating with the intelligence section and conducting targeting. The level of experience and familiarity with the Targeting Methodology of that Staff Sergeant leads to him reverting to his comfort level and focusing on the just Fires rather than providing the necessary coordination with the Intelligence Section.

To help alleviate this issue, the Brigade Targeting Officers and NCOs need to conduct home-station training with FSOs, Arial Fire Support Observers,



LTC Kirk John Junker, seminar lead instructor and director of the Joint Targeting School in Dam Neck, Virginia, discusses key points and principles of joint targeting during a targeting seminar at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait Oct. 12, 2016. The open forum seminar allowed key leaders to learn and discuss important strategies and doctrine concerning the concept of joint targeting. (U.S. Army photo by SGT Aaron Ellerman)

and Targeting NCOs on how to conduct targeting. Battalion S-2s, S-3s, S-4s, and Executive Officers would also benefit from attending the training as targeting is a staff integration function and not a Fires or intelligence function. The targeting process frequently collapses when not driven by the Executive Officer or S-3. The training needs to focus on how to apply the targeting methodology at the Battalion level, establishing and integrating into a targeting cycle, and how to conduct a TWG.

JRTC O/CTs also see Infantry Battalion staffs with a perceived lack of assets for the detect and deliver steps of the Targeting Methodology. Many S-2s rely heavily on Brigade and above air-based sensors and the Scout Platoon only as ground-based sensors while many FSOs only feel they truly have Battalion mortars for delivery. This limited view of assets gives Commanders very little in the ways of deliberate targeting and forces them to rely more on reacting to contact dynamic targeting.

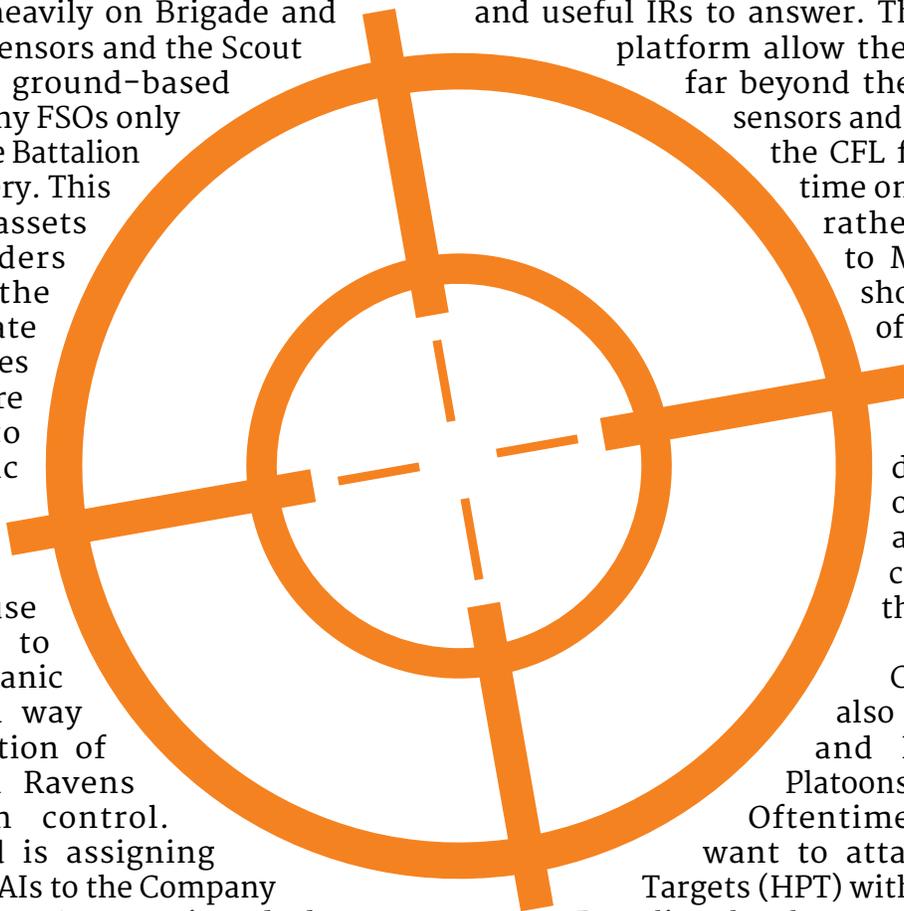
Successful units at JRTC use creative means to expand their organic sensor plans. A way is the consolidation of Company RQ-11 Ravens under Battalion control. Another method is assigning flight times and NAIs to the Company in mission orders. As mentioned above, Forward Observers rarely leave their Platoon Leaders' side. Forward Observers must be utilized as ground sensors and assigned NAIs in Company Areas of Operation (AO) to answer IRs for the Battalion. Commander's must accept prudent risk and enable Forward Observers to operate forward of the Forward Line of Troops and the Coordinated Firing Line (CFL) with minimal security, much how they trust the Scout Platoon to do. Proposed OPs within the Tasks to Subordinate Units portion of mission orders need to force Companies to utilize their assets to their fullest potential. Likewise, Forward Observers must train for this mission set

in order to earn the Commander's trust. The lack of utilization of Forward Observers increases the perceived lack of ground sensors with the ability to cover nine additional NAIs.

Fire Support Officers also often do not utilize AH-64 Apache support to the full capability. Although Army Attack Aviation (AAA) belongs to the Brigade or higher, it often operates under subordinate Infantry Battalion control or at a minimum within a Battalion AO. AAA with a clear reconnaissance-based task and purpose excel at thoroughly covering large NAIs as long as they are flying with common graphics and useful IRs to answer. The sensors on the platform allow them to reconnoiter far beyond the reach of ground sensors and operate forward of the CFL for additional lead time on enemy indicators rather than reacting to Maneuver contact short of the CFL as is often the trend. They also possess the added capability of detecting and delivering with one platform with a human operator capable of providing their identification.

Commanders must also look at their Rifle and Heavy Weapons Platoons as delivery assets. Oftentimes, Commanders want to attack High Pay-Off Targets (HPT) with mortars or above Battalion-level assets when identified in the Battalion AO. Sometimes, a Weapons Platoon is the timelier or more effective means of delivery on HPTs but is forgotten. Weapons Platoons or Companies laying ambushes on Targeted Areas of Interest (TAI) coupled with an early warning from air-based sensors could prove devastating, particularly in a counter-reconnaissance fight on the defense.

Infantry Battalions must also begin conducting TWGs as a battle rhythm event. Infantry Battalions likely do not possess the staff bandwidth, assets, or area of operations to fully nest in the



Brigade's usual 72-hour targeting cycle and the Air Tasking Order (ATO) cycle (other than in deliberate MDMP sessions leading into major operations), although they do need to work to achieve a 48-hour cycle. The Battalion TWG needs to occur daily with the input of updated running estimates, assets available (Maneuver, ISR, and Fire Support), Enemy Situation Templates, Enemy Event Templates, Brigade, and above ISR available, and Brigade and above Targets assigned to the Battalion. The output includes nominations for NAIs, TAIs, and Targets on a Target Synchronization Matrix along with a draft ICSM for 24-48 hours out and confirmation/approval on 24 hours and in. The right personnel must attend the TWG. The S-3 or higher must chair the meeting and approve decisions within 24 hours. The Battle Captain must provide the current friendly situation and assets available along with planned operations for the next 24 and 48 hours. The S-2 needs to possess all current information on the enemy as well as the ICSM. The S-4 needs to provide updates on logistics that could positively or adversely affect targeting. The FSO needs to provide friendly Fires assets available, targets, and mortar rounds available.

Finally, the FSO and S-2 must identify targets or NAIs in their sensor or delivery plan that cannot be organically serviced coming out of the TWG. Once identified, they must begin submitting Joint Tactical Air Requests, Air Mission Requests, or other enabler requests to fill those gaps. These requests preferably are deliberate and fit into the higher headquarters targeting cycle and ATO cycle however, immediate requests with plenty of lead time should still be requested. Although Brigade does generally possess the assets needed, an Infantry Battalion must try to plan to accomplish their mission with organic assets as Brigade usually focuses on the deep fight beyond the Brigade CFL. The TWG enables the staff to prioritize the efforts of all warfighting functions. The need to prioritize a Class V resupply to the mortars or the need to request replacement Soldiers to the Scout Platoon to observe NAIs are examples.

Army doctrine plays a key role in the lack of targeting conducted at the Infantry Battalion level. Both FM 3-60 *Targeting* and ATP 3-09.42 *Fire Support for the BCT* does not mention targeting below the Brigade-level. The Program of Instruction at Field Artillery Captains Career

Course gives broad introductions on the Army's Targeting Methodology (D3A) as well as the Joint Targeting Methodology (F3EAD) but does not teach future FSOs how to apply the methodologies to real-world scenarios, especially at the Battalion level.

The Army needs to involve the Army Multi-Domain Targeting Center at Fort Sill in writing doctrine to guide Infantry Battalion staff through the targeting process. This can occur through updating the current publications or creating a new publication focused solely on the Battalion level. The Fires Center of Excellence at Fort Sill, The Intelligence Center of Excellence at Fort Huachuca, and The Maneuver Center of Excellence at Fort Benning must all give input and buy-in for the doctrine to be meaningful as all three Warfighting Functions own pieces of the targeting process. These three key Centers of Excellence also need to start incorporating more targeting in their programs of instruction during the Captain's Career Course. This will help bridge the knowledge gap present at the Infantry Battalion level.

Infantry Battalion staffs fail to enable their Commander's ability to plan and synchronize deliberate targeting of the enemy for a multitude of reasons. They do not utilize the Targeting Methodology in conjunction with MDMP due to lack of trained personnel to focus on the targeting process, the perceived lack of sensors and delivery assets organic to the Infantry Battalion, the lack of Targeting Working Groups, and the lack of doctrine covering targeting at the Battalion level. Solutions exist to all these challenges through creative problem-solving, home station training, and publication of doctrine. These things will make the U.S. Army Infantry Battalion an even more lethal weapon in the arsenal.

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