

# Fighting to Get Into the Fight

A path to relevance for the S-2 in non-infantry ground units

by Sgt Ryan C. Bercaw & 1stLt Daniel W. Avery

“Grow where you’re planted” may be the most common and least encouraging words of advice offered to 0203 ground intelligence officers and 0231 intelligence specialists receiving orders to non-infantry ground units. Assignment to an artillery, tank, assault amphibian, or combat engineer battalion within the division, or to any unit in the MLG, is broadly understood by intelligence Marines to be a dead-end billet, characterized by few Marines to lead, little demand for intelligence production, and no opportunity to deploy.<sup>1</sup> We expect a survey of our peer group would find a significant proportion of Marines pursuing one of two typical courses of action, either 1) doing the bare minimum while waiting for another assignment or expiration of active service, or 2) taking advantage of the (real or perceived) lack of demand for intelligence production to attend as many courses and schools as possible while waiting for another assignment. It doesn’t have to be that way.

In our opinion, the overwhelmingly negative attitude toward these assignments is shortsighted and overlooks the opportunity intelligence Marines have to make an impact on organizations that lack experience employing an organic intelligence capability. We concede to previous authors<sup>2</sup> that these assignments place Marines into positions for which they have inadequate training, education, and experience. Admittedly, these Marines are grafted onto units, which at best attempt to employ their S-2s based on limited and inconsistent experience with the warfighting function and at worst treat the S-2 as a vestigial appendage of the S-3.<sup>3</sup> All too often,

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the intelligence officer becomes the “odd jobs officer,” and his Marines die on the vine performing administrative tasks and working parties and churning

out periodic read boards and “intel” updates with little purpose. The lack of resources committed to the S-2s in these units, illustrated in terms of col-

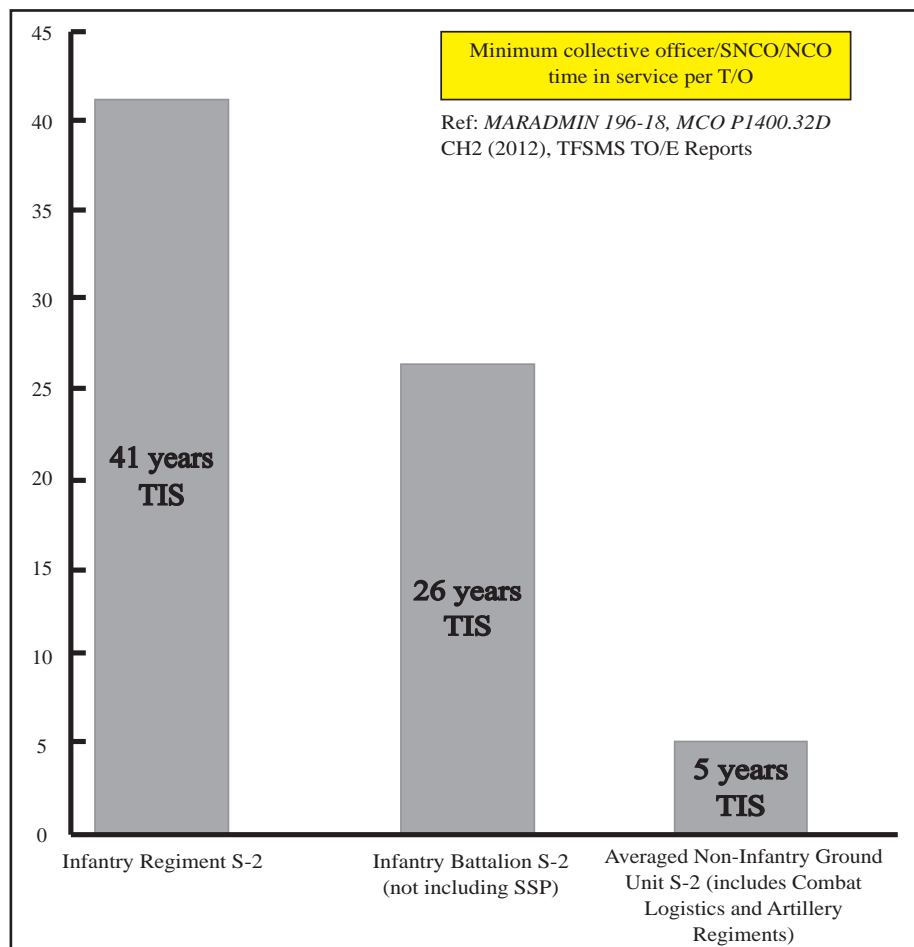


Figure 1.

lective experience shown in Figure 1, speaks to how intelligence is prioritized at both the Service and unit levels. But all is not lost. There is fertile ground and low-hanging fruit here. You can fight well above your weight as a lieutenant or NCO. And at the end of the day, these units will continue to be staffed with 0203s and 0231s for the foreseeable future, whether the individual Marine likes it or not. With that in mind, we offer our fellow intelligence professionals the following advice to make the most of their assignment to a non-infantry ground unit.

**Gain and Maintain Control of Your Collateral Duties**

Collateral duties will consume all of your time if you allow them. The nature of non-infantry ground units, which must constantly deploy platoon- and company-sized elements while simultaneously providing a disproportionate number of officers and SNCOs as individual augments, dictates that all of the staff sections, including yours, will receive a greater than usual share of investigations, designations as action officer, and inspection-required programs. The S-2 will be responsible for FA 5510.3, *Information and Personnel Security Program*, and FA 3800, *Oversight of Intel, Non-Intel Sensitive Activities*, at a minimum and will likely be responsible for some combination of operations security, anti-terrorism, and physical security as well.<sup>4</sup> The intelligence officer may be the only one named in the designation letter, but the routine maintenance of these programs can and will suppress the entire section if not executed efficiently and effectively. Because perception often becomes reality, the shop that remains suppressed by collateral duties for long enough is likely to attract more of the same as the parent unit becomes habituated to its role as the administrative catch-all. You must avoid this all costs. Three recommendations follow:

*Attack collateral duties immediately.* Hoping you won't be around for the CG's readiness inspection is not the answer. Use the inspection checklists to scrub your programs, get into the references, and complete the required

in-person and online training as quickly as possible. Understand best practices and what's right for your unit instead of relying exclusively on word of mouth, buddies at other units, and what's been done before. This process will probably measure in the hundreds of hours, but it will save you and your Marines time in the long run.

*Build a flat organization.* Train everyone to do everything. The S-2 at an infantry unit has enough Marines to make some poor PFC "the maps guy" or "the security management guy," but your section will not have that luxury. The freedom to leave all functions of the shop in the hands of one Marine so that others can participate in external training or work on a long-term product will never materialize if the junior Marine can't brief competently and confidently to commanders and staff or if the lieu-

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tenant can't use the laminator or check in a new join. In a similar vein, many of the administrative tasks that could easily occupy an intelligence Marine's entire workday are better performed by company clerks after some training and guidance. This builds efficiency and flexibility into the organization and gives a tremendous amount of time back to the S-2 but may not be well received by the company offices, so it's important to have the XO on your side.

*Not everything is important.* By the time you've defined the scope of your section's collateral duties and put systems in place to execute them, you should have built the necessary relationships and credibility within the command to carve out time for intelligence training and production by stiff-arming everything else. The H&S company staff and the S-3 do not own your Marines or their time. "Pick your battles" and "be a good dude" remain in effect

as always, but your Marines and their time are your most valuable assets, and you must protect them.

**Learn Your Craft**

Maj Chad A. Buckel recently published an excellent article<sup>5</sup> addressing the importance of Marines gaining the appropriate training, education, and experience for a given billet before being placed in that billet. As a lieutenant or NCO becoming a battalion or regimental intelligence officer or intelligence chief, you will have none of the above. Moreover, your development as a young intelligence professional will be characterized by a near-complete absence of MOS-specific supervision and mentorship. Fortunately (or unfortunately), non-infantry ground units don't have a need for all functions of intelligence or to participate in all steps of the intel-

ligence process, so the scope of activities you will have to become proficient in is comparatively small. Two recommendations follow:

*Focus internal training on what is relevant and achievable.* Research, analysis, writing, briefing, and debriefing will be critical skills wherever you and your Marines go and are relatively simple to train to. Conducting that training internally will force you to learn and relearn those skills in order to effectively teach your Marines, which will benefit you enormously. It will also enable you to link intelligence training to intelligence production. Training that culminates in Marines conducting their own analysis based on their own research, then generating a product that is relevant to the command's mission and briefing it to decision makers is inherently realistic, high fidelity, and effective. Studying for the CDASA Level I<sup>6</sup> certification exam is another great way to broaden and

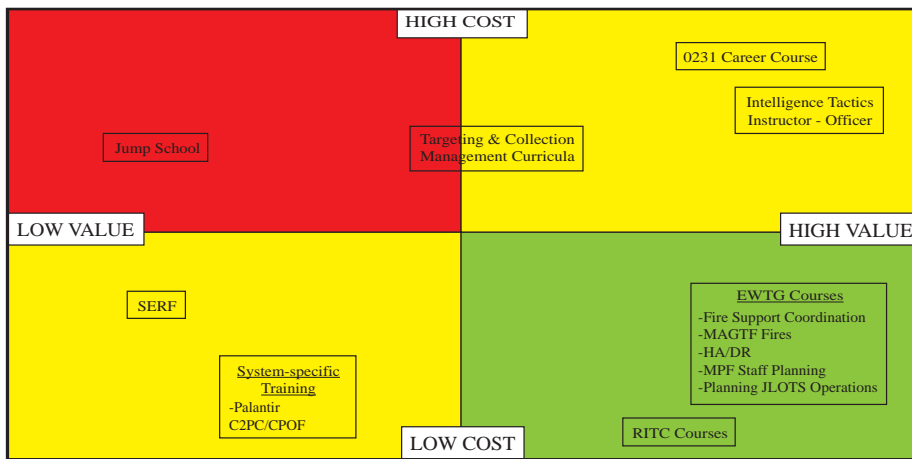


Figure 2.

deepen your knowledge as an analyst, and it gives officers and NCOs a lucrative target to shoot at.

*Pursue relevant training external to the unit.* You aren't likely to have the expertise or resources to train to anything but the basics, so seek opportunities to get your Marines and yourself to courses and formal schools that are relevant to both your career progression and your organization. Examples of training that positively impact the Marine and the unit include any number of courses offered locally at the Regional Intelligence Training Center<sup>7</sup> for junior Marines and NCOs, the 0231 Career Course for NCOs, and Intelligence Tactics Instructor-Officer<sup>8</sup> for officers. Examples of training unlikely to be retained by the Marine for lack of use and because they do little for your unit include survival, evasion, resistance, and escape (SERE), jump school, targeting and collections management curricula, and training for systems (e.g., Palantir, command and control personal computer, and command post of the future) that your section doesn't regularly employ. Look for the sweet spot between cost (mostly in terms of time away from the unit) and positive impact to the unit. (See Figure 2.) Remember, you must be present to win.

### Learn Their Craft

You'll also need to study the doctrine and tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) of your unit's warfighting function or combat arm. The limiting factor on your ability to produce relevant intel-

ligence may not be time management or MOS proficiency but a lack of understanding of your organization, what it does, what decisions are made and by whom, and what they need to know to facilitate those decisions. Throwing up your hands and bemoaning the fact that your unit isn't employed as a maneuver element and, therefore, has no intelligence requirements is a cop out. The 0203 MOS pipeline may be designed for the express purpose of generating intelligence officers for infantry formations, but 0231s are the premier generalists and have always faced the issue of supporting warfighting functions and combat arms with which they aren't intimately familiar. The only solution is to study and ask questions. Two recommendations follow:

*Speak the language.* The quicker you can grasp and comfortably use community-specific verbiage, the quicker you begin communicating effectively and building credibility. Good places to start are the core doctrinal publications<sup>9</sup> of the warfighting function or combat arm you work for, along with the manuals for the principal technical characteristics<sup>10</sup> of your unit's equipment. As you sit in meetings and listen to conversations, make note of acronyms, terms, and organizations you aren't familiar with, and ask a buddy what it all means afterward.

*Understand the capabilities, limitations, TTP, and employment of your unit.* This is absolutely critical to producing better tailored and more relevant<sup>11</sup> intelligence products. Doctrinal publications

remain a good place to start, but the student material of most MOS-producing schools is accessible through the Marine Corps Training Information Management System and may be more helpful to you in attempting to level your base of knowledge with your non-intelligence counterparts. Internal courses and local schools' curricula may be updated more often and better reflect current operations. Technical manuals for your unit's principal end items will become useful. Relevant Expeditionary Warfare Training Group courses provide opportunities to study the combat arm or warfighting function you support in greater depth. Deployment and exercise after-action reports, both internal and on the unclassified Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned and Center for Army Lessons Learned websites, can be extremely helpful in understanding how elements of your unit actually operate in relation to their supported unit, something you are unlikely to be able to observe in person. Historic accounts<sup>12</sup> of your unit's or similar units' actions in major combat operations can provide a useful point of departure when developing SOPs and working through how your section would provide intelligence support in combat.

### Leave the Place Better Than You Found It

Eventually you will leave and be replaced by another lieutenant or NCO who is just as unprepared for the job as you were when you showed up. Face-to-face turnover is critical but often overlooked, and the frequency with which S-2 billets are gapped makes maintaining SOPs and desktop procedures as important as ever. Do everything you can to give your replacement a head start on all of the learning you had to do. Recording lessons learned and effective TTPs will allow the incoming officer in charge or chief to move the ball another couple yards forward instead of reinventing the wheel. Most important is to leave a command having made forward progress as a warfighting function and with a plan for how to maintain it. Leave behind intelligence requirements that are relevant in garrison, well written, and approved by the

commander, along with a research plan for how to monitor them. Leave behind intelligence Marines who will execute your lines of effort in the absence of direction. Leave behind a population of artillerymen, tankers, trackers, engineers, or logisticians who have the right expectation of what their S-2 should be doing for them.

**Conclusion**

As the S-2 at a non-infantry ground unit, you can choose to be irrelevant, or you can fight to get into the fight. We don't pretend to have all the answers or to have had universal success implementing these recommendations ourselves, but the recipe for success is simple. Progress is an iterative process. Work hard, ensure that your unit employs its S-2 better by the time you leave than it did when you arrived, set the next guy up for success, and repeat. There is too much potential for growth and too much combat power going un-

multiplied for intelligence Marines not to take advantage of this opportunity.

**Notes**

1. With the notable exception of combat logistics battalions.
2. 1stLts John H. Boger & Austin J. Dahmer, "Why the 0203 MOS is Broken: How to fix it and make ground intelligence great again" *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Quantico, VA: September 2017).
3. Per the current *MCRP 1-10.1, Organization of the United States Marine Corps*, the S-2 is a component of the S-3 in cannon and rocket artillery battalions, despite all doctrine and common sense to the contrary. This is likely the de facto situation in many more units.
4. W.T. Potts Jr., *FA 5510.3, Information and Personnel Security Program*, 1 January 2017; Edwin Vogt, *FA 3800, Oversight of Intel/Non-Intel Sensitive Activities*, 1 January 2018; Ronald Fetherson, *FA 3302, Antiterrorism*, 1 January

2018; James Syndor, *FA 3070, Operations Security*, 1 January 2017; SSgt Joshua Rowe, *FA 5530, Physical Security*, 1 January 2017; available at <http://www.hqmc.marines.mil>.

5. Maj Chad A. Buckel, "The Infantry Career Path: A case for changes," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Online: February 2018).
6. The Certified DOD All-Source Analyst is part of a Defense Intelligence Agency effort to professionalize the intelligence workforce through a family of certifications and accreditations.
7. The Regional Intelligence Training Center offers local intelligence sustainment training.
8. This is the Intelligence Tactics Instructor-Officer, the MOS-producing course for 0233, which may be what the intelligence officer billet is coded for in the TO/E.
9. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCWP 3-34, Engineering Operations*, (Washington DC: 2 May 2016); Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCRP 3-34.3, Engineer Reconnaissance*, (Washington, DC: 12 April 2016); Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCTP 3-34A, Combined Arms Mobility*, (Washington, DC: 8 March 2018); and Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCTP 3-34B, Combined Arms Countermobility Operations*, (Washington, DC: 17 September 2016) in the case of a combat engineer battalion.
10. Marine Corps Systems Command, *TM 11275-15/3E, Principal Technical Characteristics of U.S. Marine Engineer Equipment*, (Washington, DC: April 2013); and Marine Corps Systems Command, *TM 11240-15/B, Principal Technical Characteristics of U.S. Marine Corps Motor Transportation Equipment*, (Washington DC: September 2016) in the case of a combat engineer battalion.

11. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Intelligence Community Directive 208, Maximizing the Utility of Analytic Products*, (Washington, DC: 9 January 2017) and Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Intelligence Community Directive 203, Analytic Standards*, (Washington, DC: 2 January 2015).

12. The FMFRP series, Marine Corps History Division, and U.S. Naval Institute Press are all good resources.



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