

The Cavalry Paradigm

“We Aren’t Training as We Intend to Fight”

by Captain William E. Benson

Introduction

The cavalry is in a struggle for legitimacy and recognition in today’s transitioning Army. This struggle is highlighted by inadequacies and inconsistencies in cavalry doctrine, TO&Es, and training opportunities throughout the force. Even the word “cavalry” connotes different meanings across the Army. In many, if not most, aviation units, the term cavalry is synonymous with aviation. Battalion scout platoons consider themselves cavalry organizations. The OPFOR regiment at the NTC calls itself cavalry, as does an armored division in central Texas. These seemingly innocuous designations tend to dilute and confuse the real and significant role of cavalry organizations.

The fact is that designated cavalry units (ACRs, LCRs, armor- and aviation-based division cav squadrons, and the new brigade reconnaissance troops) do represent a myriad of TO&Es and capabilities that are misunderstood by many in today’s Army, as is apparent by their misuse. The Army, as well as the armor and aviation communities, promulgate these misunderstandings through lack of branch recognition, lack of coordinated and detailed doctrinal development and understanding, lack of appropriate TO&Es, and lack of adequate training opportunities. These issues will be discussed below, setting aside the issue of branch recognition.

Doctrine

FM 100-5 lists cavalry as a separate tactical unit. Unlike the five types of infantry forces (light, airborne, air assault, Ranger, and mechanized) that are listed as subparagraphs to the tactical unit infantry, cavalry is not listed as a subparagraph under armor or aviation. Army doctrine recognizes the unique role of cavalry as separate from armor and aviation units because of its unique missions. *FM 100-5* goes on to state that “the basic missions of cavalry units are reconnaissance, security, and economy of force.” The missions (the terms mission and operation seem to be used interchangeably throughout these manuals) of reconnaissance and security are

discussed in detail in *FM 17-95* and *FM 17-97*. These are the missions for which most cavalry units train most of the time. The purpose of cavalry units is defined in *FM 17-95* as “to perform reconnaissance and to provide security for close operations.” It also clarifies the use of cavalry units in an economy of force role during offensive and defensive operations, but does not refer to economy of force as a mission unto itself. The primary role of cavalry units is to:

- Provide fresh information
- Provide reaction time and maneuver space
- Preserve combat power
- Restore command and control
- Facilitate movement
- Perform rear operations

While *FM 17-95* does a decent job outlining the fundamental role of cavalry, there are several omissions and inconsistencies that need to be addressed. Some omissions from the mission profile include tank platoons, the tank companies, aviation scout platoons, and attack companies. (The mission profile is outlined in Figure 1-4 of *FM 17-95* and cross-references cavalry units with their respective missions. Missions are listed as doctrinal, non-doctrinal but capable, and doctrinal with additional assets.) Every cavalryman knows that these elements are as much a part of their respective cavalry organizations as the scout platoons, ground cavalry troops (GCT), and air cavalry troops (ACT). As the weighted edge of the cavalry saber, tanks and attack helicopters are essential to the accomplishment of security operations and to the success of economy of force missions (e.g., hasty attack, defend in sector), particularly in a heavy environment. The omission of these units from the cavalry mission profile is a glaring oversight.

Another problem with *17-95* is its inconsistency with the MTP manuals it supports. *FM 17-95* lists “recon in force” as an appropriate mission for a

regimental cavalry squadron. However, “recon in force” is not listed in the regimental cavalry squadron’s MTP (*ARTEP 17-485-MTP*) and is not a term used in the lexicon of any modern cavalryman. *FM 17-95* also lists the general mission “attack” under the broad umbrella of missions associated with economy of force. While it goes on to say that cavalry units seldom perform deliberate attacks, it does not rule them out. This is a mistake. The deliberate attack mission does not appear in any of the related cavalry MTPs and should not be considered a viable mission for cavalry units. The hasty attack section of the FM is slightly more extensive but does not make it clear why hasty attack is considered a mission conducted in an economy of force role. This is a potentially dangerous association if not clearly defined and articulated.

The missions outlined in the *Cavalry Troop FM 17-97* are also not in step with related doctrinal manuals. For example, *FM 17-97* discusses a raid mission for heavy and light cavalry troops, but the Regimental Armored Cavalry Troop MTP (*ARTEP 17-487-30-MTP*) does not list raid as one of the troop collective tasks. In practical terms, a raid is a type of attack, I would argue a type of deliberate attack; *FM 100-5* refers to it as a limited-objective attack. Regardless, without support in the MTP and without a more in-depth discussion of raid execution in *FM 17-95*, not to mention dedicated training resources, this task does not accurately reflect current cavalry capabilities (with the possible exception of air cavalry units). At the scout platoon level, *FM 17-98* gives paltry reference to platoon defensive operations despite the fact that “conduct a platoon defense” is a platoon collective task listed in the scout platoon MTP (*ARTEP 17-57-10-MTP*). In fact, heavy scout platoons are routinely given the mission to defend a battle position and I would argue may even be asked to conduct a defense in sector in restrictive terrain as an economy of force. Retrograde or delay missions are identified as METT-T dependent for all scout platoons in *FM*



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Photos by
Robert L. Stevenson



17-95, but again, *FM 17-98* as well as the scout platoon MTP are deficient in addressing these missions.

These are just a few of the readily identifiable doctrinal deficiencies that cloud the already murky waters of cavalry operations. Tank, scout, and air cav platoon leaders need to have a doctrinal reference for all appropriate missions. Troop commanders must have the references to train their platoon leaders and to find a logical progression of tasks to properly develop their METL. Cavalry leaders at all levels must have a congruous set of doctrinal manuals that simply define the roles and missions of cavalry organizations across the spectrum of the Army. Our non-cavalry brethren need to have an accurate understanding of the *real* capabilities and limitations of cavalry units throughout the Army as well as an understanding of the doctrinal terms associated with cavalry missions.

Equipment

There has been much discussion in *ARMOR* Magazine and other publications on the deficiencies of the various cavalry MTOEs. One continuing observation is the lack of a dedicated ground reconnaissance vehicle in both the light and heavy cavalry forces. While I agree that neither the M3 CFV nor the HMMWV are ideal reconnaissance vehicles, I don't agree that there exists or will ever exist a vehicle that answers the competing cavalry mission requirements of reconnaissance and security. In fact, I believe it is dangerous to discuss the development of a pure reconnaissance vehicle without taking into account the security aspect of cavalry operations. As previously discussed, cavalry units are supposed to be able to conduct the basic missions of reconnaissance and security. Instead of

trying to develop the ultimate cavalry vehicle to meet these competing missions, it may be wiser to integrate various platforms that accent their inherent strengths while minimizing their weaknesses. An existing example of this type of cavalry organization is the heavy cavalry troop mixture of CFVs, M1s, and mortars. In fact, tanks were reintroduced to heavy division cavalry squadrons during the Gulf War to make up for the limitations of the CFV-pure cavalry troops.

The old ACT mixture of OH-58s and AH-1s also took advantage of this approach. At a more macro level, the mixture of air and ground assets in the ACR/LCR and divisional cavalry squadrons also represent a good integration of complementary vehicles. Unfortunately, this mixture of vehicles is not carried over to the brigade reconnaissance troops (BRT), the LCR ground troops, or to the battalion scout platoons. The fact that the HMMWV is not a good platform to conduct security operations in a heavy environment is beyond argument and its use as a reconnaissance platform is limited in all environments. Again, these issues have been discussed on numerous occasions in this and other publications and need not be addressed here. The fix to these deficiencies is a mix of vehicles with complementing attributes. Planners need to consider the integration of HMMWVs, M113s, LAVs, and M3s in any number of combinations to meet operational requirements. With the exception of the LAV, today's scouts are already expected to be cross-trained on this equipment.

The doctrinal and TTP changes needed to execute under these configurations are negligible. While reconnaissance and security platforms mounted on a common chassis may diminish the

need for integration of vehicle types in the "Army After Next," this future solution does not meet the mission requirements of today's cavalry organizations.

The most apparent and potentially show-stopping shortfall in today's cavalry TO&Es is the lack of dismounts. Ask any ground scout platoon leader or platoon sergeant what he wants more of, and the answer, 8 out of 10 times (unscientific survey), is more 19Ds to put on the ground. This would immediately improve the mission capability and sustainability of all cavalry units in their security, reconnaissance, and economy of force roles. It would also provide the necessary soldiers to do the ancillary work that was not taken into account by the MTOE gods. Work like processing EPWs, evacuation of casualties, digging fighting positions, maintenance and laying wire, not to mention manning long-duration OPs and conducting dismounted patrols.

The basic load of ammunition for the CFV also prevents an addition of ground scouts to the heavy scout platoon. This basic load was developed for the economy of force missions associated with the defense of the Fulda Gap and the German plains. As a scout platoon leader, I would gladly have traded eight to ten TOW missiles for an additional two 19Ds per CFV. At a minimum, platoons could be equipped with only two or three M3s, with the remainder made up of M2s.

Heavy scout platoons are not the only units with a dismount shortage. HMMWV platoons, for all their maneuverability and flexibility, can readily dismount only one soldier per vehicle. It becomes virtually impossible to consolidate enough dismounted personnel to sustain long-term, dismounted

OPs or foot patrols. At the regimental level, we find another drastic shortage of dismounted soldiers. Dismounts are the only way to secure, defend, and recon restricted terrain, but the Army's regiments do not have a consolidated dismounted force to perform these missions. Assembling such a force from internal regimental assets while deployed is difficult at best. Once these dismounts are assembled, there would be serious C2 and training issues if they were expected to perform a mission. The obvious answer to this shortfall is to equip the regiments with a 19D or, better yet, an 11-series company. This would provide the regiments with the dedicated, trained, and consolidated dismounted force it needs to defend the "iron triangle," secure or recon a built-up area, or seize a constricted defile.

The legacies of both the 3rd ACR ("Regiment of Mounted Rifleman") and 2nd ACR ("Dragoons") attest to the fact that the infantry do have a place in a cavalry regiment's force structure. Of course another option is to cross-attach an infantry company or battalion task force to a regiment in order to meet specific operational requirements. This eventuality is even mentioned in *FM 17-95*, p. 4-33. Unfortunately, today's regiments are not prepared to integrate the infantry into their operations because they do not train with the infantry — ever! This brings me to my third area of discussion.

Training

With the possible exception of the battalion scout platoons, cavalry organizations are often short-changed during externally evaluated training events. The reason behind this is simple; the majority of the Army's officers (armor officers included) have no cavalry experience and do not understand the capabilities and limitations of cavalry organizations.

While cavalry officers receive institutional training in battalion task force operations, the average armor or infantry officer receives no institutional training in cavalry operations. The result becomes apparent during collective training events at all levels. For example, GCTs and squadrons are repeatedly given the mission to conduct a zone reconnaissance in order to "clear all enemy in zone." Reconnaissance missions should be focused on finding the enemy or evaluating terrain. If you want a cavalry unit to "clear all enemy

in zone," give it a movement to contact mission. Security operations are discussed as offensive and defensive, as opposed to stationary or moving screens, guards, and covers. Units are asked to guard "in order defeat the enemy" in a specific EA rather than to protect (secure) a given friendly unit. These types of mission statements and doctrinal miscues taint the learning process and the effectiveness of externally evaluated events at places like the CTCs. Those writing the orders must understand that there is a difference between asking a unit to conduct a stationary guard and asking it to defend. These problems are sometimes perpetuated by officers from within the armor community who have no prior cavalry experience or training and do not fully grasp the nuances of cavalry doctrine and TTP. The fact that there is no school devoted to teaching and developing this doctrine also perpetuates the problem. (The Cavalry Leaders Course and Scout Leaders Course are excellent, but are not resourced to fully address these shortcomings.)

Most company and field grade officers who are placed in cavalry units without any cavalry experience or training are not capable of "growing" junior cavalry leaders effectively. Even worse, they are often a detriment to the growth of the unit. The warrior studs of the Army will always excel, but the rest of us are limited by our training and experience. The old adage among the armor community is that it is important for cavalry officers to be cross-trained in battalion task force operations to make them well rounded and keep them competitive for ranks above O5. This trend belies the need for highly trained leaders who understand the nuances of their units and their missions. This need may be greater today than at any other time as the rapid introduction of technology complicates the battlefield.

Reconnaissance and security missions make up the primary battle tasks of squadrons and regiments and are normally the focus of training. Unfortunately, squadrons and regiments rarely get to train as they are intended to fight. Heavy division cavalry squadrons are normally deployed to the CTCs as part of brigade combat teams instead of as a division asset. Heavy division cavalry squadrons never train in their primary role of conducting reconnaissance and security for the division they support, because divisions do not deploy to the field for training exercises. (Warfighters are not field exercises!)

The relationship and battle handover between the BRTs and the division cavalry squadrons have really only been discussed in theory. The TTP of how a heavy squadron delaying in contact conducts a battle handover with a light cav troop (the BRT) escapes me. The BRT was created as a result of a need for brigade-level reconnaissance to fight at the NTC. It was not created out of a need identified in the Gulf War or in any series of division training exercises. (In the past decade, the 3rd ACR has repeatedly formed and then abolished HMMWV-equipped regimental reconnaissance platoons in a similar attempt to win the deep reconnaissance fight at the NTC.)

I am not arguing that brigades don't need reconnaissance. I would argue that brigades probably need a robust reconnaissance and security unit, especially if we finally dismantle the division monolith and continue to deploy brigade-size elements to conduct real world missions. An example of this type of brigade cavalry organization is the proposed RSTA squadron of the medium brigades. Under its current TOE, however, it is particularly unable to conduct security operations beyond a limited screen, and it seems that the Army has forgotten or dispensed with the notion of fighting for reconnaissance.

Will a more robust brigade cavalry organization make the heavy div cav squadron obsolete? Maybe. Unfortunately, we can only speculate until the Army conducts training at a level that allows for an accurate assessment. The same arguments can be made for the need for training the regiments in support of their respective corps. (The last time the Army changed its operational paradigm was when it transitioned into a primarily mechanized force. This development only came about after extensive maneuver training and testing just prior to WWII in what became known as the "Louisiana Maneuvers." The current round of testing and training involving a BCT(-) at the NTC falls far short of this standard.)

Poor training opportunities for cavalry organizations extends to real world deployments as well. Cavalry units at all levels are repeatedly bastardized for significant training events and missions that prevent them from optimizing their complementary weapons systems. For

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example, division cavalry squadrons deployed for Intrinsic Action go minus their helicopters. Conversely, the helicopters often get stripped from their squadrons to get used in places like Bosnia while the ground component remains at home station. It was many years and several real-world deployments before the aviation squadron of the 2nd ACR was finally stationed at Fort Polk with its parent regiment. The bottom line is that, when it comes to cavalry organizations, we aren't training as we intend to fight.

Conclusion

The misuse and misunderstanding of cavalry doctrine, the inadequate TOE, and the lack of the ability to train as we fight are great liabilities within the cavalry community.

These liabilities are emphasized by the fact that there is no cavalry branch devoted to focusing development of doctrine and TO&Es, or fighting for appropriate training opportunities. Despite the fact that leaders are consis-

tently told that the winner of the reconnaissance and security fight wins the battle, little more than lip service is paid to properly developing the forces charged with executing these missions.

Some will argue that the advent of the UAV, satellite, and EW reconnaissance makes cavalry organizations anachronistic. This line of thinking is fraudulent because it only takes the reconnaissance aspects of cavalry organizations into account. A UAV cannot delay in contact, and a satellite cannot conduct the three-fold mission during a moving flank guard.

The "Army After Next" may address these concerns sometime in 2020, but until then, today's "transitional" Army needs to recognize the unique roles and missions cavalry units are expected to perform. It can do this by providing better doctrine, appropriate MTOEs, and better training opportunities. A return to a cavalry branch or, at a minimum, the creation of a distinct cavalry division within Armor branch, headed by an O6 or above (Chief of Cavalry), would go a long way toward remedying these problems.

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