

OPFOR Brigade Reconnaissance Company Techniques ...and How to Defeat Them

by Captain Richard S. Roubal

The commander of the mechanized team sat in disgust as he watched the observer/controller (O/C) re-key eight of the 13 vehicles he had brought onto the counterrecon screen only 30 hours before. To make matters worse, the task force commander was fuming about the OPFOR reconnaissance elements operating in his rear areas. In the last six hours, the task force tactical operations center (TOC) had been hit with indirect fires and forced to relocate, one of his tactical obstacles had been breached, and one company's hide position had been compromised, resulting in the loss of three M2 Bradleys. This carnage was caused by the OPFOR brigade reconnaissance company (formerly the regimental reconnaissance company). As the team commander began moving his freshly resurrected command to the rear, he could only hope that the rest of the day's battle would be an improvement over the last 30 hours.

A closer look at the OPFOR brigade reconnaissance company's task organization; mission; and tactics, techniques, and procedures may reveal how this situation came about.

The OPFOR brigade reconnaissance company at the CMTC is task-organized in accordance with *FM 100-60*, page 2-37, minus the motorcycle platoon. The standard brigade recon package, which precedes a brigade attack, consists of four BMP-2s, four BRDM-2s, and three to five dismounted reconnaissance teams. Depending on the mission, the company may have air defense or engineer elements. Not present are the BRM series of vehicles with the Tall Mike Radar (GSR) or any member of the RKH family of vehicle (chemical reconnaissance).

The mission of the brigade reconnaissance company is to conduct a zone reconnaissance within the boundaries of the parent brigade out to a range of 50 kilometers, but usually around 35 kilometers. In addition to this mission, the company may have other tasks assigned, like breaching obstacles, route reconnaissance, locating command and control cells, and overwatching named

areas of interest (NAIs), tasks the brigade reconnaissance company must perform on a regular basis.

The brigade reconnaissance company will cross the line of departure (LD) with full knowledge of all intelligence gathered by the division's reconnaissance battalion. Armed with this knowledge, the brigade reconnaissance company commander can determine probable lines of contact and probable dismount points for the dismounted reconnaissance teams.

The brigade reconnaissance company operates in three phases — penetration of the enemy counterreconnaissance screen, operations in the enemy main defensive area (MDA), and operations beyond the enemy MDA.

A closer look at each of these phases will reveal how the OPFOR reconnaissance operates throughout the depth of a defending task force's sector.

Penetration of the Enemy Counterreconnaissance Screen

These operations are usually conducted during hours of limited visibility. The BRDMs lead, each with a single, two-man, dismounted reconnaissance team. Once on the ground, the dismounted teams move forward to identify any vehicular threat on the enemy counterreconnaissance screen. Unless light discipline is poor, detection is initially done by listening for any vehicles that are running in order to charge their batteries, or waiting to start. Once located by sound, the dismounted team will move in and determine the exact location. If the vehicle is within artillery range, the dismounted team then moves out of the area and calls for and adjusts indirect fires from the team's BRDM. The intent is to either destroy the defending vehicle, or, at a minimum, drive it off, creating a hole in the enemy screen line through



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which the BRDM can safely pass. If the target is not within artillery range, or the tubes are not available, the dismounted team searches for a bypass. Once a hole is successfully created, or a bypass is found, the BRDM moves quickly through it and reports to the company commander that he has successfully passed through the enemy screen and that the follow-on BMP can do so as well. The BRDM will now continue to push deeper in zone, attempting to identify any obstacles and find bypass routes around them.

With the BRDM successfully past the defending enemy, the dismounted team remains in place to once again trigger fires if the defender attempts to reoccupy his position after being driven off by artillery. If the enemy does not return, the BMP will move through the hole created by the dismounted team and begin its movement through the zone. If the defending vehicle returns and the BMP can destroy it with direct fire without becoming decisively engaged, it may do so. This will allow reconnaissance elements that are unsuccessfully attempting to penetrate the screen line at other locations to pass through a known weak point. If success is achieved across the entire brigade frontage, this will not be necessary; however, the OPFOR will be extremely adept at exploiting an identified weak point.

Once the BMP has moved through the hole created by the dismounted team, the dismounts will move forward and establish surveillance on remaining elements in the enemy screen line. They will attempt to identify whether they will pull back and fight from the

MDA or stay in position and fight forward. The dismounted teams may also reconnoiter any obstacles identified by the BRDM or BMP, or they may be used to overwatch key choke points along the brigade's route of march, attempting to identify enemy FASCAM emplacement.

One of the easiest ways for the brigade reconnaissance company to get into the enemy main defensive area (MDA) is to find the withdrawal route of the enemy element which is screening forward of the MDA. Finding this obstacle-free route is a high priority for the OPFOR.

Operations in the Enemy's Main Defensive Area

Among the key priority intelligence requirements that the brigade reconnaissance company can provide are the location of enemy BPs, and, if possible, grid coordinates to individual vehicular fighting positions. Sounds also help to gather this information, like the noise of machines digging survivability positions. This activity can be heard over long distances. The BRDMs in the lead will identify these targets and may either conduct further reconnaissance or pass them off to the following BMPs while they push deeper into the zone. The BMPs may conduct the reconnaissance mounted, or, if there are still dismounted teams onboard, dismounted. Once the BMP has determined a firm grid, it will immediately relay this information to the chief of rocket troops and artillery (CORTA) for incorporation into the brigade pre-assault fires.

If still within range, expect fires to be placed on the engineer assets preparing vehicular positions immediately, to keep the enemy from improving his battle positions.

The enemy Volcano vehicles are the single, highest-payoff targets to be found within the MDA. If a BRDM locates a Volcano vehicle, it will generate an immediate fire mission; if out of range of artillery, the BRDM will hand the target off to the following BMP. When the BMP locates the Volcano vehicle, it will engage immediately, provided it can egress safely.

The OPFOR reconnaissance commander may choose to use some of the BMPs on the enemy approaches to the MDA to identify when the defending task force conducts final occupation of the MDA from its near-hide positions. This can be of importance in two ways. First, if the reconnaissance commander

knows that the brigade is closing quickly on the enemy engagement area, and the enemy still has not occupied his battle positions, the BMPs can disrupt the enemy in his attempt to occupy. This may be successful in delaying the enemy occupation long enough to allow the brigade to secure a foothold in the enemy engagement area and destroy the enemy as he attempts to occupy his prepared positions.

Secondly, if the reconnaissance commander can identify when the enemy occupies his BPs, he can then pass this information to the CORTA and this will trigger the beginning of pre-assault fires on the known positions identified earlier, as well as positions templated by the intelligence officer.

If it is the brigade commander's intent, the BMPs may stay within the vicinity of the enemy engagement area and report all enemy actions. If the BMPs are carrying dismounted reconnaissance teams, they may drop them near the enemy engagement area to further increase coverage. Simultaneously, the BRDMs will continue providing coverage through the depth of the brigade's zone and begin reconnaissance of the subsequent objective, while attempting to identify any counterattack forces postured against the brigade.

Operations Beyond The Enemy MDA

Operations beyond the enemy MDA will typically see the BRDMs once again operating forward. Priority targets in enemy rear areas include command and control nodes, logistics centers, company team hide positions, location of enemy reserves, and, if forward staged, any aviation assets. The location of any of these elements will once again generate a priority fire mission, if within range.

If fires are unavailable, the BRDMs will engage with direct fire only if they have the capability of destroying the target; i.e., aircraft, TOCs, or POL facilities, and can disengage quickly without sustaining any damage to their vehicle or personnel. One target that will be engaged upon identification is a Volcano-equipped aircraft. Next to the enemy TOC, this is the BRDM's highest priority target in the enemy rear area. When the BRDMs have completed their initial reconnaissance of the enemy rear area, they will move on to subsequent objectives while a more thorough reconnaissance is conducted by the BMPs.

If the brigade commander's intent is to have the BMPs move into the enemy rear, or the lead battalions combat reconnaissance patrols (CRPs) are quickly closing on the MDA, the BMPs overwatching the engagement area will move into the enemy rear as well. The BMPs will refine the reconnaissance already conducted by the preceding BRDMs.

Of critical importance to the BMPs' mission in the enemy rear is to pinpoint the location of enemy hide positions and overwatch them to alert the brigade commander of the enemy's movement toward the MDA.

Another crucial mission is to identify any enemy reserves conducting counterattacks against the brigade. If the reserve has been located, the BMPs will generally conduct surveillance and notify the intelligence officer of the reserve's impending deployment. If reconnaissance fails to locate the enemy reserve, the BMPs will overwatch key road networks and intersections upon likely counterattack routes along the brigade's route of march.

Summary:

- The mission of the OPFOR brigade reconnaissance company is to conduct a zone reconnaissance within the brigade's zone out to 50 km (usually about 35 km).

- Brigade reconnaissance elements will have full knowledge of the enemy situation as determined by the division's reconnaissance battalion.

- The BRDMs will generally lead the BMPs into zone and will use dismounted reconnaissance teams and artillery to create a hole in the enemy screen line.

- Once through the enemy screen, BRDMs will conduct initial reconnaissance of the enemy MDA and BMPs will then refine that reconnaissance. The BMPs may stay within the MDA until the brigade begins to close on it.

- As in the MDA, the BRDMs will conduct initial reconnaissance of the enemy rear areas, attempting to locate high priority targets. The BMPs will refine reconnaissance of rear areas and attempt to locate any counterattacks moving against the brigade.

Defeating OPFOR Reconnaissance

Be aggressive. *The battle is decided during the counterrecon fight!* Consider doubling the size of the counterrecon screen and adding depth to it. That

which you destroy tonight can't hurt you tomorrow. Remember, *the OPFOR lives and dies by reconnaissance.*

Always think security. *Never leave an obstacle-free route for the counter-recon screen to withdraw through!* Consider a tactical obstacle that can be easily opened, closed, reinforced, and overwatched. The easiest way for the OPFOR to get in is the counterrecon element's way out.

Keep it simple. *Use the hunter-killer technique and stress initiative at the lowest level!* Emplace dismounted OPs forward and have them tied to a specific M1/M2 section. When OPFOR vehicles are detected, the OP *immediately* calls the section forward and talks them into position to destroy the threat. All the platoon leader/company commander has to do is ensure no fratricide potential exists. Remember, you are the *hunter*, not the *hunted*.

Be flexible: *Plug holes quickly!* You are going to lose vehicles. Expect it, and have a plan to cover their areas of responsibility. A platoon from another company with a "Be prepared to" mission, a few Javelin gunners with truck transport, etc... If the OPFOR recon creates a hole in your screen, the dam is about to burst.

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