

ONLY THE **INNOVATIVE** NEED APPLY — BRIGADE SPECIAL TROOPS BATTALION COMMAND

By Lieutenant Colonel Scott C. Johnson

One of the most unique and challenging battalion commands in the Army is the brigade special troops battalion (BSTB). Unlike most commands, the BSTB is composed of a variety of units with vastly different primary missions and branch-specific equipment and capabilities. The Army would be hard-pressed to find officers with the background to fully understand how to effectively train and employ engineer, military intelligence, signal, chemical, and military police assets.

Due to the diversity of the battalion, every commander will struggle with establishing teamwork and mission-focus within the BSTB, but it is absolutely critical to success. Whether you call it a vision or the overarching mission of the BSTB, the commander must ensure that every Soldier in the unit understands that the primary mission of the battalion is to provide enablers that enhance the brigade's ability to successfully plan, prepare, and execute operations. Success requires teamwork and a single-minded focus on enabling the brigade's mission.

The leaders and Soldiers in the battalion must be prepared to support the brigade when and where they are needed. The BSTB's responsibilities, in many cases, span the entire brigade combat team (BCT) area of operations. To achieve success, leaders at all levels must be adaptable, and the subordinate units must understand both their primary mission and the specified missions of the battalion.

The primary mission of the BSTB is to provide command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) support to the brigade with its organic assets and to execute other sustainment and support missions for the brigade, the brigade headquarters, and other supported units. The latter can include engineer units, civil affairs teams, psychological operations



1-3 Brigade Special Troops Battalion,
1st Brigade Combat Team, 3d Infantry Division,
October 2006

(PSYOPS) teams, elements of the joint forces, and any other unit augmenting the brigade or the brigade headquarters.

The specified or overarching mission of the BSTB during combat can vary based on the brigade's requirements. As a command and control headquarters, the BSTB's primary focus must remain on providing support to the brigade, but it also has the ability to command and control a functional mission or, with some inherent limitations, area of operations. The specified missions for BSTBs have varied greatly over the last few years.

Many of the BSTBs had excess engineer officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) when they were formed. As a result, many were assigned missions associated with engineer operations in support of the BCT—civil or military. During recent deployments to support Operation Iraqi Freedom, BSTBs have been responsible for functional area missions in support of the BCT, such as Iraqi army military transition teams (MiTTs), Iraqi police transition teams (PTTs), and civil-military operations. They have also been given the mission to execute base camp operations and security.



Another unique aspect to some, but not all, BSTBs is the control of the BCT headquarters company. In some BCTs, the headquarters and headquarters company (HHC) BCT is a completely separate organization, and in others it is task-organized under the BSTB. When the HHC BCT is organized under the BSTB, a common understanding between the deputy commanding officer/executive officer (DCO/XO) and the BSTB must be established to ensure that everyone is working toward a common goal.

An effective technique in this case is to develop a memorandum of agreement that separates and assigns responsibilities for individual training and readiness requirements, company logistics and administration, and BCT staff functions, management, and training. The BCT staff is the purview of the BCT DCO/XO, and training, maintenance, and sustainment are command issues that the BCT staff must support. Success is predicated on mutual understanding and a company commander who can bridge the gap between the battalion and the brigade staff's requirements.

During combat operations, the integration of BSTB resources with the BCT staff has the potential to blur the lines of command. The brigade engineer, intelligence, and communications staff sections are responsible for planning and coordinating support for the brigade. Elements from signal and military intelligence companies enable the brigade staff to plan, manage, and coordinate intelligence collection and analysis and communication network management. The BSTB, however, is responsible for mission preparation and execution.

Successful execution is predicated on establishing the boundaries between the brigade staff and the BSTB. To ensure common understanding and situational awareness, missions for the company's resources must flow through the BCT operations and training (S3) section via the orders process. Direct coordination between the company and the BCT staff should be allowed and encouraged, but additional coordination with the battalion and tasking authority must remain in command channels.

Tactical Unmanned Aircraft Systems (TUAS) operations provide a good example of how this process can work. The BCT intelligence (S2) section publishes the intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) matrix in coordination with the units requiring support. The initial ISR matrix should be published in a BCT fragmentary order (FRAGO) and in a BSTB FRAGO in an adequate amount of time to allow for planning at all levels. The military intelligence company has the ability to conduct parallel planning through the BCT FRAGO (essentially a warning order). Any technical or crew rest issues are worked out between the BSTB and the BCT S2 before the BSTB issues its order.

All the mission planning and preparation to successfully execute TUAS operations is the responsibility of the military intelligence company and the BSTB. Once the TUAS is airborne, tactical control of the aircraft may revert to the

“At any time, these Soldiers must understand the capabilities of both their own companies and the mission and functions of the battalion as a whole.”

supported unit and the brigade. A TUAS liaison officer can synchronize targets, in-flight diversions, and time on station in coordination with the BCT S2 and S3 battle captains directly. By operating in this manner, both the military intelligence company and the BSTB can monitor execution while providing maximum flexibility. When the TUAS returns to base or lands, full control of the asset again returns to the military intelligence company and the BSTB.

This cooperative process should also apply to other assets in the military intelligence company, the signal company, and the chemical and military police platoons when they are supporting brigade operations. Depending on the missions the chemical and military police platoons are assigned, it is possible to keep all coordination and planning at the battalion level. When these units aren't engaged directly in the brigade fight, the BSTB has the ability to employ these units in support of the battalion's other missions or to enhance the battalion's execution of other support and security functions.

Regardless of the mission, the BSTB must have well-disciplined and trained Soldiers and adaptable leaders to achieve success. Individual training within the BSTB companies and the HHC BCT (if attached) must focus on individual expertise—both as a Warrior and in their specialty. The goal, as in any command, is to produce Soldiers skilled in the Warrior Tasks and Battle Drills and imbued with the Warrior Ethos. The signal, military intelligence, engineer, military police, chemical, infantry, and other Soldiers must also be highly proficient in their military occupational specialty (MOS)-specific skills at the individual and collective levels.

Training Soldiers on Warrior Tasks and Battle Drills is fairly straightforward. In the BSTB, training Soldiers, teams, sections, platoons, and companies is as complex and diverse as the organization and missions they are expected to perform. Developing, resourcing, and executing a training plan that creates experts in the broad range of specialties requires leaders who fully understand the mission of their unit and the training resources available to them. Training is available at the installation, through the various schoolhouses, from the Department of Defense and other outside agencies, from civilian technical institutions, and through other accredited venues. Leaders within the BSTB must be innovative in searching out training opportunities and resources for their Soldiers to ensure that they have the skills and tools to succeed.

The officers and NCO leaders within the BSTB must be adaptable and multifunctional. Officers from multiple

branches and NCOs with a broad spectrum of MOSs fill the ranks of the BSTB. At any time, these Soldiers must understand the capabilities of both their own companies and the mission and functions of the battalion as a whole. This will enable the companies and units within the BSTB to achieve a certain synergy that enhances the overall effectiveness of the battalion and enable leaders to develop techniques to enhance the mutual support required to ensure their success.

As with any organization, it is a challenge to develop adaptable and innovative leaders, but the BSTB absolutely requires them. It requires a constant top-driven focus on how the unit and its diverse elements can improve their effectiveness and efficiency. It requires problem solvers who can develop solutions with limited resources. It requires a team mentality among the officers in the battalion and teamwork between what have historically been stovepipe organizations. It requires leaders to encourage and nurture junior leaders and Soldiers to develop workable solutions and implement them.

Commanders, staff officers, and senior NCOs assigned to the BSTB must be willing to expand their experience base, learn a variety of new skills and technical knowledge, and grow both professionally and personally. The success of the Army's BCTs requires dedicated and innovative leaders who are focused on achieving results. When approached with an open mind and willingness to place the mission of the brigade first, BSTB command is a personally and professionally rewarding experience that demands the best.



Lieutenant Colonel Johnson, United States Army Corps of Engineers, commanded the 1-3 Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 3d Infantry Division, from 20 June 2006 to 17 June 2008. He is currently assigned as the United States Army Engineer School Chief of Staff.

