

Reconnaissance and Security Forces in the New Heavy Division Structure

by Major Michael C. Kasales

As the world transitions into the 21st century, the United States Army also begins a transition, both in organizational restructuring and doctrinally. These transitions must be well thought out in order for the force to meet the challenges of the future battlefield. Organizational restructuring (the new heavy division) and emerging doctrine (distributed operations) have sufficiently addressed the changes to our traditional armored and mechanized forces. However, there are several shortcomings with respect to reconnaissance and security operations, both doctrinally and in force structure. This article discusses these issues and makes some recommendations to ensure that proper consideration is given to future reconnaissance and security operations.

Intelligence collection assets at national, corps, and division levels can provide commanders with valuable battlefield information. New equipment and technology will allow this information to be quickly disseminated and become available down to individual crew and squad level. This technology will allow orders and operational information to be disseminated faster, ensure more timely and accurate reporting and coordination, and enhance situational awareness across the battlefield. However, until the new technology and equipment is fielded and integrated throughout the force, commanders will have to rely on organic reconnaissance and security forces to provide timely and accurate combat information.

Even with the wide range of intelligence collection assets available to the commander, he has no better asset than his scout platoons to put reliable “eyes” on the objective. Imagery intelligence (IMINT) may not be available due to weather; human intelligence (HUMINT) from sources above brigade may be outdated; and signal intelligence (SIGINT) may not provide a clear enough picture for the commander. The ground scout provides the commander with a continuous, all-weather, thinking source of information. The scout provides timely and

accurate reports on enemy strengths, weaknesses, locations, and disposition. The commander also employs his scouts to the front, flanks, and rear of main body forces, or in a specific area, to establish security for the main body, providing early warning to the commander of the enemy’s advance.

Brigade and task force commanders must carefully weigh the need for detailed reconnaissance of an objective area, reconnaissance of the routes or axes for the approach march, and flank or rear security. The commander and staff must thoroughly analyze the mission and develop a plan that provides sufficient reconnaissance forward to deploy main body forces, while ensuring adequate security to the flanks so the main body can maneuver freely to achieve their intended purpose. With a limited number of reconnaissance and security forces, this can be a challenge to even the most prudent commander and well-trained staff.

Approaches to Reconnaissance

There are several methods or schools of thought for employing reconnaissance forces. The commander must understand which method he will use, as it will influence his planning process. Additionally, subordinate reconnaissance forces must also understand which method the commander is using, since this drives the amount of planning and preparation required for execution of the reconnaissance mission, as well as their understanding of how the intelligence information collected will influence the main body’s execution.

The first method of employing reconnaissance forces is “reconnaissance push.” This method calls for reconnaissance forces to be deployed early in the planning process. The staff uses the intelligence information collected to develop the plan. This technique requires the staff to develop facts and assumptions on the enemy early enough to focus the reconnaissance effort. These facts and assumptions are generally based on enemy tem-

plates and a thorough IPB. As reconnaissance forces confirm or deny the facts and assumptions, this intelligence information is reported back to the staff in order to complete the plan. “Reconnaissance push” requires that a detailed R&S plan be developed prior to the planning of the main body’s mission. And the intelligence information must be gathered and reported in time to influence the planning process. The result of “reconnaissance push” operations is a detailed plan, based on hard intelligence, for the employment of main body forces. This is the technique that most BLUEFOR organizations attempt to use at the National Training Center. It is generally unsuccessful in a time-constrained environment because the staff does not dedicate enough time on R&S planning, and most units do not use the intelligence information collected to develop or adjust their initial plan.

The second method of employing reconnaissance forces is “command push.” This method is similar to “reconnaissance push,” as collected intelligence information is used to develop the plan. The difference is that it calls for the staff to develop several detailed main body courses of action prior to deploying reconnaissance forces. The staff must also develop a detailed R&S plan, normally based on the IPB process. Reconnaissance forces are then deployed to gather detailed information on enemy strengths and weaknesses. The intelligence information collected is used by the commander to select the appropriate course of action — massing his strengths against enemy weaknesses. This method also results in a detailed plan, based on hard intelligence, for the employment of main body forces.

The third method is “reconnaissance pull.” This method also calls for reconnaissance forces to identify enemy weaknesses so they can be exploited by the main body. However, the staff must develop a flexible plan, based on several possible courses of action and driven by the commander’s intent. In order to execute “reconnaissance pull,” the commander must ensure that all subordinates

truly understand his intent for the operation, as this type of operation calls for decentralized, but synchronized and integrated execution. The plan must allow for maximum flexibility because the reconnaissance forces precede and continually place the main body in a position of advantage against identified enemy weaknesses. The commander uses a series of decision points, based on the intelligence “read,” to maneuver his forces. This method does not alleviate the staff from planning R&S operations. They must still provide reconnaissance forces with the probable locations, strengths, and disposition of enemy forces. The result of the planning process is a flexible plan, based on decision points, that allows the commander to maneuver his main body forces based on intelligence information collected from his reconnaissance forces.

The commander must determine which reconnaissance method to use. The staff must become proficient in using the collected intelligence information to develop the plan or to advise the commander on which COA to execute. The technique for employing reconnaissance forces and exploiting the intelligence information they collect will become even more essential as brigades and task forces operate over a larger battlespace.

Emerging doctrine outlines an increase in the division’s and brigade’s battlespace. This increase — 100x100 kilometers versus 120x200 kilometers for the division, and 20x50 kilometers versus 60x100 kilometers for the brigade — amounts to giving the division and brigade responsibility for a third more battlespace, to include the responsibility for providing the added security and reconnaissance in this larger area.

Currently, armored and mechanized infantry battalion task organization includes an organic scout platoon. Its mission is to collect intelligence information for the commander by answering specific priority intelligence requirements (PIR). These scout platoons consist of six M1025/1026 HMMWVs (having been reduced from 10 HMMWVs). The platoons’ total assigned strength is 18 scouts (1 officer/17 enlisted), a reduction of 12 scouts (4 NCOs/8 enlisted). Each vehicle has a crew of three: a vehicle commander, gunner, and driver. The platoon’s main armament consists of three vehicle-mounted M2 .50 caliber machine guns, three vehicle-mounted Mk 19 automatic grenade launchers, and personal weapons. Additionally, scout platoons can be issued anti-tank weapons (AT-4s and Javelins), demolitions, and countermobility munitions (MOPMS and HORNET). By using GPS and hand-held laser range-

finders (MELIOS) (and in the near future the LRAS3 system) scout platoons also possess the capability to direct and call for precision indirect fires. Current plans for fielding the LRAS3 call for one per scout platoon.

Brigade Reconnaissance Troop

A recent change in force structure introduced a dedicated brigade-level reconnaissance and security element — the brigade reconnaissance troop (BRT), which consists of a headquarters platoon, two scout platoons of six vehicles each (identical to the organization of the task force scout platoon), and a striker platoon of six three-man fire support teams. The primary role of the BRT is to provide battlefield information to the brigade commander through the conduct of dedicated brigade-level reconnaissance and security operations. The headquarters platoon gives the BRT commander an organic command, control, and support element.

The BRT scout platoons have the same capabilities as the task force scout platoon and are directed by the BRT commander to observe specific named areas of interest (NAIs) to answer the brigade commander’s PIR. The striker teams are dedicated fire support teams that allow the commander, in accordance with the brigade commander’s scheme of fires, to shape the battlefield with indirect fires. They accomplish this task by observing and calling for fires into specific targeted areas of interest (TAIs).

Supporting the BRT

Commanders may task organize certain combat support elements to the BRT or scout platoons, based on mission requirements and asset availability. These assets include ground surveillance radar (GSR), fire support teams (COLTs), engineer reconnaissance teams (ERT), FOX chemical reconnaissance vehicles, Stinger air defense teams, and communications retransmission teams.

Each of these assets is employed to enhance the BRT’s or scout platoon’s reconnaissance or security mission. The commander and staff must ensure that these assets are fully integrated into the plan and that their task/purpose directly relates to the overall reconnaissance or security operation’s success.

Overall, the brigade combat team has a total of five dedicated scout platoons. The BRT works primarily for the brigade commander and each of the task force scout platoons work directly for the task force commanders. All of these assets are integrated and synchronized through the

brigade reconnaissance and surveillance plan. The BRT and task force scout platoons are capable of infiltrating into enemy areas and providing the commander with critical intelligence information. However, there are several constraints and limitations that must be considered when planning the employment of the BRT and TF scout platoons.

The brigade’s frontage can be up to 60 kilometers. Realistically, the main body should only maneuver over terrain that has been sufficiently reconnoitered or defend a sector no larger than that over which security (early warning) can be provided. By current doctrine, the scout platoon can reconnoiter a zone 3 to 5 kilometers wide. With a scout platoon of six vehicles and only 18 personnel, the scout platoon will be limited in its ability to conduct reconnaissance and security operations. METT-TC (Mission, Enemy, Troops, Terrain and Time, Civilians) conditions will increase or decrease the size of the zone or sector over which the platoon will operate. However, the width of the zone able to be reconnoitered will obviously be reduced due to fewer scout squads.

A conservative estimate of the scout platoon’s frontage is one to three kilometers in forested or rugged terrain and five to ten kilometers in open or desert terrain. This estimate is based on the general characteristics of the terrain, the ability to infiltrate and maneuver, observe assigned NAIs and TAIs (Targeted Areas of Interest), and communicate across the battlefield. Commanders and staffs should consider all of these factors when assigning zones or sectors to the BRT and scout platoons.

With smaller brigades and task forces dispersed over a larger battlespace, there is an increased need for security. While there are additional intelligence assets available to the brigade to observe the flanks and rear of the unit, there must be dedicated ground security elements on the critical flanks to protect the force. We should commit scouts to those flanks seen as avenues of approach for the enemy’s courses of action. This requires, at a minimum, one scout platoon dedicated to these vulnerable flanks to provide security and early warning.

Brigade and task force commanders must consider the limitations of the BRT and scout platoon’s ability to reconnoiter fewer routes. By current doctrine, the HMMWV scout platoon can reconnoiter up to two routes simultaneously (reconnoitering for trafficability only). Based on a 6-vehicle platoon, they will now only be able to reconnoiter one route at a time.

With the requirement for the platoon to provide for its own security along the actual route being reconnoitered, the HMMWV scout platoon does not have a sufficient number of squads to reconnoiter two routes simultaneously. This will have an impact on planning the routes or axes of the main body's avenue of approach. This does not mean that commanders and staffs should avoid considering multiple routes. However, they must understand that they may have to accept risk when considering the use of alternate routes because the scout platoon will be committed to reconnoitering only one route.

During offensive operations, commanders normally attempt to employ an advanced guard. The advanced guard should be an armored or mechanized company team, not a HMMWV scout platoon task organized with tanks or BFVs. The BRT or task force scout platoons do not fare well when given the mission to conduct aggressive reconnaissance. These platoons do not have the armor protection or firepower to react to decisive direct fire contact. Scout platoons must be able to maintain freedom of maneuver and avoid becoming decisively engaged. If they are designated as an advanced guard, attempting to establish contact with the enemy, they generally will not survive the initial contact. Consequently, the commander risks losing this precious asset.

The organizational changes also impact the platoon's ability to man observation posts. The scout platoon will only be able to establish a maximum of three observation posts, providing continuous observation of three NAIs at any given time. This results in the brigade's ability to observe a total of 15 NAIs with scouts and six TAIs with striker teams. Keeping in mind the larger battlespace (with more possible enemy avenues of approach) and the requirement to provide for greater flank security, the brigade should realistically only plan to observe 9-12 NAIs and six TAIs forward across a frontage of up to 60 kilometers. This limits the commander's ability to sufficiently employ scout elements throughout the depth and width of the battlespace to provide detailed reconnaissance or security. The S2 must carefully scrutinize enemy courses of action and prioritize NAIs to ensure scout observation posts are positioned to accurately track the enemy's advance or report on enemy locations.

Current changes will also limit the scout platoon's ability to organize for combat. With a 10-vehicle platoon, the platoon leader could organize his platoon into two, three, four, or eight teams. Now,

having only six vehicles, the platoon leader will only be able to organize his platoon into two or three teams (he could possibly organize into six squads for short duration). This will reduce the number of scouts able to conduct "eyes on" reconnaissance and surveillance, resulting in less flexibility for the commander in employing his dedicated reconnaissance and security element.

Overcoming Dismount Limitations

The HMMWV scout platoon has a very limited dismount capability and must be carefully task organized to conduct dismounted operations. The scout platoon will find it even more challenging to execute dismounted operations in the future. The 10-vehicle scout platoon has the capability of constituting 10 dismounts while still manning all of its vehicles. The six-vehicle platoon can only constitute six dismounts while still manning all of its vehicles. What this really results in is losing the ability to constitute two two-man dismounted reconnaissance teams, once again limiting the platoon's ability to provide reconnaissance or security.

In the task force, the smaller platoon organization will also pose challenges to command, control, and combat service support. The platoon headquarters section will be called upon to man observation posts and conduct reconnaissance. Executing these scout tasks will reduce the platoon leader's ability to provide command and control. Additionally, the platoon sergeant will have a more difficult time executing platoon CSS operations while he is directly involved in the reconnaissance or security effort. To overcome this problem, the combat service support responsibility must be placed on the HHC commander and 1SG. In the new heavy division structure, the HHC commander and 1SG are not encumbered by duties in the field trains. These duties are now the responsibility of the logisticians in the task force support area. This frees the HHC chain of command and makes them available to closely track and coordinate the support required by the scout platoon.

Following is an example of how to employ the BRT and TF scout platoons during brigade offensive operations:

The BRT conducts a zone or area reconnaissance to collect intelligence on the enemy to the front of the brigade. Initially, the BRT will conduct reconnaissance across the brigade's frontage, focusing on the brigade's main objective. Once task force scout platoons are committed, the BRT scout platoons focus their reconnaissance beyond the objective, attempting to locate the enemy's

reserve. Striker teams are employed to influence the fight by calling for fires on the objective or on the enemy's reserve.

The scout platoon of the brigade's main effort task force conducts route reconnaissance along the main body's axis of advance and then reconnoiters the objective for the main effort.

The task force scout platoons that follow reconnoiter objectives for the supporting efforts, reconnoiter alternate routes or axes of advance, conduct flank or rear security for the brigade, or facilitate the movement or forward passage of follow-on forces.

After the brigade has secured the objective, a security zone must be established while the brigade conducts consolidation and reorganization. This plan should have already been developed and included as the final phase of the current operation. During this consolidation and reorganization phase, the BRT and TF scout platoons establish a screen forward and to the flanks of the brigade to provide early warning during this vulnerable period.

Following is an example of how to employ the BRT and TF scout platoons during brigade defensive operations:

The BRT screens well forward in the brigade's security zone. BRT scout platoons observe NAIs and report on the advance of enemy formations. The striker teams are positioned in the security zone to call for indirect fires in order to shape the battlefield by destroying, delaying, disrupting, or limiting enemy formations as they advance. Additionally, the BRT has the capability to shape the battlefield by employing MOPMS and Hornet minefields to delay, disrupt, or limit enemy courses of action.

The scout platoons from the lead task forces also occupy a screen in depth in the security zone. They conduct reconnaissance and surveillance to identify enemy forces and accept target hand-over from the BRT. The lead task forces must also dedicate combat elements, task organized with the scout platoons, to occupy the security zone. The company teams forward in the security zone accept target hand-over from the scout platoons and destroy enemy reconnaissance elements.

Scouts can also be used to destroy enemy reconnaissance elements by employing Hornet minefields or engaging with direct fire systems (Javelin, AT-4, and .50 cal MG). However, commanders must consider the value of destroying enemy vehicles versus the cost of compromising scout locations.

After the enemy reconnaissance phase, the BRT and scout platoons continue to report on the advance of the enemy main body. The BRT, striker teams, and scout platoons continue to shape the battlefield with indirect fires and counter-mobility munitions; attempting to delay, disrupt, or limit enemy courses of action.

The security zone company teams move back to the main battle area and participate in the main defense. The task force scout platoon from the rear task force should be employed on a flank to provide early warning to the brigade along a most dangerous enemy avenue of approach.

The concerns and recommendations discussed above are based on observations from 18 training rotations at the National Training Center as a cavalry troop and scout platoon trainer. During this period, several brigade reconnaissance troops and reorganized task force scout platoons were observed and each of these elements had to overcome the challenges addressed above. Based on the trends observed, the following recommendations are proposed:

Current scout platoon doctrine (FM 17-98) and reconnaissance/security doctrine in task force and brigade-level field manuals (FMs 71-2 and -3) should be amended to address the above concerns. The specific issues to address include: reduced scout platoon doctrinal frontages, limitations on reconnoitering routes and axes of advance, use of HMMWV scouts as an advanced guard, limitations on the number of OPs, and combat service support to the TF scout platoon. Addressing these issues in our field manuals will ensure that maneuver commanders are fully aware of the tactical implications of

employing the BRT and the smaller task force scout platoons.

We should reconsider the decision to field six-vehicle, HMMWV-equipped scout platoons. The scout platoons, both in the task force organization and in the BRT, should be modeled on the 10-vehicle platoon organization. As the task force and brigade inherit a larger battlespace, they will require a larger number of reconnaissance and security assets. The concerns discussed above clearly outline the challenges of employing smaller scout platoons and support the need for a 10-vehicle, HMMWV-equipped organization.

We should re-think the distribution of new equipment. The scout platoon is currently scheduled to receive only one LRAS3 per platoon. Instead, each scout section should be issued the LRAS3. This system will give scouts the ability to acquire targets out to 12 kilometers and identify targets at 8-10 kilometers. Additionally, this system will allow scouts to laser targets for precise grid locations in order to call for accurate indirect fires. The current distribution plan does not provide a sufficient number of LRAS3s to the scout platoons.

The future MTOE strength of the scout platoon must be carefully considered. The LRAS3 is an interim fix until the Future Scout and Cavalry Vehicle (FSCV) is fielded in FY 2007. The FSCV will provide improved surveillance capability to the scout platoons in the task force, BRT, division cavalry squadrons, and ACRs. However, current plans only call for a scout platoon to be equipped with four FSCVs. For the same reasons mentioned above, fewer scout systems

will significantly reduce the commander's ability to conduct reconnaissance and security operations. Based on surveillance and communications equipment limitation, four vehicles per platoon will not be able to provide sufficient coverage. The ideal size of an FSCV-equipped platoon would be six vehicles.

In conclusion, organizational and doctrinal changes are here or just over the horizon. As we transition into the 21st century, we must ensure that the organizational restructuring and doctrinal revision of our reconnaissance and security forces are carefully considered. These forces have a significant role in all military operation and provide the commander with invaluable combat information. Failures to give the issues due consideration will significantly reduce the effectiveness of these valuable brigade and task force assets.

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