



Soldiers and Civilians of the 389th Military Intelligence Battalion (Special Operations) (Airborne) pose for a group picture after the unit activation ceremony on 16 September 2019.

1st Special Forces Command Has a Military Intelligence Battalion

by Lieutenant Colonel Sapriya Childs

Introduction

Did you know that 1st Special Forces Command has a military intelligence (MI) battalion? This was the rollout question on the 1st Special Forces Command’s Facebook and Twitter 5 months after the battalion’s activation on September 16, 2019. It was the question that officers asked as they saw this new unit in the Assignment Interactive Module cycle. Soldiers and noncommissioned officers asked the same question when they received orders to the 528th Sustainment Brigade.¹ What was missing in the question, and on those orders, was that the 389th MI Battalion (Special Operations)(Airborne) has, since 2015, been building toward the day we would officially get our numerical designation and be doctrinally tasked as the operational intelligence arm for the 1st Special Forces Command.²

“Illuminate to Action”

Many have asked, “Why build an MI battalion in the 1st Special Forces Command when each Army special operations forces element has organic intelligence at the group/brigade and below?”³ The answer is *connection*. In today’s competitive global environment, with a greater focus on peer and near-peer adversaries, the command was missing

an operational intelligence connector to bridge the seams across regions where our adversaries operate and a dedicated reach-back structure to connect with the rest of the intelligence community, interagency, Army, and joint special operations forces. ADP 3-05, *Army Special Operations*, describes the 389th MI Battalion as the “nexus for continental United States–based intelligence support, integrating the efforts of each U.S. Army Special Operations Command component...support for the full range of missions.”⁴

In comparison to other MI formations across the Army, think of the 389th as the expeditionary-MI brigade of the 1st Special Forces Command, with the worldwide coverage and regional alignment requirements of each MI brigade-theater. Our motto is “Illuminate to Action,” symbolizing the purpose of our mission to highlight transregional threat activity and inform Army special operations forces’ decision makers. We execute that mission through four complementary lines of effort:

- ◆ Line of Effort One: Provide intelligence support to the component subordinate units.
- ◆ Line of Effort Two: Serve as the core intelligence element of a special operations joint task force contingency.

- ◆ Line of Effort Three: Develop the processing, exploitation, and dissemination (PED) platform for Army special operations.
- ◆ Line of Effort Four: Conduct intelligence training and support standardization of intelligence support to Army special operations forces.

Line of Effort One

Provide intelligence support to the component subordinate units. This line of effort is the most dynamic. We provide tailorable support to the Special Forces Groups, Psychological Operations Groups, and Civil Affairs brigade whenever and however they require. This support includes connecting regional Special Forces elements to intelligence community and interagency analysts and providing specialized reach-back support and/or individual deployment augmentation. Recently, the battalion transitioned to building capacity for continental United States–based intelligence support to information operations through the newly established Information Warfare Center under the 8th Psychological Operations Group.

Line of Effort Two

Serve as the core intelligence element of a special operations joint task force contingency. In this capacity, the battalion stands trained and ready to support the 1st Special Forces Command G-2’s transformation into the joint intelligence element for a two-star-level operational special operations forces headquarters. This requires a constant awareness of global instability factors, threat activity, and pre-established connections and relationships to the intelligence community and theater special operations commands.

Line of Effort Three

Develop the PED platform for Army special operations. The 389th serves as the foundational PED capability for the U.S. Army Special Operations Command. Aligned against the Gray Eagles from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, we are growing this capability in conjunction, and cooperatively, with the joint special operations forces and Army PED enterprise. We are building the baseline for PED expansion and evolution, incorporating data science and artificial intelligence to synchronize intelligence from all sensors (aerial to human).

Line of Effort Four

Conduct intelligence training and support standardization of intelligence support to Army special operations forces. We built this effort on the back of the Special Warfare Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) Course, a baseline training for tactical SIGINT elements within the Special Forces Groups. We will expand in this line of effort to support the U.S. Army Special Operations Command’s codification and implementation of the Army special operations forces’ Military Intelligence Training Strategy, as well as development of the intelligence training pathway for intelligence support to information operations. Our goal is to build lasting relationships between the U.S. Army Intelligence Center of Excellence and the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, capturing Army special operations forces’ intelligence requirements in Army and joint multi-domain doctrine.

Conclusion

So, yes, the 1st Special Forces Command has an MI battalion. With our core values of delivering quality, reliability, collaboration, flexibility, professionalism, and learning and growing, we stand ready to evolve, as the environment evolves, in support of the regiment. **Illuminate to Action!**

For inquiries or to contact the 389th Military Intelligence Battalion (Special Operations) (Airborne), email 389th.MI.BN.Leadership@socom.mil. 🌟

Endnotes

1. The 389th Military Intelligence Battalion is the operational intelligence arm for the 1st Special Forces Command and is subordinate to the 528th Sustainment Brigade (Special Operations) (Airborne).
2. For more history, see Christopher E. Howard, “From Leyte to the Levant: A Brief History of the 389th Military Intelligence Battalion (Airborne),” *Veritas* 15, no. 1 (2019). Available at https://arsof-history.org/articles/19_aug_389_leyte_to_levant_page_1.html.
3. The 1st Special Forces Command is the division-level headquarters for the Army’s seven Special Forces Groups, two Psychological Operations Groups, and the Civil Affairs brigade. These units are regionally aligned and have varying numbers of intelligence Soldiers providing tactical intelligence support from the team level to the group/brigade headquarters. These elements serve as the base intelligence capability; when deployed, they often require additional augmentation.
4. Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Publication 3-05, *Army Special Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 31 July 2019), 5-4. Change 1 was issued on 26 August 2019.

LTC Sapriya Childs served as the 389th Military Intelligence Battalion Commander from August 2018 to June 2021. She held numerous positions in the Army and special operations tactical and operational forces. Her intelligence assignment highlights include 17th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion S-2; military intelligence company commander, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division; signals intelligence officer, Department of the Army G-2 Staff; Army Geospatial Intelligence Battalion executive officer; and Joint Intelligence Support Element Chief, Special Operations Joint Task Force-Afghanistan. LTC Childs is a graduate of the National Intelligence University.