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“S-2 SEES IT THROUGH

by

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Army Air Force Documents 1944, AFHRA, Maxwell AFB

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By Major Roger Warner, S-2 Officer
460th Bomb Group (H)
1944

Combat Intelligence, as known and practiced in the Fifteenth Air Force, is a comparatively new development in the American Army. It is a leaf taken out of the FAF's book of experience, and rewritten to suit American organization, tactics and temperaments. Groups have done without it in combat, to their own detriment. It was not understood, for instance, in its present highly developed state by the 19th Group in their operations in the Pacific. It has been misunderstood, or importance minimized, by some Group Commanders newly arrived in this theatre of operations.

S-2 is a staff officer, a statement obvious but important, in that relationship of staff to command is basic. Staff inevitably will reflect command. Without an interest in intelligence, a willingness to give it an even break with other staff functions, and an appreciation of what it can mean in combat, the Group Commander cannot receive from his S-2 section of the work they are capable of doing for him. He may receive less than the best and be satisfied. He may not want the best, because he thinks he can get along well enough without it. The kind of battle courage that prompted Farragut to shout, "Damn the torpedoes," was misapplied by the Group Commander who said "Damn the Flak," and proceeded to fly through it unnecessarily on routes to and from his targets.

The Group Commander may be thankful to S-1, who relieves him of boring paper work, may revere S-3, his brother flying officer, and respect "good old S-4," who keeps the airplanes in flying condition, but at the same time look upon S-2 as some modern and necessary decoration. To work efficiently, S-2 must have from the beginning an even break with the other staff officers in working relations with his commanding officer and in the physical accommodations allotted to his section. If, in the turmoil of setting up in the field, the actual working needs of S-2 are lost sight of, or discouraged, he fights an uphill and discouraging fight against his own commanding officer. He does his work of preparation for mission, interrogating and reporting the hard way. The time is delayed when he can bring out the best work of which his section is capable.

Intelligence in the 460th Bomb Group (H) went through growing pains. This article will discuss symptoms and deal with the situation as it exists at the end of six months of operation, long after the pains have passed away. It will record improvements that took place meantime.

The first concern of the Group S-2, naturally, was the varying qualities and talents of the officers and enlisted men he found in his section. At once his situation differed from that of the department head in a business. The business executive could pick and choose his people, ascertaining their capabilities first and hiring them for the jobs in mind. In the army, the department head must

work with people assigned to him more or less blindly, from this place and that, in this cadre and that. Only after he had observed them over a period of time, and had developed their capabilities, could he hope to weld them into a strong department.

S-2 officers in the 460th Bomb Group (H) varied in age from twenty-three to fifty-two. Civilian background included, student, farmer, storekeeper, salesman, accountant, restaurant owner, radio announcer and executives in insurance, manufacturing and public relations. All had graduated from AAFIS (Army Air Force Intelligence School?), Harrisburg, Pa., and five had been through AAFSAT (Army Air Force School of Applied Tactics), Orlando, Fla., with the key personnel of the Group. All had the background of months of practical experience in the field with RTU (Replacement Training Groups), Groups. At Chatham Field, Ga., where the Group trained, almost twice the minimum requirements in Intelligence had been accomplished in the abbreviated 2nd and normal 3rd phase periods.

Yet change from training to combat called for new talents and imposed new stresses and strains. New duties had to be performed by the officers best qualified. There would be specialization in Escape, Enemy Fighter Tactics, Recognition, Censorship, History, Reports and Counter-Intelligence. The old, familiar jobs of briefing and interrogation were sharpened to meet the needs of combat.

In combat the Group, rather than the squadron, became the important tactical unit. Briefing, like flying, was a group function. Group S-2 briefed the first twelve combat missions. This was not, on his part, presumption that he could do a better job than another S-2 officer. It was rather an attempt to profit by his own mistakes, understand and meet the wishes of the Commanding Officer and arrive at an adjustment with S-3 on briefing procedure. These having been accomplished, briefing was turned over to teams, four in number, each composed of an S-2 officer to brief combat crew officers and an S-2 officer to brief gunners in their separate room. Before the Group became operational, there had been dry runs on briefings, in which all S-2 officers took part. Now, in the actual work, one officer after another was tried and coached and criticized. Regardless of rank, the officer better qualified to give the "main," or officers' briefing, was selected. An assistant, a Lieutenant, might brief the officers and the Squadron S-2, a Captain, the gunners. Group S-2 and Ass't S-2 remained one of the teams, and took their turns in the briefings. The fact that some officers proved unsuitable for briefings, did not end their usefulness to the Group. There were many jobs to be done. There was work for all.

Actual preparation for briefing, as smoothed and perfected by months of operation, begins the night before the mission. S-3 and S-2 do the job together. Bombardier, Navigator, Intelligence, usually in the War Room, study together, help each other, think from 20,000 feet. As soon as the field order comes in, the night shift of S-2 enlisted men quit their card game. The route is posted on the master map in the War Room. The material in the objective folder is studied, the maps, charts and photographs selected to be shown in the baloptican (Opaque Overhead Projector used for projecting maps, photographs, or clear acetate sheets that could be written on with wax pencils, Mfg. by Bausch & Lomb.), marked with route or MPI, and their sequence decided upon. (A handy tool here is a cardboard frame which shows exactly how much of a chart may be projected.) Sectional maps in sets, one each for the lead navigators, deputy and box leaders, are marked with flak along and near the route to be flown. Target charts and photographs to be issued to bombardiers are set aside. Escape kits, ten

to a musette bag (a small knapsack with one shoulder strap), are in readiness, as are proper receipts to be signed by the co-pilots.

During the night the route, with relevant flak areas is posted on the maps in officers' and gunners' briefing rooms. Neat labels show key point, initial point, primary and alternate targets and targets of the rest of the Air Force. The stage is set, the curtain is drawn. When the night shift knows its business, briefing officers can walk into the room next morning, confident that every detail behind the curtain is correct.

Briefings at the 460th seldom last more than half an hour. Often they are shorter. Four officers regularly take part – Navigator, S-2, S-3, and Weather. The Commanding Officer may or may not speak. Short separate briefings follow. What S-2 has to say, plus his discussion and description of primary and alternate targets, may consume more time than is taken by any other officer. Yet what S-2 leaves out of his portion of the briefing is almost as important as what he puts in. His night work is that of selecting, editing, arranging those facts and displays which will put his story over most clearly to the combat crews. The Intelligence Annex is a valuable tool. It may be amplified by facts about the war situation or the target derived from other sources. Information in the Annex is not presented in the sequence written. An outline of a typical briefing for officers follows:

- A. The military importance of the target and its relation to the war situation.
- B. The coordinated attack to be made by Air Force.
- C. Fighter Escort.
- D. Enemy defenses, flak and fighters.
- E. The description of the targets, with check points from I.F.
- F. Escape pointers, showing in baloptican safe landing areas if they apply.
(All crews have a background of several hours instruction in escape and prisoner of war conduct.)

One officer conducts the entire briefing of gunners, giving routs, fighter rendezvous, weather, in addition to Intelligence. In general, he follows the outline above, though target description is not as detailed. He includes a review of enemy fighters and the escort with their markings.

S-2's part in a briefing is not oratory, and it should have none of the tricks of oratory, or the high-strung fervor of the football coaches pep talk. Instead, S-2's manner should be businesslike and his diction straight-forward. He need not strive for effect, for his subject is inherently interesting. He is instructing men about to fly on a mission of great military importance and possibly great danger, and should conduct himself with modesty. Humor should be used sparingly, if at all. Forced humor is likely to fall pretty flat in front of an audience routed out of bed before daylight, hurried through breakfast, faced with hours of difficult flying, the certainty of flak and the possibility of fighters.

The Chaplain customarily opens briefings with a short prayer. The wisdom of combining prayer with operational instructions may be questioned. It has been a 460th custom from the beginning. If it gives confidence to young men facing dangerous tasks, it is worth while. The fact that crews have missed the Chaplain when he has been away and have asked for his return is one measure of the value of his prayers.

Briefing deserves a setting in keeping with its importance. The room must be large enough to seat the audience without crowding. Briefing map and screen for baloptican must be at proper height. Desk for notes must have proper lighting and there must be arrangements for blackout. If, in addition, the shape of the room makes possible appropriate decoration, a subtle but important element of dignity is added to every meeting in it. Combat crews, usually under strain during briefings, reset to their surroundings, whether consciously or unconsciously, and sometimes they are very sensitive to them. There was, for instance, the pilot who requested that the dingy mail, used as a curtain over the map, be turned with the yellow side rather than the black side towards the audience. Black he considered funeral. His request was granted.

The main briefing room of the 460th was the hay barn of a large farm. Unbroken walls of rough tufa rock and high roof of tile gave it somewhat the proportions of a chapel. Along the right wall neatly lettered white plaques display the names of the mission flown by the Group. They have passed one hundred. Here the National colors hang during briefings. Shortly the opposite wall will be used for more missions. A separate display records the numbers of enemy aircraft credited to the Group.

The Gunners' Briefing Room, next door, was a wine cellar. It has low arched ceilings, and arched bays on either side. Its wall have been decorated with the national colors, the Fifteenth Air Force symbol, and with a well-chosen and well-painted murals of enemy and friendly fighters. This room is available for daytime classes with baloptican. It needs no blacking out.

Interrogation in the 460th started as a Group function. Circles of fin rack chairs were arranged in the original briefing room and an S-2 officer assigned to each. The system had obvious advantages. It was flexible, in that significant facts discovered by one S-2 officer could be checked at once by other interrogators. It made for control and quick reporting. Analysis of interrogation forms could begin almost at once. About as soon as the interrogation was completed, a consolidated report could be ready.

The early change from Group to squadron interrogation was concession to the layout of the airbase rather than a criticism of the method. The farthest hardstand on the line was almost three miles from Group Headquarters, and transportation was at a premium. Crews had to turn in flying equipment, ride the three miles before interrogation, and another half mile afterwards to their camp area. The change to Squadron interrogation increased the comfort of men who fly. But it slowed interrogation and made prompt reporting, by Squadrons and Groups, more difficult. The situation was further complicated by the lack of transportation. Group S-2 had none, and found extreme difficulty in borrowing. Squadron S-2's had none. To begin with, an enlisted man would start from the Squadron S-2 tent, on foot, with the interrogation forms, hoping to catch a ride to Group Headquarters. The returning of escape kits and purses by these methods was haphazard and unguarded.

The whole unsatisfactory situation was eventually cured by two factors, both of which contributed speed. One was the assignment of a battered command car to Group S-2. Evidently a veteran of North Africa, Sicily and the Italian invasion, it would still run most of the time. In it, interrogation forms and escape kits were collected promptly from squadron S-2 tents.

Another factor of speed was a new attitude towards interrogation on the part of Squadron S-2's, a streamlining of the whole process. In training, the interrogation form had been a means of

indoctrinating crews in the importance of accurate observation. As a process of education it could be gone over patiently and thoroughly with each crew member. In combat, it was only an aid in collecting military information – and that quickly. In the 460th the form became a guide, a general outline, rather than a ritual. Group S-2 pointed out to Squadron S-2's that certain facts about most missions are not open to doubt and can be skipped or passed quickly, after the first few crews had been interrogated. Thus weather, flak and general results are seldom in question. "But what did you do with your bombs?" requires a specific answer. Observations may be of greater importance or little, in which case the crews can be turned off – tactfully. A special form for the lead navigator covers group assembly, wing rendezvous, escort, time over target. Lead Navigator draws route flown on the track chart. Weather is collected from selected crews. When encounters with enemy a/c occur, they must be recorded in detail. Claims are developed in a separate meeting with Squadron S-2 the next day. Information of our own a/c in distress is sifted thoroughly, for it becomes the basis of Escape and Evasion Reports. Squadron S-2's, as aids to interrogation in their tents on the line, post maps with the route briefed and display target charts or photographs on which the briefed MPI is marked. Squadron officers arrange their interrogation and refreshment tents as they please. The only standard practice is that two crews may be seated and interrogated at once.

Because of leaves, trips to Rome and detached service, it often happens that there is only one S-2 officer on duty in the Squadron. Perhaps because most S-2 officers are older than most flying officers, and their experience in business administration wider, the Intelligence section has been depleted from time to time by assignment to other duties. Thus it supplied the Group PRO Officer (Public Relations Office), the Group Adjutant, and for a time, a Squadron Executive Officer. In the beginning, it would have been impossible to get along with one S-2 officer per Squadron. The necessary time schedule of reporting would have suffered. But as the interest in Intelligence has grown, and its importance became more thoroughly realized, Squadron S-2 has not lacked able, volunteer assistants. The Squadron navigator and bombardier, provided they are not flying, are glad to help at interrogation, as are pilots. These officers, like the S-2, know the crews personally, call them by their first name, an aid to ease of interrogation.

The battle seasoning of combat crews has been a great factor in swift, accurate reporting. As they flew more and more missions, their powers of observation became acute. It can be said truthfully that the original crews were given to understatement rather than to boasting. Their reports could be depended upon. Only battle experience has improved the replacements to the extent that their answers can be taken seriously. To begin with, sometimes, they wouldn't be sure where they had gone, what they had seen, what they had done.

At the 460th, the Circling Report is telephoned to Wing Headquarters by the Master Sergeant who is head of the Group Section. This report makes no attempt to estimate the number of airplanes, virtually an impossibility when the formation is split into boxes or individual aircraft. Group S-2 and his assistant visit the line some minutes before the formation is due, in order to distribute special forms for lead navigator, issue any last minute instructions. They interview the first ship or ships, down for the Flash Report. Putting in the Flash Report gives them a quick picture of what has happened, a background against which they can interpret the Interrogation Forms. Their procedure is to greet the officers, but question the gunners. A target chart or photograph is carried along as an interrogation aid.

It took a little while for the sergeants to realize the S-2 was interested in the bombs of the Group, not of a particular aircraft.

"Where did the bombs go?" Once a gunner, leaning out of the waist window when asked that familiar question.

"Six went right on the target, sir. I couldn't see the rest."

"Sergeant, did the Group hit the target" persisted S-2.

"Couldn't see, sir. But six out of ten of our bombs did.

I call that pretty damn good."

When the target is simple and results cannot be doubted, the Flash Report can be telephoned at once. When there is confusion about what happened, two or three airplanes must be visited and perhaps airplanes from both attack units. Usually Flash Reports can be filed within ten minutes of a mean landing time, and sometimes ahead of mean landing time.

Within an hour on mean landing time, and often sooner, the interrogation forms collected from all four Squadrons, are in Group Headquarters. Analysis begins at once. In the beginning Squadron S-2's took turns in analyzing and reporting. This method was too slow. Now the same officers, Ass't S-2 and a Reporting Officer, do this work day after day, using short cuts learned by experience. Within an hour and a half from mean landing time, the Mission Report is ready. On a simple, cleanout milk run, it has been filed within an hour.

Narrative Reports are compiled the same evening, or the next morning. It is a custom in the 460th to check the Narrative Report with the officer who led the mission, thus bringing out any unusual occurrences and thus interpreting his experience and judgment in the narrative.

There has been a tendency on the part of some flying officers to look upon narrative reports and, for that matter, upon bomb plots as means of exploiting the accomplishments of the Group and their own personal prowess. They have confused the function of digging out and reporting military information, which is S-2's with the function of securing publicity, which is the PRO's. They have accused "INTOPS" (In operatives) of understatement. They have awakened the Photo Interpreter out of a sound sleep, and sitting on either side of his groggy form, have tried to make his plot additional bombs which his professional judgment told him were not there. Under these circumstances S-2 has had to protect his remaining shreds of intellectual honesty. He has pointed out that his reports and his photographs are military information for the use of the whole Air Force, that upon his findings the Commanding Generals of Wing, of the Air Force, might well base tomorrow's decisions as to the next day's missions, that his reports are as near unemotional truth and cold, hard fact as he can make them. That usually sufficed. – Yet because they are military information, those same unintentional reports have furnished the basis for more than one individual award, and in the end, for the Group Citation.

S-2's own office, the War Room, has been in three places. It began in the present Security Room, which had been a granary. After grain and most of the rats had been removed, S-2 files began to take shape, as did situation maps. Classes and the first briefings were held in the room. Next, the War Room with a file of some six hundred Objective Folders was moved to the second floor, back of the Headquarters, an arrangement convenient for the Commanding Officer but annoying to almost everybody else. It meant that S-2 was separated from much of its working material and most of his personnel. It meant frequent trips up and down stairs, during the night, from the Security Room to the War Room, and passing through a dormitory in which twenty

officers were trying to sleep. Worse, separated the offices of S-3 and S-2. It was far from a sound working arrangement.

The final move was back to the Security Room, where a new War Room had been built. This room was situated between the offices of S-3 and the Security Room, which is where it belonged. Just outside the present War Room are files of Objective Folders, the photographs files, files of maps and target charts by the thousands. The Master Map, the map of record, is the feature of the War Room, and perhaps S-2's most important single piece of equipment. On it flak areas are carefully recorded from "E" reports, from INTOPS, from the Group's own painful discoveries. Air Fields and their fighters are checked day by day against all latest information. Safe Landing areas, bomb lines, prisoner of war camps are posted. Commanding Officer and Staff refer to the Master Map frequently, sometimes many times a day. From it, if necessary, the Group could lay its own battle plans, write its own Intelligence Annex, choose the route, determine the proper axis of attack and the better rally point. No wonder, the Master Map in the War Room had become the center of the Group's planning.

A wide, well-lighted corridor of the Security Room contains the situation maps, kept for the benefit of the Group Staff and, more particularly, of the Combat Crews. As the war had grown in number of theatres and intensity, three maps have attracted more and more attention. Security Room is on the way to the distant shower baths, which may result in some increase in traffic: but soap and towel are not required admission tickets. It has become the habit of officers and enlisted men to check the situation map daily. The maps are supported by the latest teletype news and incorporate the most recent radio news reports. In this same corridor are posted photographs of the previous day's bombing results. In the center of the area, a large table holds the newest intelligence publication of Wing and Air Force. At the side of the area, another table displays Air Force Escape and Evasion Memoranda arranged by countries, and over the table is the latest Air Force map of safe landing areas. This material is for a ready reference. It makes possible during briefings when time is a premium, a quick escape review rather than the exhaustive escape lecture. Here is the logical follow-up to the lectures on escape and prisoner of war conduct given to new crews and repeated for all crews.

As the moths have gone by, many changes and improvements in Intelligence in the 460th took place. Some of them, like the War Room, Security Room and the two Briefing Rooms, were permanent installations. They made for more efficient operation over a period of time. Other changes in working methods resulted from suggestions made by officers and enlisted men as they went about their work. Improvements have come about because each individual on the team was trying to better this own work and the work of the whole S-2 section for the benefit of the Group.

It is difficult to say where S-2 learned his job. Certainly the schooling at Harrisburg, good as it was, could only introduce him to the many things he needed to know – and to feel. Advice and warnings given there only suggested the situations, psychological and diplomatic, in which he finds himself day and night, month after month as his Group faces combat.

Along with the rest of the Group, often he will lack supplies, the very working materials of his trade. He must stretch what he has, or substitute. He will become expert in making stoves out of oil drums, tables out of scrap lumber, drawing boards from packing cases, filing cabinets from frag boxes. Like any good soldier in the field, he will invent, or borrow, or requisition by midnight.

S-2's primary duties are clearly defined: "to keep the Commander, and all others concerned, informed of the enemy situation and capabilities." But the most valuable tool he can take with him into action is prescribed in no field manual and described in no text book. It is his regard for his combat crews. This will carry him through personal discomfort, weariness and discouragement. It is, perhaps, his best justification for being. It keeps him human, keeps him from becoming an automation, expert at compiling facts and spouting figures. It can make his very presence a source of power in combat.

"I have a serious criticism to make of your briefings," said the pilot of some forty missions to his credit.

S-2 was all attention. Here, at last, was truthful comment on what he had been trying to do.

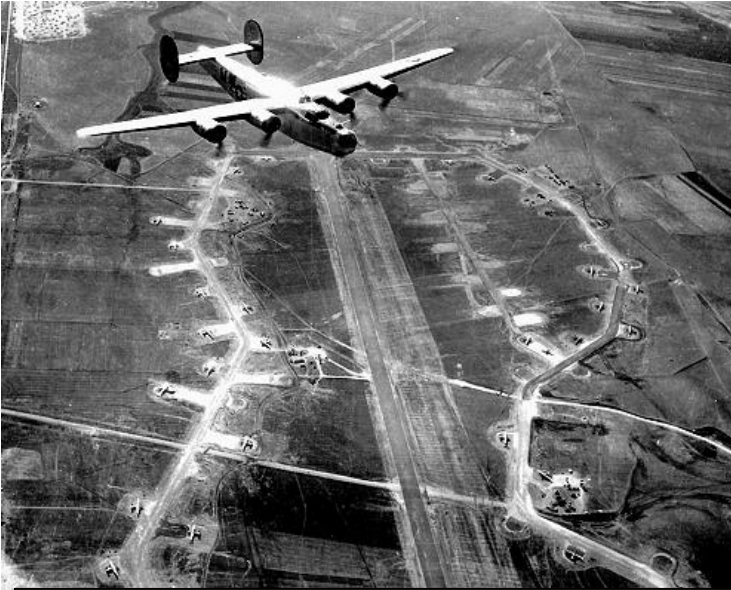
"What is it?" he asked in all humility.

"Well, you see it's this way. The things you tell us are true, all right. That's good! But the way you say them, and the tone of your voice, makes us go out of there thinking everything is going to be all right... That's bad!"

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PHOTOGRAPHS



460th Bomb Group Landing Strip. The base camp can be seen in the upper left corner. 1944



B-24 OVER 460TH BOMB GROUP CAMP AREA 1944.



"Dolly Tower" at the 460th BG Runway



"Engine Mechanics" John Eckert Collection 464th BG

[See More Photographs under "S-2" in the Photo Album](#)