Paratroopers of the 82nd Airborne Division and other airborne units drift toward the drop zone near La Fière Bridge in Normandy, France, June 9, 2019. The paratroopers conducted the airborne operation as a way of honoring the paratroopers who jumped on June 6, 1944.
(U.S. Army photo by SFC Daneil Wallace)

Tactical Counterintelligence in Support of Large-Scale Combat Operations

by a contributor from the Southwest Region, U.S. Army Counterintelligence Command

Company E, 16th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division, lands on Omaha Beach, Normandy, France, during one of the first waves to assault, 6–7 June 1944.
(Photo courtesy of Center of Military History)

How can I fight worth a damn without counterintelligence people around me?

—*COL (later GEN) John. H. Michaelis*
Commander, 27th Infantry, at the Pusan perimeter, Korean War

Introduction

For the greater part of the past two decades, the U.S. military has engaged in counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations. This is transitioning to a greater strategic approach that focuses on large-scale combat operations against a peer or near-peer threat. The significant shift in priorities has created a need to update Army doctrine, education, training, and other areas, including tactical Army counterintelligence (CI) and its mission to detect, identify, assess, counter, exploit, and/or neutralize foreign intelligence entities at home and abroad.

By looking at the successes and challenges of the U.S. Army's Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) during World War II, we can learn how to reform present-day Army CI in anticipation of operating as part of a broader joint force. Army CI will need to conduct CI activities that enable the Army to help penetrate and dis-integrate enemy antiaccess and area denial systems during large-scale combat operations, as described in Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Pamphlet 525-3-1, *The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2038*.[1]

This article will describe various tactical tasks that the CIC conducted during World War II and will recommend ways to reform present-day Army CI when preparing for large-scale combat operations.

The Beginnings of Modern Counterintelligence

Modern counterintelligence began in World War I when the Army established a corps of counterintelligence specialists, the Corps of Intelligence Police (CIP). In 1942, the CIP became the Counter Intelligence Corps. Counterintelligence units deployed worldwide to protect U.S. and Allied forces fighting on foreign soil and operating in an environment exploited by saboteurs and collaborators.[2]

Historical Tasks of the Counter Intelligence Corps

Formed in 1942, the CIC played a significant role during World War II, in both the European and Pacific theaters. CIC agents provided tactical intelligence about the enemy from captured documents, interrogations of captured troops, and civilian sources. They also protected military installations and staging areas, located enemy agents, and acted to counter stay-behind networks. The following are eight examples of their tactical tasks:

✦ Screening.

✦ Document exploitation (DOCEX).

✦ Raids against adversarial intelligence officers and their agents.

✦ Counter-espionage with indigenous resistance groups.

✦ CI collections.

✦ Counter-subversion.

✦ Counter-sabotage.

✦ CI threat awareness.

Screening. During World War II, commanders required CIC special agents to screen refugees, internally displaced persons, U.S. citizens (as requested), and local national hires to both protect U.S. forces and acquire information of CI value. Individual screening played a significant role in the identification of Axis intelligence and Axis powers' "stay-behind agents."[3]

One of the most important screening operations occurred in 1945 during the CIC's deployment in the Pacific theater during the Luzon Campaign in the Philippines.[4] Individuals of Japanese descent easily blended into the local populace, thus providing opportunities to remain undetected in a foreign country. Japanese intelligence would employ agents from a variety of demographics to conduct espionage, sabotage, and subversive operations. This resulted in an increased CI threat throughout the archipelago. In response, the CIC established screening points to identify those working on behalf of the Japanese or their ally (Axis) intelligence services. Throughout the Luzon Campaign, the CIC apprehended more than 1,200 "collaborators, puppet officials, enemy nationals, and Kempeitai agents [Japanese secret police comparable to the German Gestapo]."[5]

Document Exploitation. During World War II, the CIC played an important role in DOCEX. The most significant and influential task the CIC conducted during their assignment to the Western Task Force, North Africa Campaign, was capturing personnel and records from the German Armistice Commission. The commission was a commercial entity with the clandestine responsibility to ship raw materials to Nazi war industries.[6] Throughout World War II, Allied forces primarily controlled Casablanca, Morocco, but at one time, Axis forces occupied the city. This provided a rich environment for "stay-behind" agents and a wide spectrum of intelligence activities. In 1942, Allied troops deployed to Casablanca, where CIC agents conducted a series of DOCEX operations. This effort identified local nationals who were providing support or resources to the Axis intelligence services. The buildings that the German Armistice Commission had occupied were a primary target for DOCEX. Two CIC agents uncovered an intelligence windfall that led to the identification of several Italian and German intelligence sources in Morocco.[7]

Raids against Adversarial Intelligence Officers and Their Agents. Although CIC agents conducted raids against adversarial foreign intelligence service officers and their agents at all levels of war, including the notable arrests of the "Butcher of Dachau" and "Axis Sally," it was at the tactical level that the CIC's raids provided a direct advantage to U.S. forces. During the Allied campaign in Italy, just south of the Apennine Mountains, the 305th CIC captured more than 200 German

agents, numerous subversive Italians, clandestine equipment, and explosives traversing what the CIC had dubbed the "Spy Highway." These efforts ensured that Axis forces did not return from their deployment to the U.S. Fifth Army's area of responsibility, making it difficult for the Axis powers to defend Italy from an Allied liberation.[8]

Counter-Espionage with Indigenous Resistance Groups. The CIC's work with indigenous resistance groups in France, Italy, Belgium, and Hungary proved to be invaluable because the resistance groups had a far better understanding of the culture and threat unique to those locations.

One notable example of the CIC's important role occurred before the commencement of D-Day when CIC elements from the 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions landed by parachute and glider at Normandy.[9] After initially securing their objective, a nearby communications tower, the surviving CIC agents linked up with members of the French Resistance who conducted combined raids against many of the Nazis' stay-behind agents, including those who were on the CIC's most wanted list.[10] The French Resistance also provided the CIC with "the location of an ammunition dump, names of other resistance members in the area, and disposition of enemy troops within the vicinity."[11] The CIC's actions against Axis intelligence undoubtedly provided a tactical advantage to Allied troops who would later liberate France and continue eastward toward Germany.

Counterintelligence Collections. The CIC conducted a variety of activities known as CI collections. Historically, a clear delineation between CI collection and human intelligence (HUMINT) collection did not exist during World War II. There was only CI collection. Collection requirements that addressed both adversarial perception and how foreign intelligence services collect information from U.S. forces were within the realm of CI collections. Today, this is not the case. In the years following World War II and the Cold War Era, the Army codified the collection of adversarial information from human sources into the military occupational specialty for HUMINT collector operations.[12]

Axis Sally

Axis Sally's real name was Mildred Gillars. In 1935, she moved from the United States to Berlin, Germany, and took a job as an English teacher. Soon thereafter, she accepted a job as an announcer with Radio Berlin and signed an oath of allegiance to Nazi Germany. During the war, Radio Berlin broadcast her program "Home Sweet Home" throughout the European theater and the United States with a goal to undermine the morale of American Soldiers.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation and U.S. Department of Justice classified her broadcasts as psychological warfare but could not apprehend Gillars until the war ended. She managed to evade authorities until March 1946, when agents of the 970th CIC located and arrested her. In 1949, she finally went to trial in the United States and was sentenced to 10 to 30 years in prison and fined $10,000. After 12 years, she was paroled.[16]

Counter Intelligence Corps arrests Axis Sally, 14 March 1946. (U.S. Army photo)

During World War II, CIC agents ran internal networks throughout Army formations, primarily driven by fear rather than valid CI collection requirements. CI informants were positioned in almost every Army unit. The ratio of informants to a CIC agent totaled 1 per every 30 Soldiers, which was a massive undertaking. The emplacement of CI informants was most effective as a means of deterrence, dissuading Soldiers from succumbing to recruitment attempts by Axis intelligence agents.[13]

The overall efficacy of the CIC in this area was negligible. The causes were a lack of valid collection requirements, an inability to collect because of ongoing open investigations and the lack of deconfliction, the vast scope of sources-to-agent ratio within the program, and known collection activities of foreign intelligence services against friendly forces. The resulting criticism of the CIC's informant networks was substantial and nearly led to the disbandment of the CIC.[14]

Counter-Subversion. The Axis powers, primarily Germany, intended to use subversion for strategic objectives. This was evident through the Axis powers' denial of the Allied powers' use of a neutral power infrastructure. Routinely, American tactical commanders tasked their respective CIC detachments to counter Axis subversion of an established government. Iceland, while historically neutral, was concerned about its participation in the war. This hesitation stemmed from the citizens' fear of mandatory requirements to participate with, or at least identify with, either Axis or Allied partners.[15]

The British and American presence in Iceland was to establish and protect logistical lines of effort through the Atlantic region. Despite this presence, the Nazis increased their already considerable efforts to cultivate support among Icelanders and form a potential fifth column as they had done in Norway. Upon learning of this information, the CIC took action by emplacing more than 100 CI agents in Iceland, a country with a population then of only 120,000. This facilitated counter-subversion efforts, thereby ensuring Allied access to the strategically important

island en route to the European continent. This effort came with many challenges, such as language barriers, a lack of cultural awareness, and a significant equipment deficiency, until the intervention of U.S. Army MG Charles Bonesteel, Commanding General of Iceland Base Command. Once the CIC leveraged the familial ties of their Icelandic agents, the CIC was able to identify covert Nazi operatives working throughout the island. These actions resulted in basing agreements for tactical Allied units, which later proved instrumental in the liberation of Europe.[17]

Counter-Sabotage. Aside from enemy agents engaging in espionage or subversion, the CIC had to counter foreign intelligence services' attempts to sabotage both the U.S. Army operations and the stability of the newly established Allied government in areas liberated from Axis forces.[18]

In March 1945, Soldiers from GEN George Patton's Third Army were planning to cross the Rhine River near the German town of Oppenheim. CIC detachments throughout the region garnered intelligence information that outlined the Germans' plan to use underwater swimmers to sabotage bridge crossings. Using information collaboration and CIC reporting, infantry, engineer, and military police units were able to ensure freedom of maneuver for the Third Army. They identified and captured the German underwater swimmers and transferred them to the CIC for interrogation. Effective CIC operations contributed to the success of GEN Patton and the Third Army's push into Germany.[19]

Counterintelligence Threat Awareness. The Battle of the Bulge was perhaps the most notable instance of CIC's threat awareness efforts. In 1944, German Lieutenant Colonel Otto Skorzeny, a noted German commando leader, orchestrated the training of 150 German soldiers. This training provided information on United States culture, language, and military customs in order to prepare these German soldiers for undetected infiltration into United States Army units. The intent of the operation was to collect information, incite confusion, and conduct sabotage within Allied units throughout the region of Ardennes.[20]

Skorzeny's commando unit, the *Einheit Stielau*, was not successful thanks to the CI threat awareness program, which was educating U.S. Soldiers on indicators for the possibility of enemy infiltration in an area of CI interest. The 9th Army's CIC detachment apprehended 35 German Soldiers during the first 15 days of December 1944. During an interrogation, one German soldier revealed information about Operation Greif, also known as Skorzeny's plan for infiltration. The CIC quickly placed additional emphasis on their CI threat awareness efforts, resulting in the detection of all but 10 to 12 members of Skorzeny's unit.[21]

Learning from the Past to Prepare for the Future

Based on the CIC's experiences in World War II, we can reform present-day Army CI to prepare for large-scale combat operations. For these recommendations, the following assumptions apply:

✦ All Army CI units will be realigned under a central CI command—the Army CI Command.

✦ Maneuver elements may be unable to assist Army CI in completion of their duties during large-scale combat operations because of competing mission requirements and resource constraints.

Underdeveloped tactical CI doctrine significantly affected CIC operations. The lack of doctrine delayed the implementation of an effective CI organization by at least a year and a half. The CIC units within this region also faced challenges with insufficiently trained personnel and no supporting tactical CI units. Currently, peer and near-peer threats pursue any means to reduce or impair the U.S. military's reaction time.[23]

Recommendation: Developing and implementing tactical CI doctrine are imperative to retaining the tactical CI advantage. Based on historical CI information and disparities in current CI doctrine, the Army should—

✦ Revise and disseminate tactical CI doctrine across classified and unclassified mediums.

✦ Develop and disseminate a comprehensive guideline to assist agents throughout the process of counter-espionage, counter-subversion, counter-sabotage, DOCEX, CI screening, insider threat identification and incident processing, and CI awareness training.

✦ Ensure the U.S. Army Intelligence Center of Excellence (USAICoE) collaborates with the Army CI Command when developing and revising tactical CI doctrine.

✦ Establish training courses, as resources and bandwidth allow, that implement updated information, concepts, or processes.

CIC agents received insufficient linguistic, cultural, and combat training before deployment. The areas most affected were CI screening, DOCEX, CI collections, and counter-espionage in coordination with the host nation. After the CIC's

campaign in North Africa, an after-action review revealed substantial gaps in training and overall understanding of the host nation's language and culture. The CIC realized this training was integral to mission success and sought to improve agents' overall understanding by sending agents to the Berlitz language schools for 13 weeks of intensive training before deployment.[24]

Recommendation: As a consolidated and modernized command, Army CI could improve language capabilities among current and future CI agents through an established pipeline, coded billets, or inclusion of language in institutional or functional training venues. Army CI agents fluent in common Eastern European languages, including Russian, would enable an Army CI Command to effectively liaise and communicate with allied and/or coalition partners during shaping operations of a campaign plan.

Combat arms basic training would provide advanced skills to engage in close combat with enemy forces. This would augment CI agents' basic combat training. Possessing both advanced combat training and proficient CI skills, Army CI units would be better suited to work in concert with combat arms units, rather than rely on combat arms units for mission success.

The CIC ran informant networks throughout many Army units without the use of validated CI collection requirements.[25] Army CI operates using validated CI collection requirements in accordance with Executive Order 12333, *United States Intelligence Activities*, dated 1981. Although Executive Order 12333 bans internal informant networks, in order to protect the rights of U.S. citizens, Army CI agents have the potential to identify sources of information through refugees and internally displaced persons.

Recommendation: CI agents could accomplish the identification of source information through CI screenings or debriefings, as demonstrated during U.S. Army operations in the Middle East. CI agents could also ask individuals with valuable intelligence information to return to areas of tactical CI importance to obtain and covertly relay information of CI value. This approach would provide real-time information and actionable intelligence to tactical commanders.

Much like the CIC during World War II, today's Army CI missions are misunderstood. During World War II, commanders and their respective G-2s did not fully understand the mission, responsibilities, and capability of the CIC. A commander's or staff's lack of understanding and underutilization of CI capabilities placed the unit at a considerable disadvantage.[26]

Recommendation: Establishing a clearly defined command and support relationship between a newly formed Army CI

Command and U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) would be a critical step for ensuring tactical forces employ CI agents in a mutually beneficial capacity.

While assigned to tactical units, CI agents in a garrison environment should belong to the Army CI Command. This would provide the ability to receive tactical CI training and augment strategic CI missions before deploying in support of FORSCOM units. Using this approach, agents would receive training to execute tactical CI functions and possess the knowledge to leverage strategic CI assets to counter the activities of a foreign intelligence entity on the battlefield.

As a part of the newly established Army CI Command, deploying units would request a CI support team from a hypothetical expeditionary CI battalion. A memorandum of agreement with the Army CI Command would identify details of this support, outlining a direct support relationship. This would mitigate concerns FORSCOM units may have regarding their ability to assign priorities to tactical CI agents, while enabling the CI agents to operate under the legal authority and technical control of the Army CI Command. This would minimize risk to tactical commanders, ensure tactical CI agents are producing quality work on behalf of their supported commands, and enable the Army CI Command to shift strategic CI assets efficiently to foreign intelligence entity threats identified at the tactical level. Army CI units, in direct support to Special Forces units, would have the ability to conduct CI activities with host-nation resistance groups, which would be permitted as part of Special Forces' unconventional warfare core tasks.

Tactical commanders were not educated on how the CIC could enhance their operations. This included how the CIC could enable target acquisition, identify targets within the area of operations, and answer priority intelligence requirements. Initial reporting indicated that some unit commanders did not understand the CIC mission.[27]

Recommendation: As a means to bridge the gap in understanding CI mission and capabilities, a hypothetical expeditionary CI battalion, subordinate to the Army CI Command, could provide a CI officer to serve as the supported FORSCOM unit's CI coordinating authority or S/G-2X. Additionally, the Army CI Command could—

✦ Establish a website designed to educate the force on the differences between the Army CI Command, Criminal Investigations Command, and HUMINT as a specialty.

✦ Serve as a repository for annual Threat Awareness and Reporting Program training.

- Publish press releases to dissuade foreign intelligence entities, terrorist organizations, and insider threats while reassuring friendly forces of Army CI's ability to protect them.
- Provide vignettes detailing historical Army CI successes.
- Educate the force on how CI could enable the success of tactical operations.

Official after-action reviews concluded that CIC units' training and equipment were inadequate and their missions ill defined. Unlike most of the conventional Army, the CIC did not have an established organization and table of equipment. Tactical Army CI experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq have shown CI agents to be almost completely reliant on the support of combat arms patrols in order to conduct their CI operations. In the event of large-scale combat operations, this framework may not allow for a collaborative approach unless it is included in doctrine or codified before the engagement.[28]

Recommendation: An additional approach to tactical CI's current dependency on external organizations would be the creation of an organic tactical CI element subordinate to the Army CI Command (previously referred to as an expeditionary CI battalion). This element would have adequate resources, equipment, and training to conduct tactical CI operations without completely relying on combat support and combat services.

CIC agents assigned to the field armies lacked a clear delineation of responsibilities between strategic and tactical CI tasks. This led to the agents frequently being overwhelmed and overworked. The agents were responsible for national security investigations and tactical counter-subversion operations in support of forward-moving forces. This oversaturation was apparent during Operation Cobra in Northern France, when the rapid pace of the war forced CIC agents to leave investigations partially completed in order to focus on more pressing tactical CI tasks, such as counter-sabotage.[29]

Recommendation: The Army CI Command should be responsible for the full spectrum of CI activities and be obligated to delineate strategic and tactical tasks of subordinate units/commands. This would enable the augmentation of tactical CI agents to those fulfilling tactical CI activities. This would also apply to those agents fulfilling strategic CI activities requiring augmentation.

Way Ahead

As the U.S. Army continues to shift focus from counterterrorism and counterinsurgency to large-scale combat operations, Army CI needs to transition efficiently to the changing demands of conflict. This analysis of the CIC's successes and challenges during World War II demonstrates the need to establish a contemporary Army CI Command capable of—

- Organically providing training, equipment, management, and oversight of all Army CI special agents.
- Providing FORSCOM and Special Operations Command CI agents in a direct support role.
- Enabling Army CI units to work autonomously to accomplish their assigned CI tasks.
- Developing readily accessible, current tactical CI doctrine in coordination with USAICoE and TRADOC.

This approach would ensure both tactical and strategic leaders have the necessary CI support to accomplish their unique mission throughout operations and when countering peer and near-peer adversarial foreign intelligence services. ✯

Epigraph

James L. Gilbert, John Patrick Finnegan, and Ann Bray, *In the Shadow of the Sphinx: A History of Army Counterintelligence* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2005), 112.

Endnotes

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25. Ibid., 26.

26. Sayer and Botting, *America's Secret Army*, 23–24.

27. Ibid.

28. Gilbert, Finnegan, and Bray, *Shadow of the Sphinx*, 75–77; and Department of the Army, *Counter Intelligence Corps*, 21.

29. Gilbert, Finnegan, and Bray, *Shadow of the Sphinx*, 43–44.

The Army Counterintelligence Command conducts proactive counterintelligence activities to detect, identify, assess, and counter, neutralize or exploit foreign intelligence entities and insider threats in order to protect Army and designated Department of Defense forces, information and technologies worldwide.