

The Battalion Scout Troop:

A Doctrinal and Organizational Answer to Battalion Tactical Reconnaissance

by Captain Bill Williams

As a community, Armor leaders have struggled with the question, "how to best provide effective task force reconnaissance." There have been numerous articles in *ARMOR* outlining expedient task organizations and different tactics, techniques, and procedures. The March-April 1999 *ARMOR* shows two excellent examples.

First, LTC Henry St. Pierre and 1LT Jamie Warder's article, "Team Recon: A New Approach to Armored TF Reconnaissance: One Unit Hardens the HMMWV Scout Platoon to Increase Its Survivability," offers a thought-provoking expedient to solve the survivability problem of the task force scout platoon. Within today's doctrine, this unit should be commended for its non-doctrinal approach to providing the tactical reconnaissance capability that is vital to the battalion commander.

LTC St-Pierre and 1LT Warder's answer to the problem was to create an *ad hoc* reconnaissance force, "Team Recon," commanded by the HHC commander, as the "Chief of Reconnaissance." It consisted of the scout platoon and a platoon of tanks, a couple of dismounted infantry squads, a mortar section, and a CSS slice. This force, argue the authors, provides a scout force that can maintain contact with the enemy and "effectively break contact and 'retain the freedom to maneuver'."

They present a current tactical reconnaissance problem concisely. The current scout platoon in a tank or mechanized infantry battalion does not have the combat power to maintain contact with the enemy **and** retain the freedom to maneuver.

The second problem is the scout platoon's "lack of survivability." This problem "often presents the task force commander with a dilemma, send the maxi-

mum reconnaissance forward and risk losing it early, or husband his forces and miss some important piece of information...."

In the same edition of *ARMOR*, 1LT Wayne Westgaard wrote "Will the Brigade Reconnaissance Troop Be Adequately Protected?" 1LT Westgaard wrote an interesting analysis comparing the XM1114 Up-Armored HMMWV and the M3 Cavalry Fighting Vehicle. His premise was that the new brigade reconnaissance troop needs a more robust and survivable vehicle. He argues that there is such a vehicle in the inventory today, the Cavalry Fighting Vehicle. This article begs the question that perhaps all of our mechanized scouts are inadequately protected.

These articles ask some poignant questions that deserve attention. Do our task force scouts have the organization and tools to both accomplish their mission **and** survive, or does our reconnaissance doctrine and organization need to change to address the task force tactical reconnaissance limitations? LTC St-Pierre and 1-33 Armor worked within the current system to correct tactical and organizational flaws, but perhaps it is time that we, as a community, realize that we must change the organization to "fix" these flaws. After all, our doctrine already contains the answer to tactical reconnaissance; it is a combined arms answer. It is a robust force that is capable of using stealth, but also capable of responding with superior firepower. That force exists and is called the armored cavalry troop. It is a force that is capable of sustained reconnaissance operations and has the necessary command and control structure. It is a combined arms force that lacks only dismounted infantry in any strength. I do not believe that each battalion in the U.S. Army needs to field a complete armored

cavalry troop, although that would make quite a capable force; rather, I suggest that a half troop, based on the model of LTC St-Pierre and 1LT Warder, become the battalion reconnaissance force. This is the force that provides a model for the battalion scout troop, my recommendation to provide the task force with capable tactical reconnaissance.

Historical Background

An excellent monograph written in 1988 explores the question of tactical reconnaissance in the heavy division. In "Who is Out There? Tactical Reconnaissance Formations For the Heavy Division," MAJ James Diehl explores the doctrinal differences in tactical reconnaissance before World War II and during the war. He looks at three major belligerents, the Germans, the Russians, and the Americans. His findings reflect similarities in tactical reconnaissance doctrinal debates that occur today. Specifically, does the reconnaissance force use stealth and observation to gain its intelligence or is it forced to fight for this tactical information? He notes that early German and American doctrine stressed the need for stealth, but as the war progressed, the lesson learned in combat was the necessity to form *ad hoc* combat formations to fight for tactical information. The Russians followed the pre-war doctrine of fighting for intelligence, throughout the war. He quotes one American captain from a reconnaissance squadron, who found that the combination of a scout platoon and a tank platoon was the most effective team for reconnaissance.

The Rand Studies

Two studies made by the Rand Corporation on tactical reconnaissance require further attention. In 1987, The Arroyo

Center of the Rand Corporation published a study, "Applying the National Training Experience: Tactical Reconnaissance." This study was a statistical survey of tactical reconnaissance in over 60 rotations at the NTC. Among other things, the study found that scouts often engaged the enemy and that half the scouts died as a result in a given battle. The scout platoons at that time were mostly M113/ITV- or M3 CFV-equipped. The Rand study suggested that training was a factor in the poor reconnaissance abilities of the scout platoon, but that a stealthier vehicle was also needed. It suggested the **addition** of a wheeled reconnaissance platform to provide this capability. The report summary specifically stated, "A small number, perhaps two, wheeled vehicles should be added to the scout platoon for the purpose of stealth and numbers." Despite this call for a small change in the platoon, the Army decided, in most of its mechanized battalions, to totally replace the M3 and M113/ITV scout vehicles with HMMWVs and increase the number of vehicles from six to ten.

The second study, a 1994 Rand Study initiated by LTG Funk, outlines a smaller study of the effects of the major changes to the scout platoon's organization. The study covered approximately ten rotations, seven with HMMWVs, and three the M3s. The study found that like the previous study, the scouts attempted to use stealth. However, the scouts using both types of vehicles lost about half their strength each mission. Another interesting observation was the percentage of scouts that attempted to avoid direct fire engagements. In this limited sample, the observer/controllers found that only 74% of HMMWV scouts attempted to avoid the enemy, compared to 86% of the M3 scouts.

One might conclude from these two studies that scouting is simply dangerous business. Despite the attempt made to train the scouts to be stealthy and providing them with limited means for engaging the enemy — at least in this small sample — they still end up in direct fire fights that lead to unacceptably high scout casualties. If the NTC is any example, the battalion commanders in our next real war will end up reconstituting an *ad hoc* reconnaissance force after the scouts are effectively destroyed in the first few fights. This makes me believe that perhaps we should consider creating these "ad hoc" forces before we enter this difficult combat, and perhaps we should even

adjust our doctrine and organization to reflect this change.

Future Capabilities

It is clear to me from previous *ARMOR* articles and my own research on the Future Scout Cavalry System (FSCS) that force developers are moving towards quite a capable sensor platform that will make great strides in stealth and observation capabilities. It is for this reason that I will use this vehicle in the structure and tactics of the new battalion scout troop. In fact, the combination of stealth and sensors with a tank force may prove to be the best tactic for such capable future systems.

I also make this proposal at a very opportune time in force structure change. The elimination of the fourth tank company from the new division structure creates an opportunity to provide currently available machines and trained soldiers to create this change to the force.

The Battalion Scout Troop

My proposal is to form the battalion scout troop. Such a troop would have three fighting platoons. See Figure 1. The scout platoon would be either the current scout platoon with 10 HMMWVs or a future force of six Future Scout Vehicles. Its role would be similar, if not identical, to the scout mission today. The troop

would have one tank platoon organic to the troop. This is a normal tank platoon with all the current tank platoon's capabilities and limitations. There would also be a dismounted infantry section, made up of 11B infantrymen or 19D scouts, that are used purely in the dismounted role; they could be carried in M113 tracked vehicles or two cargo trucks, but their primary training and mission would be dismounted patrolling. The troop would have a section of two 120mm mortar tracks and an FDC team carried by a M113 vehicle.

The troop commander would ride in a tank or M2 Bradley, depending on which parent battalion the troop originates. The troop would be commanded by a captain and would have a small troop HQ section, including a first sergeant. The troop XO could be a dual hat position, as tank platoon leader and troop executive officer.

The troop headquarters would have two M998 HMMWVs, one for the command group and one for supply. CSS is provided in a dedicated fashion with one attached ambulance M113, a 4-litter ambulance HMMWV, and an attached maintenance contact team with an M998 HMMWV and an M88 recovery vehicle. The wheeled ambulance is both for evacuation forward where stealth is needed and for long trips to the battalion AXP or aid station. This is an addition to

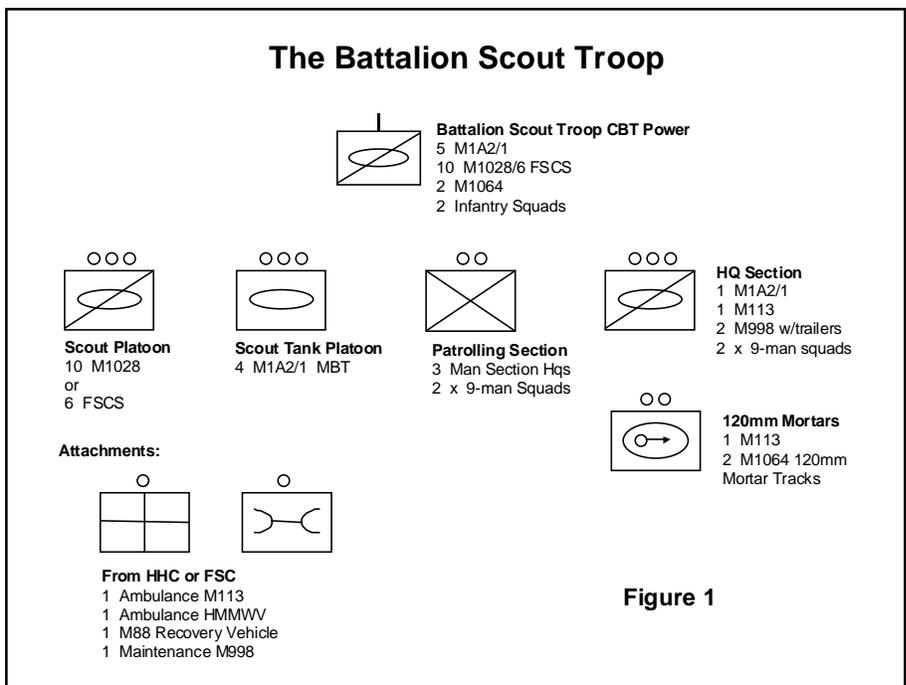


Figure 1

a current tank or mechanized company medical slice, but one that is badly needed for a dispersed force. The maintenance slice would be a small contact team capable of providing unit level maintenance and recovery to the tank platoon and to the scout vehicles. The medical M113 could be called upon to provide limited scout vehicle recovery, where self recovery is not possible and where the M88 would be unwieldy.

The beauty of this organizational change is that it could coincide with the planned elimination of the fourth tank company in tank battalions. The battalion scout troop could be composed of elements that currently make up the D Company in the battalions that are scheduled to be reorganized. The use of one or more of the three tank platoons scheduled to be eliminated and the use of the existing D Company headquarters structure, with appropriate CSS slice, is a natural transition. This organization could be easily stood up in existing battalions. The mechanized infantry scout troops could receive tanks from the disbanding D Companies in local brigades. The crews are, undoubtedly, already trained and cohesive units.

There is another professional benefit to this structural change. The creation of a scout troop creates another tank platoon and company-sized command for the armor force. The scout troop command might be an HHC-type command for the best tank or infantry company commander as a second command, as the forward support company concept strips the community of that second command opportunity. It also provides a difficult tank platoon job for the best lieutenants in the battalion.

Tactically, the battalion scout troop provides three main advantages. First, it provides a focused experienced unity of command for the battalion reconnaissance effort. Second, it provides a meaningful, survivable, and capable reconnaissance force that can use both stealth and reconnaissance in force to achieve the reconnaissance objectives. Lastly, it provides a sustainable force that can provide continuous reconnaissance of the task force sector.

Tactics

The scout troop can be used in much the same way as discussed in LTC St-Pierre and 1LT Warder's article, in fact, it can use doctrine and tactics that are similar to armored cavalry troop doctrine already in

use. As the FSV/FSCS is fielded, the capabilities of this future sensor and communication platform can be coupled with the killing power of the tank platoon in any number of configurations, perhaps with stand-off tank munitions and remotely piloted vehicles.

Hunter-killer actions, or massing the tank platoon when needed to assist the scout platoon, are two possible uses of this added firepower. Add to this a dismounted patrolling capability and an organic mortar section, and you get a credible combined arms force, which can provide the troop commander with the survivable means to seek observation and respond to fights in a more effective manner.

The scout troop will also provide the permanent counterreconnaissance force headquarters. This scout troop could be given the METL task of conducting all counterreconnaissance missions. The troop could be reinforced by tanks and mechanized infantry as METT-TC requires, but they would be consistently trained on this difficult skill.

Not only will the addition of tanks in the scouting role be beneficial to gaining tactical intelligence about the enemy, but it will also serve to deceive the enemy about the correct locations of the friendly front line trace or main force companies. The HMMWV never fooled any observer into believing it was a tank. If you see a hard shell HMMWV in our frontline area, you are probably not near the main body yet, but, if you see an M1A1 tank, who knows? Counterrecon missions already accomplish this to some degree in a defensive role, but not as much in offensive operations.

If this idea stretches to mechanized infantry battalions, it might provide additional deception to the purely organized mechanized infantry unit. The question in the enemy commander's mind may be, "Does this infantry battalion have tanks? Is it an infantry battalion or an tank battalion?" Confusion in the enemy commander's mind is good. It would be better to force that enemy commander to attack further into your defensive sector to find out.

Command and Control

The scout troop relies on the idea of combined arms and another time-tested principle of war — unity of command. The "Chief of Reconnaissance" is the troop commander and he is positioned at

the best place to command and control that element, where he can see the battlefield. Further, as a commander, he is directly responsible to the battalion/task force commander for all reconnaissance tasks and missions in the task force. The battalion staff provides planning and assistance to the troop commander, as required, but the task force commander gets experienced tactical judgment, in the form of his most experienced tactical commander, to focus on this important task. The battalion commander of the next ten or so years is also used to having four maneuver elements and will no doubt appreciate the increased reconnaissance capability.

CSS

One of the more difficult questions for current battalion commanders at the combat training centers is sustaining and caring for the battalion scouts. Many battalions have been successful at CSS at the training centers, but most have relied on their own initiative in supporting the scouts.

The focus of a dedicated scout ISG and XO with habitually attached CSS elements is the right answer to alleviate this problem. Many times the scout platoon is forced to move many kilometers behind enemy lines to get "eyes on" a particular Named Area of Interest (NAI). As the scouts make contact with the enemy, the wounded scouts are forced to wait while a medevac is pondered or they simply die of wounds. The scout troop commander will be more capable to use his own troops to rescue a wounded scout or extricate the scout vehicle or section in contact.

Further, the troop ISG will be more likely to be able to move his own dedicated medic to save the scout and evacuate him to an aid station. Maintenance recovery will also be a more focused exercise for the scout troop. Resupply from a dedicated ISG might also prove to be more efficient.

Odd supply times and multiple resupply missions in a day, given the continuous nature of the scout troop mission, would surely be simpler to accomplish with a dedicated troop ISG and supply sergeant.

Reorganization Options

There are two ways to tackle this reorganization, as I see it. One is to use tanks in all battalion scout troops, mechanized and armor battalions. This would be ac-

completed by distributing tank platoons from the lost D Companies to the mechanized battalions and standing up a troop headquarters within the mechanized battalions. The pain would be greater in those units, because they would have to create the troop headquarters and the troop CSS assets. But, the late Echo anti-tank company is not such a distant memory in the infantry community and they might want to give it a shot.

The second option is to just reorganize the scout troop in the Armor battalions. This might be more cost effective and it is better than having no change at all. The infantry community might find the means to develop this idea on similar terms within their organization.

A third option is to beef up only the Armor battalions and the new brigade reconnaissance troops with a section of mortars and a platoon of tanks. This might further address the survivability of this newly acquired asset.

Conclusion

Operations in Somalia and the Balkans only reinforce the idea that technology alone cannot replace the need to provide for tactical intelligence on the ground with robust forces. The vulnerability of HMMWV forces to sustained mechanized combat cannot be overstated. The time has come to recognize the frailties of the current scout platoon organization. Whether this force has HMMWVs, M3s, or FSCSs, the scout platoon is asked to provide tactical intelligence for a lethal and powerful force. This force is expected to face equally lethal and powerful adversaries. We should consider providing the task force commander with a force capable of meeting modern mechanized forces and either getting intelligence using stealth or fighting for it, and we should do this in our organizational structure and in our doctrine. We should use the current restructuring to accomplish this goal.

CPT Bill Williams, a 1988 Distinguished Military Graduate from Texas A&M University, served in Germany as a tank platoon leader, Headquarters Company XO, battalion maintenance officer, and S1 for 5th Battalion, 77th Armor. After attending the Armor and Artillery Officer Advanced Courses, he served as the S4, tank, and headquarters company commander of 3rd Battalion, 66th Armor. and commanded A/4th Forward Support Company during the Advanced Warfighting Experiment in March 1997 at the National Training Center. He is completing a Masters degree in Industrial Engineering in Simulations and Training Systems at the University of Central Florida in Orlando. On graduation, he will be assigned to The United States Military Academy to teach in the Department of Military Instruction.