

Editors Note: This is the second of a three-part series by the MAGTF Staff Training Program (MSPT) on the subject of information management (IM). This first article focused on the Information Management Officer's (IMO) role within a unit's IM program. This article focuses on the importance of battle rhythm in IM. The final article will examine trends observed in IM and discusses tools available to assist MAGTF staffs meeting the challenges presented by "information overload".

Predictable and recurring events occur in every complex process, whether man-made or naturally occurring. Even in the most chaotic and seemingly unorganized natural events, scientists have been able to discover patterns and order—a natural rhythm. Rhythm, in its truest sense, is defined as “flow, movement, procedure, etc., characterized by basically regular recurrence of elements or conditions in alteration with different or opposite elements or conditions.” *To have rhythm, a process must have a length of time, and within that time, predictable and organized patterns must be formed.*

All would agree that a military operation is a complex and often chaotic process spanning a length of time. A quick analysis of operations activities readily reveals predictable and recurring event patterns within a prescribed period of time. For example at the MEF a daily—sometimes twice daily—situation briefing is held for the commander. These briefings establish a cycle for the entire staff. This cycle—based not only on the unit's internal requirements for meetings, briefings, and updates, but also on the requirements imposed by higher headquarters—is the unit's battle rhythm. *Therefore, whether or not a formal battle rhythm is acknowledged or identified, a rhythm naturally exists.*

What is Battle Rhythm?

Battle rhythm is an important aspect of command and control. It is the process where the commander and his staff synchronize their daily operating tempo within the planning, decision, execution, and assessment (PDE&A) cycle to allow the commander to make timely decisions. The PDE&A cycle is the process the commander and his staff use to plan operations, make accurate and timely decisions, direct the effective execution of operations, and assess the results of those operations. PDE&A is a complete cycle that starts with the initial receipt of the mission and continues through mission accomplishment.

The volume and scope of information and activities required to conduct even a small operation can be staggering. As technology expands the volume and thus the complexity of information available to a commander, information management becomes more important. To maintain operational tempo there must be a seamless non-stop dialogue up and down the operational chain. Pertinent information must be immediately passed to the correct activity. A battle rhythm helps establish these processes. Therefore, thinking and reacting faster than the enemy is the ultimate success of a closely followed and properly designed battle rhythm.

The commander must ensure that his battle rhythm is nested or linked to that of his higher headquarters and that his subordinate commanders synchronize their battle rhythms with his headquarters. Some of the planning, decision, and operating cycles that influence the battle rhythm of the command include the intelligence collection, targeting, air tasking order, reconnaissance tasking, and the battle damage assessment collection cycles. See Figure 1.

Whose Battle Rhythm?

Who creates and manages the battle rhythm? The battle rhythm is the commander's battle rhythm—it is his “plan of the day.”(See Figure 2.) Generally the chief of staff is responsible for managing the commander's battle rhythm. The principal and special staff officers provide input by identifying planning, decision, and operating cycles within their areas that influence or impact the battle rhythm. It is the IMO's responsibility to take the provided information and develop the battle rhythm matrix.

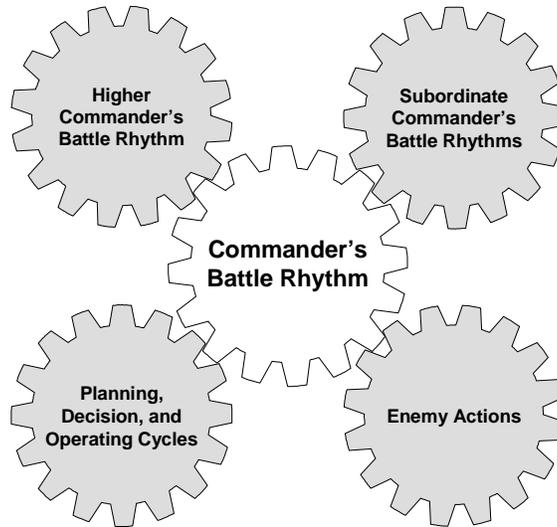


Figure 1. Relationship of battle rhythm with other activities.

Subordinate unit IMO's need to review the higher commander's battle rhythm matrix and update the information in their commander's battle rhythm matrix.

While battle rhythm helps determine when the commander is available, he does not need to be physically present to make a decision. The IMO ensures the commander can use the available information technology to command and control his forces

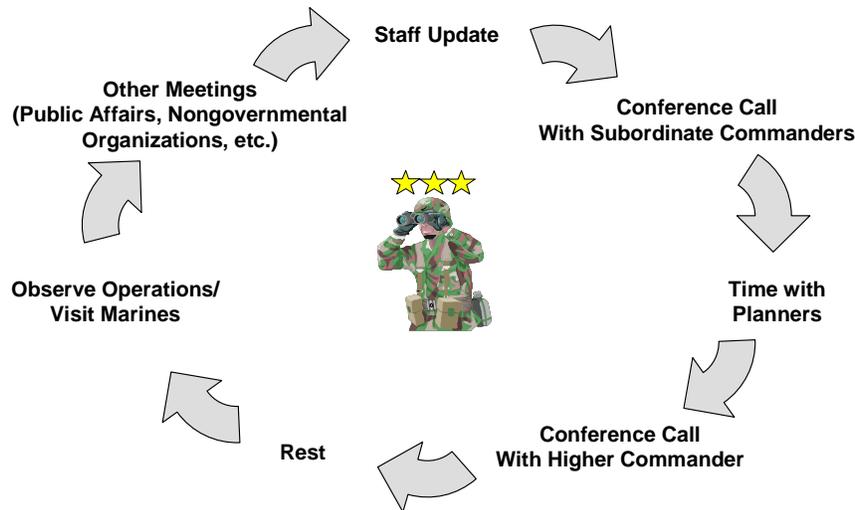


Figure 2. Commander's battle rhythm.

Establishing Battle Rhythm

Although some commanders may not use a formal process for establishing a battle rhythm and others may even think establishing a battle rhythm is not necessary, experience has shown that understanding, anticipating and reacting to the sequence of events that make up an operation facilitates the PDE&A cycle. The question is then not "What is a battle rhythm and does it exist?", rather the question is "Does the commander want to influence and manage the rhythm or does he plan to allow the rhythm to force him to react to it?"

There are occasions when the commander has no choice but to react to rapidly unfolding events. However, for deliberate conventional planning and sustained operations, establishing a battle rhythm is essential. Some of the consequences of not establishing a battle rhythm may include missed opportunities and staff inefficiency resulting in decision makers not being prepared to react at critical decision points, staff fatigue and frustration, and disjointed transition between the various levels of command.

Battle Rhythm Matrix

The battle rhythm is usually depicted as a matrix spanning a 24-hour time period. This matrix identifies and prioritizes various recurring activities and places their occurrence in time. Most MEF operational standing operating procedures include a sample battle rhythm depicting historically included events. It is extremely difficult to create a battle rhythm matrix during operations. Developing, exercising and adhering to the established battle rhythm matrix during training is essential.

The battle rhythm matrix is a schedule of key daily events that involve the commander and the staff. These events can include staff briefings, updates, visits, reports, and products (e.g., air tasking order, intelligence summary). These events are extracted from the IM matrix and placed in the battle rhythm matrix. The purpose of the battle rhythm matrix is to disseminate the schedule and integrate various events. The commander and his staff are responsible for identifying which event needs to be placed on the battle rhythm matrix. See Table 1 for a sample battle rhythm matrix.

TIME	EVENT	LOCATION	PARTICIPANTS
2400	COC Shift Change	COC	COC Watch
0100	SITREP Update to component/combatant commander	COC	COC Fires
0200	Reactive Attack Guidance Matrix published	COC	COC Fires
0500	Morning update slides due to SWO	COC	Battlestaff
0600	ATO Execution	COC	
0730	Morning update slides to component	COC	COPSO
0800	CG Morning Update	OSC	Battlestaff
0800	Target Guidance Working Group	FFCC	
0900	Plans Update Brief	FOPS	CG, FOPSO, G-3
1000	MSC SITREP information due	COC	MSCs
1145	COC Shift Change Brief	COC	COC Watch
1200	COC Shift Change	COC	COC Watch
1200	MEF SITREP published	COC	G-3
1200	G-2 INTSUM published	COC	
1300	Evening Update slides due to SWO	COC	Battlestaff
1530	Evening Update slides to component	COC	COPSO
1600	CG Evening Update	OSC	Battlestaff
1700	SITREP Update to component/combatant commander	COC	SWO
TBD	VTC	OSC	TBD
1800	Joint ATO published		
2000	Targeting Board	OSC	TBD
2345	COC Shift Change Brief	COC	COC Watch
2400	COC Shift Change	COC	COC Watch

Table 1. Sample battle rhythm matrix.

The first entries into the battle rhythm matrix are those events required by higher headquarters. If the event requires time to complete, such as a status report, reverse engineering must be applied. If inputs are needed from staff members or subordinate commands, they must be alerted of deadlines and the expected products. Next any periods of transition must be planned to ensure a complete turnover of duties. The availability of decision makers must always be considered when creating the battle rhythm matrix. Sleep

plans, travel time and meeting overruns must also be considered. All periods of a leader's nonavailability must include an update brief upon his return. Nonavailability plans should also include a clear succession of leadership to ensure continuity of routine decisionmaking. The battle rhythm matrix is found in Appendix 5, Battle Rhythm/Planning, Decision, Execution, Assessment Cycle of Annex U, Information Management of an operation plan/order.

Many of a command's routine information requirements are predictable. Establishing a daily battle rhythm allows the staff to anticipate and manage information by identifying daily briefings, meetings, and report requirements. This speeds information flow and reduces the demands on communications systems. The higher headquarter's battle rhythm usually influences the MAGTF's battle rhythm. Information is exchanged and transmitted on internets/intranets for the commander and staff to use in the events and activities of the daily battle rhythm. On the unit's internet, each entry in the battle rhythm would be linked to underlying supporting data such as read-aheads, summaries and other related documents.

One tactic, technique, and procedure which may help commands maintain proficiency in managing their battle rhythm is to use a battle rhythm matrix in day-to-day garrison operations. A standing battle rhythm helps a command maintain a higher level of IM readiness on a 24-hour basis and assists in bridging the gap between garrison and tactical activities. Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-40.2 (MCWP 3-40.2), *Information Management*, contains additional information on battle rhythm management.

Conclusion

For the commander—and his IMO—to establish a responsive battle rhythm, they must identify and prioritize the numerous recurring activities and ensure that they occur at the proper time and in the correct order. Battle rhythm is not intended to be rigid, it should be dynamic. It can help to build tempo in execution, identify times when the commander's physical presence is required, and aid the staff in balancing the critical commodities of time and information.