

TIC: SRR IN THE FIELD ARTILLERY BATTALION

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The United States Army

is short of a state of armed conflict with the nation's acute threat (Russia) and its strategic competitor (China) (National Security Strategy, October 12th, 2022). As such, the Army's current mission is deterrence (FM 3-0, para. 4-2). Important to its deterrence mission is the US Army's ability to target at the tactical edge using tactical collection assets. One new capability that the US Army's Combined Training Centers (CTC) are testing for the Transformation in Contact (TiC) initiative are Short-Range Reconnaissance (SRR) drones that it has issued to some of the force's Field Artillery Battalions (FA BN). As Observer-Coach-Trainers (OC/T) at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) we have observed and evaluated dozens of American and NATO-Allied units with SRR and SRR-like capabilities and believe there are fundamental changes that a Brigade Combat Team (BCT), Field Artillery Battalion (FA BN), and Battery should consider to fully integrate the SRR at the tactical edge.

Some of our recommendations are new ideas to reach the SRR's full potential. Meanwhile, others are returns to doctrinal principles which we have rarely seen utilized during joint exercises but have been in place to guide warfighters for decades.

The Brigade

Integrating, planning, and executing information collection is critical for enhancing situational awareness and supporting the Brigade targeting process. By pushing the SSR and its collection capabilities to the tactical edge, brigades and battalions can generate timely intelligence that informs operational and strategic decisions. As the US Army's ARSTRUC plan reduces traditional human reconnaissance elements, commanders will increasingly rely on organic sensing capabilities. This requires deliberate planning to identify which elements are best positioned to collect information in support of the main effort.



The Field Artillery Battalion

Effective integration begins in the planning phase, when commanders and collection managers assess the threat and the operational environment and determine where sensing assets should be focused. Commanders must identify requirements and task subordinate units capable of contributing to the intelligence picture by leveraging capabilities such as unmanned systems, electronic warfare assets, and target acquisition sensors. Clear guidance and collection priorities ensure that sensing aligns with achieving upper echelon objectives. Effectively, the proliferation of organic sensors requires an embrace of mission command principle; the delegation of collection planning responsibility from the brigade collection manager to the battalion S2 for battalion sensors can result in a more effective use of TiC's sensors at echelon.

Execution hinges on training, interoperability, and disciplined reporting. Battalions and commanders must understand their role in the larger intelligence architecture and be equipped to communicate observations rapidly and accurately. This bottom-up flow of data enhances target development and situational awareness, enabling BCTs to act decisively with precision based on real-time, ground-truth intelligence.

Typically, FA BN S2's we have observed in exercise implicitly forfeit information collection responsibility. In cases when the radar section is attached to the FA BN, this responsibility is surrendered to the radar-section chief. On the other hand, in cases when the radar section is not attached to the FA BN, FA BN S2s typically have typically forfeited information collection completely for want of sensors to deploy. This behavior is understandable to an extent so long as the S2 would treat "every Soldier as a sensor" and report relevant information vertically and horizontally in moments of acute relevance in the brigade rear area. However, these business rules cannot continue after the provision of SRR to the FA BN under TiC.

The FA BN S2 must resume an active role in supporting the brigade collection manager's mission by managing sensors at their level. To perform this increased role, the S2 may expect from the brigade collection manager a desired task and purpose, achievable geographic boundaries, and most importantly the understanding that unless directed by the brigade, the battalion commander will have final say over the use of their SRR. Within limitations, due to the FA BN's position in the brigade rear area, the FA BN S2 can support area reconnaissance, route reconnaissance, and security missions, if only briefly and only in a supporting role.



To execute this renewed responsibility, the FA BN S2 needs to become re-acquainted with the collection management processes within Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (ATP 2-01.3) and understand the greater information collection process at the brigade level (ATP 2-01 and FM 3-55).

With this, we would advise the FA BN S3 to become involved with the approval and monitoring of the S2's proposed collection plans to satisfy the priorities of the brigade collection manager, along with the battalion commander. The S3 shop at the FA BN is uniquely qualified to balance competing priorities in the conduct of operations to achieve optimal mission outcomes. The S3's presence in the brigade's target working groups (TWG) and target decision boards (TDB) give them a perspective on the sensor-to-shooter chain that the S2 is unlikely to have as they perform their other duties.

The Battery

The firing battery would also do well to take greater advantage of the SRR. To their credit, the purpose for which battery commanders have proven adept at using the SRR is to pre-empt the leader's recon when evaluating a new PAA so as not to waste time on moving equipment and personnel on a site that is unsuitable such as already being occupied (a problem of brigade land management), or terrain that has

been rendered unsuitable due to weather/seasonal conditions. Another quick-win for a commander before entering contact with the enemy is the SRR's ability to help the battery "see itself" by observing cannon hide-sites from above and evaluating the unit's use of the terrain and camouflage netting to provide overhead concealment. When in contact with the enemy – particularly SPF who do not often engage with overwhelming force – battery commanders have wisely directed the overflight of their SRR, but upon noting contact coming from within tree lines and therefore unable to see anything, have directed it brought down. If the commander were to instead direct a wider survey and persistent overhead observation around the battery area rather than just the point of contact, SRR may reveal vehicles, enemy drone base stations, or enemy exfil routes upon the conclusion of direct fire engagement. Finally, Commanders should consider the SRR capable of a significantly more efficient patrols of open spaces than could be achieved by other means. Therefore, dismounted patrols through tree lines featuring overhead concealment can be focused on a smaller security area, leading to an overall more efficient use of resources.



Conclusion

The allocation of more capable collection capabilities at the battalion and battery echelons presents new challenges and opportunities for BCTs. The US Army now has access to a greater proliferation of sensors across its forward line of troops (FLOT), however, in exchange it must reckon with the increased burden of synchronizing this proliferation of assets to reach the collection enterprise's full potential.

About the Authors

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