



# 700-Series Battalion Conducts External Evaluation to Improve Mission Essential Task Proficiency

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**Editor's Note:** Some figures in this article were abbreviated because of their size. The complete figures can be found with the web version of the article at <https://mipb.army.mil>.

## Introduction

As the U.S. Army continues to emphasize lethality and readiness, military intelligence (MI) units must focus on sustaining technically and tactically proficient teams and Soldiers. An important aspect of preparing for current and future operations is to achieve and sustain a high degree of training proficiency in the operational domain. From 24 to 28 August 2020, the 717<sup>th</sup> MI Battalion (BN), 470<sup>th</sup> MI Brigade-Theater (MIB-T), conducted an external evaluation (EXEVAL) to validate both the battalion's and the companies' mission essential task (MET) proficiency. The battalion's EXEVAL is challenging because of its operational control (OPCON) and administrative control (ADCON) relationships (Figure 1). The battalion planned and simultaneously executed several training and battle rhythm events, each geared toward gaining an honest MET proficiency assessment. Using the training and evaluation outlines (T&EO), the 717<sup>th</sup> MI BN conducted the first cited 700-series battalion assessment of the METs to thoroughly evaluate its daily contribution to mission.

This article starts with an overview of doctrine as it pertains to EXEVALS. It also provides "a way," or framework, to conduct a 700-series battalion EXEVAL. The EXEVAL trained, certified, and validated the battalion's and companies' MET proficiencies. The training event also facilitated the collaboration between the brigade and battalion at a critical transition period and amid the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. More importantly, the EXEVAL produced significant outputs, such as the fiscal year 2021 (FY21) unit training plan (UTP) and the training methodology necessary to sustain a T-level proficiency across all METs.

## External Evaluation Design, A Way

The EXEVAL design sought to incorporate both objective and subjective criteria. FM 7-0, *Training*, specifies that EXEVALS "are scenario-driven evaluations of a unit's training proficiency conducted by leaders from outside the evaluated unit's chain of command. The commander two levels above the evaluated unit directs and resources the external evaluation."<sup>1</sup> In this case, the 470<sup>th</sup> MIB-T was the higher headquarters that trained and certified external observer

coach/trainers (OC/Ts) to execute the EXEVAL and provide objective and subjective feedback. The objective criteria used for the EXEVAL were primarily the battalion's mission essential task list (METL) tasks and its T&EOs. Evaluators also used the individual critical task lists to observe and evaluate individual tasks as either GO or NO-GO. The evaluators assessed the battalion's METL, which consisted of—

- ◆ MET 1: Conduct Mission Command.
- ◆ MET 2: Direct Operation Intelligence Activities.
- ◆ MET 3: The Sustainment Warfighting Function.

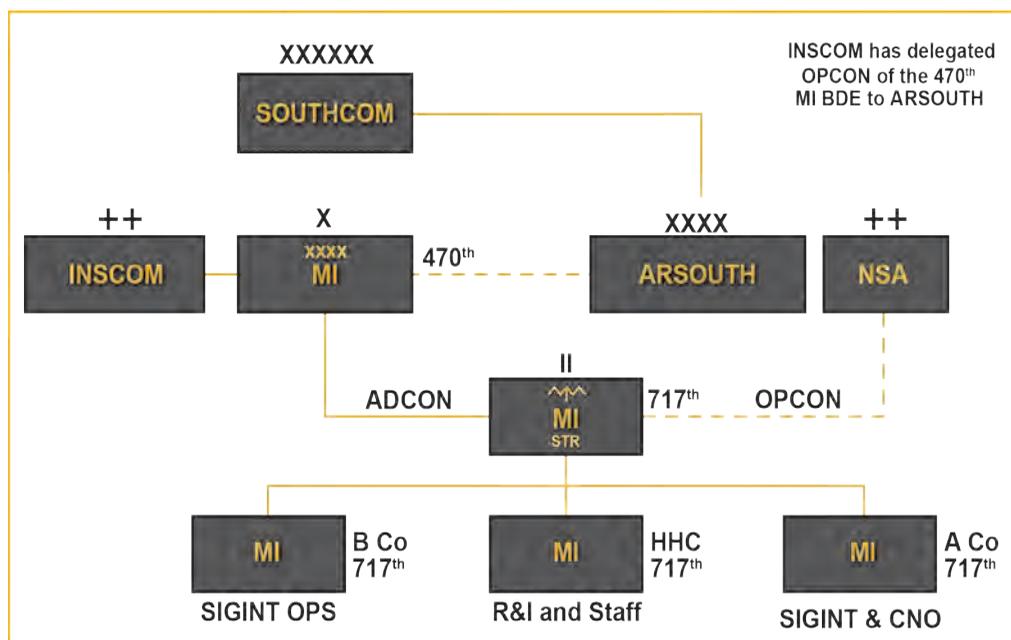


Figure 1. 717<sup>th</sup> MI BN, 470<sup>th</sup> MI Brigade Task Organization

To test MET 1, the event focused on the evaluation of the battalion's execution of the military decision-making process (MDMP) on the FY21 UTP. To test MET 2 and the execution of global cryptologic operations, the battalion was evaluated on 26 separate mission briefs, its Joint Qualification System progression, and other routine site events. To evaluate MET 3, the battalion planned and executed the Junior Leader Development Course (JLDC) and conducted sustainment support operations. Evaluators used task proficiency criteria and standards to measure proficiency.

While the EXEVAL used objective criteria to evaluate task proficiency, it also allowed brigade leaders to provide subjective feedback. The evaluators provided input based on their personal experiences and observation, allowing leaders across the brigade to add value to the exercise.

The EXEVAL schedule design was to validate both the battalion's and the companies' MET proficiency by using the

daily battle rhythm events. In this case, the EXEVAL leveraged routine training events that were originally scheduled across 2 weeks. However, the lack of evaluators and their availability narrowed the schedule to 1 week. Figure 2 shows the first 2 days of the schedule of events across time and space. The schedule is color-coded by MET and provides predictability for both the OC/T and those being evaluated. Overall, the condensed schedule stressed the battalion's systems and processes while gaining an honest objective assessment from the brigade evaluators.

### Military Decision-Making Process on the FY21 Unit Training Plan

As part of exercising the battalion's MET 1, the 717<sup>th</sup> MI BN deliberately developed and implemented the battalion's FY21 UTP and long-range calendar during the EXEVAL. The battalion staff used the MDMP to develop the UTP and provide maximum predictability to the formation. It is

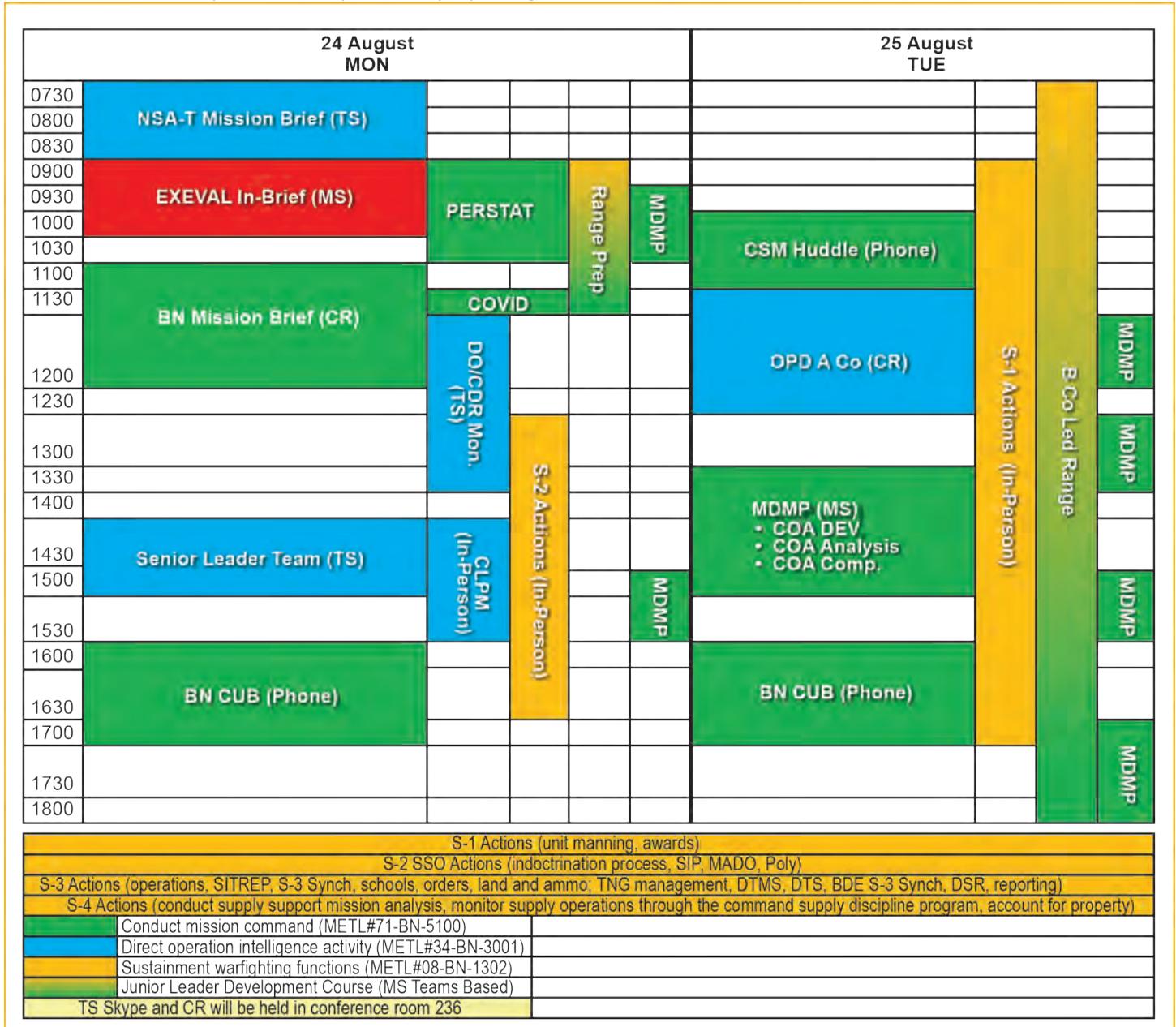


Figure 2. External Evaluation Schedule

important to note that many individuals on the staff had not formally participated in an MDMP or had limited experience. In preparation for the week of execution, the battalion's executive officer led the staff through an MDMP education session. The staff discussed the seven steps of MDMP, including key inputs and outputs. ADP 5-0, *The Operations Process*, states, "successful planning requires the integration of both conceptual and detailed thinking."<sup>2</sup> Because of the timeline, the staff placed an emphasis on mission analysis, course of action (COA) development, COA analysis, and rehearsals. As the chief of staff, the executive officer managed and coordinated the staff's work while also providing quality control.

Critical to the execution of the MDMP on the UTP was the background knowledge taught in the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College's "M100: Training and Deployment Operations" module. The module requires students to conduct a training requirements analysis while applying doctrine. The MDMP on the UTP was essential in understanding how to integrate doctrinal concepts into the battalion's collective and individual training strategy.<sup>3</sup>

The following week, the process began with the receipt of the mission and the battalion commander's guidance, which called for the battalion to focus on the core METs. The commander's guidance was for the staff to focus on developing a UTP by "doing less, better." As part of the MDMP, the commander asked the staff to develop two COAs. The first COA was to develop a focus on "evolution," that is, the evolution of the previous year's UTP, and to consider the limitations and impacts of the COVID-19 environment, whereas the second COA, "COA Revolution," would allow the staff to develop a new plan by adjusting the battle rhythm and training requirements and methodologies as they saw fit.

The battalion ensured the incorporation of bottom-up feedback and staff analysis. The company commanders

provided their input to the UTP COA and identified numerous limitations and constraints. The staff identified specified and implied tasks. This would create the opportunity to discuss and develop solutions and to better prioritize training. The executive officer continued to lead the process, covering the fiscal year calendar quarter-by-quarter and facilitating the staff to identify and recommend training. As a result, the battalion's collective and individual training events were removed, added, or shifted from the calendar; this created more white space, flexibility, and ultimately predictability for the companies.

In Figure 3, the FY21 717<sup>th</sup> MI BN line of effort training strategy displays the UTP over time. For purposes of the EXEVAL, the MDMP concluded with COA approval. Through the process, the following areas were addressed:

- ◆ The development of new battalion METs would be in line with higher headquarters and company-level missions.

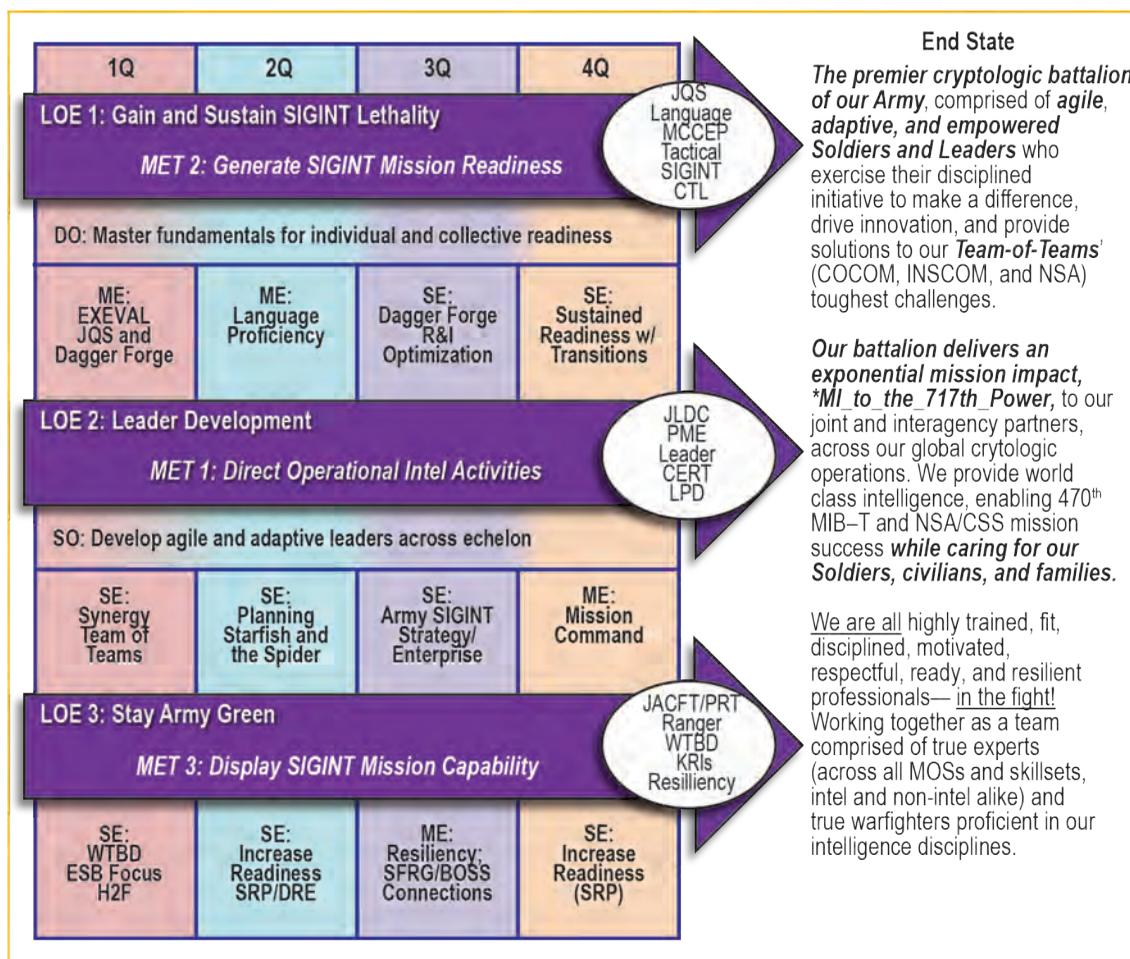


Figure 3. FY21 717<sup>th</sup> MI BN Line of Effort Training Strategy

- ◆ Companies providing support to the National Security Agency (NSA)-Texas would be re-task-organized, adding a platoon to each company.
- ◆ The reception and integration process would be improved to decrease a Soldier's NSA out-of-access time.

- ◆ Sergeant’s Time Training and Warrior Task and Battle Drills would focus on Expert Soldier Badge tasks.
- ◆ Company missions/training would be protected.
- ◆ Language training would become a priority following the NSA’s reconstitution after COVID-19 restrictions.
- ◆ Tactical driver training would be eliminated.
- ◆ Range requirements would be reduced for Soldiers in line with the tables of distribution and allowances.

### Battalion Junior Leader Development Course

The battalion also executed its JLDC to train and prepare junior leaders to assume duties and responsibilities of a noncommissioned officer (NCO) in the U.S. Army. The battalion’s most experienced NCOs run the 1-week course, focusing on mentorship and increasing enlisted leadership proficiency. This opportunity provided every Soldier the chance to test their mettle and leadership skills and to better understand the decision-making processes. Figure 4 displays 2 days of the JLDC execution timeline.

The battalion leveraged this event during the EXEVAL and gained helpful outside viewpoints on how to improve future iterations of JLDC. For one, external evaluators praised the hands-on approach by the trainers on topics such as time management and delegation. They also identified best practices such as exposing junior enlisted to using the five-paragraph operation order for all events as well as providing small group sessions with the brigade command sergeant major. As a result, the battalion intends to incorporate these lessons learned in future JLDC iterations.

Monday	Tuesday
MS Teams Familiarization 0730-0800	Stress Fire Range 0600-0900
Introductions, Admin 0800-0900	Diet/Nutrition 0930-1030
PT Discussion (Overview) 0900-0930	Time Management and Delegation 1030-1130
After Action Reviews 0930-0950	Sponsorship 1130-1200
Unit History 0950-1000	Lunch/Personal Hygiene 1200-1300
Resources (APD, IKN, ATN, CALL) 1000-1100	Taking Charge of Events/NCOIC 1300-1430
Base Resources (BH, MRT) 1100-1130	Developing Short Training Classes 1430-1530
Lunch 1130-1230	PSG Roundtable Discussion 1530-UTC
Role of the NCO (Junior Leadership) 1230-1400	
Role of the NCO (Senior Leadership) 1230-1400	
1SG Roundtable Discussion 1530-UTC	

Figure 4. FY21 Junior Leader Development Course Schedule

### Lessons Learned

While the EXEVAL was conducted to standard, it was not perfect, and it is therefore important to capture lessons learned to share across the U.S. Army Intelligence and Security Command enterprise. The EXEVAL includes the following lessons learned:

- ◆ Train and certify external evaluators early. The EXEVAL requires knowledgeable evaluators or OC/Ts who understand the unit’s METs and respective T&EOs. Developing evaluators who can balance their own requirements while learning the intricacies of a 700-series battalion takes time and coordination. It is recommended that evaluators be trained weeks in advance to allow for coordination before the event.
- ◆ External evaluators are key to improving major training events and internal systems and processes.
- ◆ Clearly define structure and outputs before starting the MDMP.
- ◆ Create a collaborative environment in which the staff members know their input is respected and valued. Understand the value of straightforward input across all warfighting functions.
- ◆ Maximize opportunities to have staff members create, manage, and present their content, thus allowing the executive officer/chief of staff to oversee and manage the MDMP process as a whole.
- ◆ Frequent cross-echelon touchpoints provided a clear, shared understanding.
- ◆ An understanding of the OPCON/ADCON relationships was instrumental in the facilitation of the EXEVAL. The higher headquarters must understand command and support relationships and perform the inherent responsibilities.
- ◆ Having a knowledge base of our mission access requirements is imperative. Many of our Soldiers are unable to “come inside the wire” because of the stringent security restrictions that our OPCON element places on us.

### Conclusion

The EXEVAL had tangible benefits that promoted collaboration and communication across the entire MIB–T. The event facilitated “eyeball-to-eyeball” interaction between the brigade and battalion elements. This face-to-face, albeit socially distanced because of COVID-19, was essential to gain a shared understanding of the battalion’s individual and collective training proficiencies. Given the turnover of personnel and the geographic separation between brigade and battalion elements, the EXEVAL provided a unique opportunity for face-to-face interaction.

In line with the Army Signals Intelligence Strategy, the battalion's enduring goal is to produce and sustain cryptologic-lethal Soldiers to the force while simultaneously developing tactically proficient Soldiers. The EXEVAL helped provide an honest assessment of the daily operations executed by the battalion. As a result of the EXEVAL, the battalion helped provide predictability and prioritization for FY21 while enabling key leaders to capitalize on the lessons learned to refine cryptologic, tactical training, and operational support to deliver an exponential mission impact. 

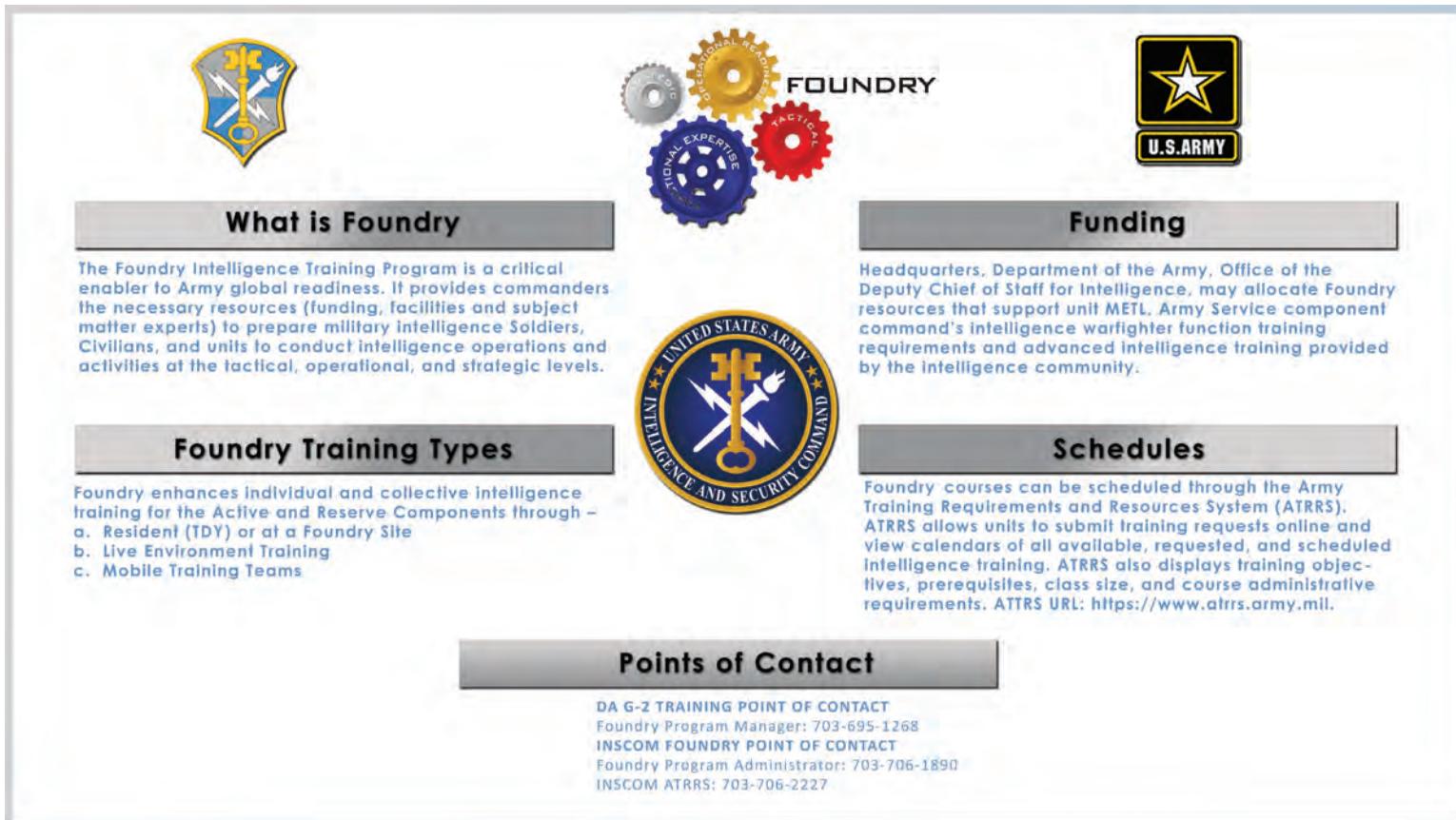
**Endnotes**

1. Department of the Army, Field Manual 7-0, *Training* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], 14 June 2021), F-2.
2. Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Publication 5-0, *The Operations Process* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 31 July 2019), 2-16.
3. Department of the Army, *CGSC Circular 350-1 U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Catalog* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Command and General Staff College, 2020), 7-10.

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The infographic features a central graphic of interlocking gears labeled 'FOUNDRY' with sub-labels: 'OPERATIONAL READINESS', 'TACTICAL', 'TECHNICAL EXPERTISE', and 'OPERATIONAL'. To the left is a shield-shaped logo with a key and a lightning bolt. To the right is the U.S. Army star logo. At the bottom center is the United States Army Intelligence and Security Command logo.

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