

Counterreconnaissance

Taking the Fight to the Enemy

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The outcomes of most battles — at the National Training Center or in a real war — are usually decided before a unit ever crosses the Line of Departure (LD). In nine out of ten cases, a unit's success in the preceding counterreconnaissance fight is an impressively accurate indicator of who will win the upcoming battle.

According to the Ft. Irwin Mobile Training Team, "90% of the units that win the counterrecon fight win the subsequent battle."¹ Few who have been involved in the practical application of such maneuvers can argue empirically about the truth behind this statement.

Despite the importance of a successful counterreconnaissance fight, many units fail in their effort. We believe this is because of the friction generated in the planning, preparation, and execution of the mission.

To start, we must recognize the nature of the beast, and the source of the difficulties. The essence of the problem lies in the lack of definition in how to conduct the counterrecon fight. There exists no direct method to succeed in this fight, as evident by the limited published tactics, techniques, and procedures on the subject.

The armor manuals (FM 17-95 and FM 17-97) describe the concept of several types of screens, but not the mechanics of a counterrecon fight. The infantry school acknowledges the mission's importance (FM 7-10 and FM 7-20, FM 71-2), but glosses over the mechanics of the mission (FM 71-123). The battle against enemy reconnaissance is a mission in and of itself, which ties together the diverse mis-

sions of subordinate units. The task of conducting a counterrecon fight incorporates a screen, hasty attack/defense, zone recon, and the unique execution of tactical logistics, to name a few.

Units grapple with the counterrecon fight because of the complex conditions under which they conduct it. First, the counterrecon fight immediately follows the completion of another violent, intensive mission, such as an attack or a defense. This means that the tasked units are at a reduced strength, with a non-standard chain of command, and at some level of physical exhaustion.

Second, since units normally fight the counterrecon battle during the planning process for a subsequent mission, it is underway without the benefit of the staff conducting a full mission analysis. Factors such as these increase the burden on the unit commander conducting the mission.

Our intent here is to lay out some techniques and procedures that have proven effective for the authors. The goal is to incorporate the following into training so that SOPs can be developed to facilitate the efficiency of counterreconnaissance fights. The article is organized to address the "mission" by Battlefield Operating Systems in three separate phases: plan, prepare, and execute. Finally, remember that this article seeks to amplify existing manuals with refined and proven techniques and procedures. It almost goes without saying that the following should be overlaid against published doctrine and methods available.

Assumptions

Before continuing, let us identify the parameters and assumptions of this article. First, these techniques are applicable in conducting a counterrecon mission for the frontage of a company through regiment; while the numbers involved may change, the principles remain the same.

Second, the anticipated adversary is a mechanized/motorized enemy using various Krasnovian tactics; in other words, he does what he must to accomplish his mission.

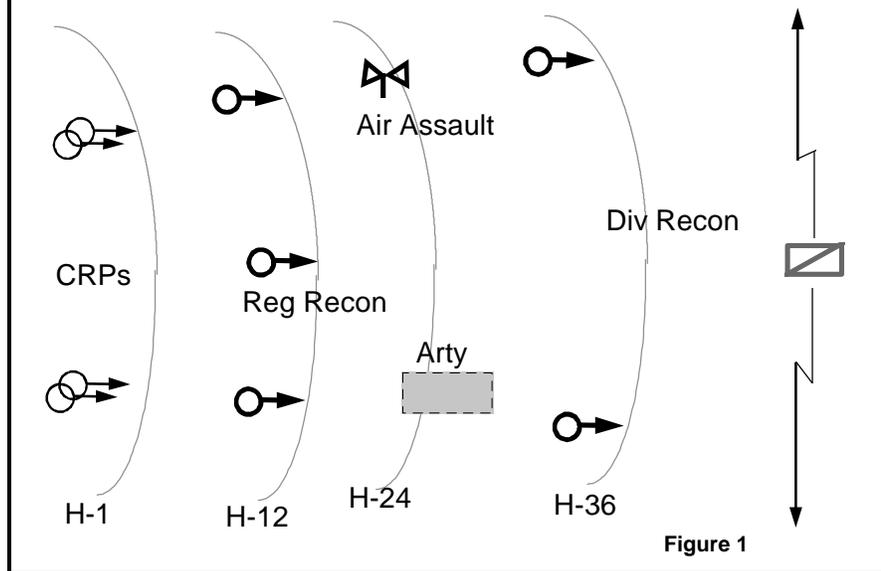
Third, the unit conducting the counterrecon mission is *not* the main effort for subsequent missions, and the focus of the higher headquarters is on generating combat power for the following mission's main effort. The counterrecon unit is organically formed from, and protecting, a mechanized/heavy force (to include HMMWV-mounted scouts as applicable). During the execution of the mission, the tasked unit has priority of fires and logistic support. Further, mission execution will be primarily during hours of limited visibility.

Last, the applications explained utilize two separate maneuver elements. These two components are, to borrow an effective term, hunters and killers, and represent a refinement of the concept discussed in *ARMOR* (See "Hunter-Killer Operations," July-August 1993 *ARMOR*. - Ed.) The most effective ratio found to date is one tank section (killer) per scout or surveillance platoon (hunter).² The lethality of the killers has proven to be higher when employed in pairs, across a platoon frontage, under the control of a headquarters rather than as an individual tank in support and control of a specific scout section. When more than this one surveillance platoon (hunter) is used in conjunction with one tank section (killer), a third component is required from outside these two forces, a mission commander. A command and control element (CP) directs and manages all systems and synchronizes the fight, freeing the platoon leader to concentrate on detection and destruction.

Plan

Maneuver: First, all participating forces should identify the front and rear boundaries of the security zone. These borders constitute limits where the fighting forces have the latitude to conduct operations without the need to further deconflict terrain. It is imperative that this front and rear limit be disseminated to friendly elements which operate behind the counterrecon force. This prevents friendlies from straying too far forward and, during the execution phase, delineates where subsequent units assume responsibility for destroying "leakers." As soon as possible, establish the rear boundary of the coun-

Threat Database, Draft



terrecon force. This will allow methodical clearance of the sector and provide control for the subsequent movement of friendly forces. The identification of subsequent and alternate positions is imperative. Instinctively, scouts will seek alternate screen lines during their occupation, but additional attack and assault positions for the tanks, as well as extra ambulance exchange points (AXPs), logistics release points (LRPs), and other CSS sites for related activities need to be included during development of the plan.

Intelligence: The commander of the counterrecon force needs to develop a "Threat Database" during the planning phase (FM 34-130). This tool is made up of three components: an enemy order of battle (OOB), overlaid on the current mission timeline, referenced against the enemy's objectives. To start, establish the order of battle with the number of enemy recon elements and from which echelon, for example: two divisional recon patrols followed by three regimental recon patrols in our sector with a possible air insertion of a 15-man patrol on hills in our northern sector (see Figure 1). Next, overlay the OOB onto the enemy's mission timeline. Depending on when the security mission begins, some enemy recon elements may already be in your area of operations. This obviously impacts movement techniques and affects the actions of those conducting operations to the rear. Finally, evaluate these two items in terms of the enemy's objectives. Just because the enemy has four

recon patrols doesn't mean he will assign one in each quarter of the sector. This is particularly important when friendly assets are stretched thin; a unit cannot do **ALL** things well, and a tool such as this can help one decide where to assume risk.

While still in the planning phase, consider a deception plan for Ground Surveillance Radar (GSR). GSR can be a powerful tool, and it can also be an artillery magnet. When planning, specify its activation times as well as varying and changing the sectors it covers, and the positions from which this is done. If used during the day and not moved during the night, it could easily fall victim to the enemy's suppression of air defense.

Fire Support: Establish day and night indirect fire trigger points for the area of operation. There is no magic for this procedure; use the same criteria and thought process that goes into building an engagement area (see FM 17-95-10). Also establish mortar and artillery trigger points separately, based on the time needed to process a mission and the desired effects from each system.

Additionally, adjust the mortar basic load for the mission. Since we assume the task will occur during night, increase the number of illumination and HE rounds at the expense of smoke.

Battle Command: Establish good comms, establish good comms, establish good comms! Enough said about

this subject? Probably not, but we'll move on.

The observation plan is the heart of the whole counterrecon fight. It is from this block (the actions of the hunter) that the rest of the mission evolves. Start developing this as soon as possible, beginning at the lowest level. Consider what terrain must be seized and what may be secured against the anticipated threat.

Determine what can be observed and what advantage dismounted patrols can bring to the sector. As each position is manned, require a completed sketch card (similar to a range card) depicting both observation and direct fire capabilities. Platoon leaders ensure coordination with adjacent units and attachments. Each platoon leader compiles these and draws a platoon sector sketch, forwarding a copy to the unit CP. The CP completes a unit observation plan from all platoon sketches and includes all combat multipliers (GSR, countermobility, patrol routes and times). The extra work spent doing this early will make for a less confusing and hectic fight later.

Mobility/Countermobility: During the planning phase, address this BOS by defining with higher when the main supply routes (MSR) in sector will be opened and closed. This is especially true when an engagement area is developing to your rear. Nobody wants to be sealed forward or forced to travel a circuitous route back. Also define from higher what engineer assets are available and when. Frequently, the answer is "none" since the engineers are already supporting the main effort of the subsequent mission.³

Combat Service Support: If the unit's SOP does not specifically address support during the counterrecon fight, then throw it away for this mission. Begin by task-organizing early for the mission. Second, recognize (and force others to recognize) this is a unique mission and requires some non-standard actions. Move the aid station forward, and synchronize it with the MSR. Consider having Class III bulk attached to the unit for the duration of the mission. Depending on what the follow-on mission requires, and the length of time needed to conduct LOG-PAC, it may be simpler (and thus more likely to succeed) if effort isn't wasted with link-up times and compressed time schedules used in traditional re-

supply methods. Identify and request the mission-specific extras needed, such as; night vision device batteries, engineer class V, flares, etc. Simultaneously request CSS for expected attachments, and ensure that the attachments are aware of locations of AXPs, LRPs, etc.

Air Defense Artillery: Besides considering the standard parameters of ADA, look specifically at the likely enemy landing zones (LZ) that are in the sector, or could influence the sector if they were used for an enemy airmobile operation. Then reposition ADA elements to cover air avenues of approach and deny the use of these templated LZs.

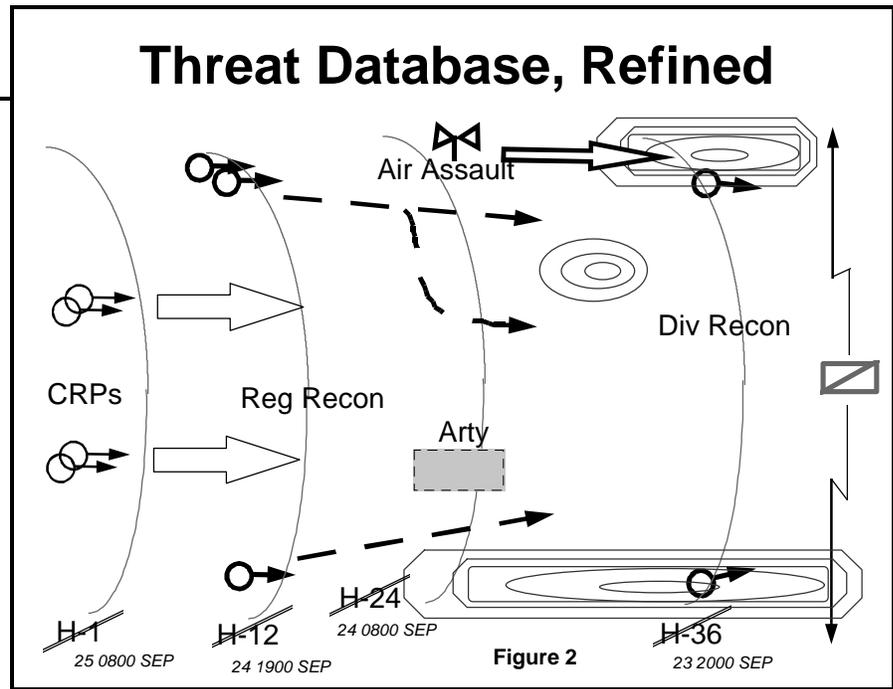
Prepare

Maneuver: As the unit begins its preparation for the counterrecon fight, it conducts a survivability move, ideally at the end of End Evening Nautical Twilight (EENT). For maximum deception, have the hunters bound forward to set the screen line. If time did not permit a covert leader's recon of a forward position, then fall back to a subsequent screen line that was reconnoitered during the advance into sector. The observation plan is compiled for the final position.

When does the counterrecon fight end and the subsequent mission begin? If you, as the force commander don't know, then ask; different criteria for each mission can exist. It could be based on time, identification of an enemy main body, or destruction of specific enemy forces. Decide which routes and movement techniques to use when it is time to reposition for subsequent missions. Above all, disseminate this criteria.

Intelligence: During the preparation, refine the "Threat Database," similar to the way a doctrinal template is developed to a situation template. At this point, it should evolve from a schematic into an enemy plan. Overlay the enemy's timeline to your current locations and define his frontages to specific avenues of approach (see Figure 2). Then take this and refine the observation plan. Are the patrols synched to when we expect the enemy? Are the sectors of observation (both visual and electronic) appropriate? If not, fix it.

Fire Support: Consider registering mortars and/or artillery. Consult with



your favorite artilleryist to see if this is appropriate for you. For brevity, the doctrinal diatribe on this subject is omitted.

The leader of the counterrecon fight must determine the commander's intent for fires, both for artillery and mortar systems. The two weapons are obviously not the same, and can be arranged to complement each other, such as mortar illumination for artillery adjustments. Prioritize the mortars for the element without priority of FA fires and allocate the artillery for the main effort of the counterrecon force. At the same time, utilize the observation plan and establish applicable no-fire areas for OPs, patrols, AXPs, etc.

Battle Command: Work to have alert leaders during the critical times by ensuring rest. No other component of a BOS is so selectively ignored as this. To start, as stated in the assumptions, the counterrecon fight is part of a larger operation, and thus it cannot be conducted in a vacuum. Given this, leaders need rest to be a viable component of the follow-on mission. Allot time during the preparation for leader rest — however little it may be. Likewise, since there will be a follow-on mission, the commander of the counterrecon fight will have to leave sector to be briefed on following missions. Thus, plan for his absence during a portion of any of the phases. The commander is important to this fight, but do not allow him to be irreplaceable.

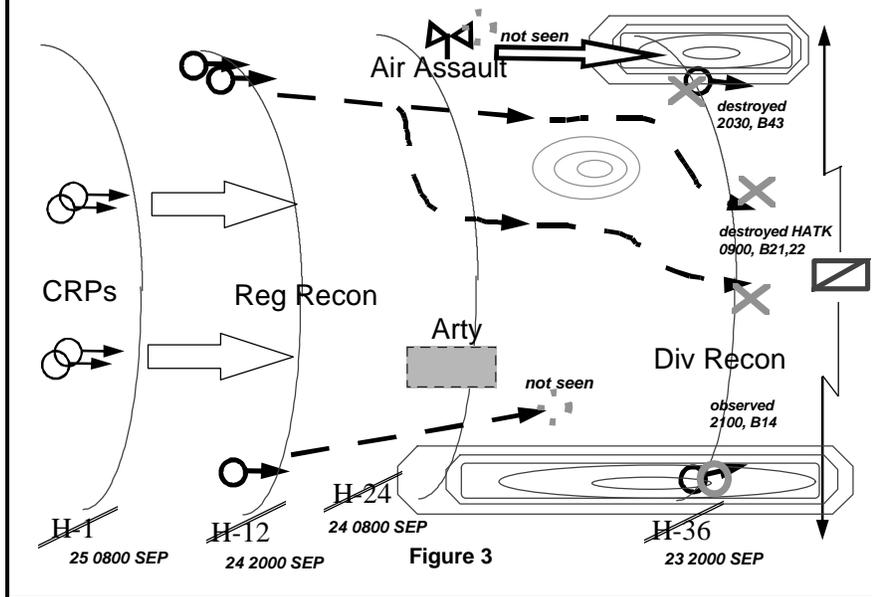
The requirement for the commander to enter and return to sector will affect his location on the battlefield. His position should provide redundancy in ammo and complement the CP's placement. Some situations may require the two of them to co-locate.

Mobility/Counter-mobility: Application of engineer assets will pay its highest dividends if done during the preparation phase of the mission. Maneuver forces should utilize vehicle basic load Class IV to emplace hasty obstacles (cheap tricks). These obstacles, in addition to their doctrinal applications against the enemy, can serve several other uses such as: movement control from the rear by closing unneeded MSRs, blocking lateral routes, and as a form of deception. If further engineer assets are available, always employ them. Engineers typically work long into the night, and fratricide becomes a concern since they quickly become indiscernible as friendlies in a thermal sight. Applying silver duct tape can provide a field expedient "CIP" panel; it's especially effective on the sides of M113s.⁴

Combat Service Support: Consider pre-positioning Class V, either for the upcoming fight or in anticipation of re-arming for follow-on missions. For example, extra HE mortar rounds for the evening, and a main gun cache vicinity of the unit's battle position for the subsequent mission.

Use all daylight to rehearse movement of medics and recovery vehicles

Threat Database, Scorecard



if available. Start with the most difficult position (as opposed to the most likely) and rehearse ending with the easiest position. Include in these rehearsals the evacuation of attachments (GSR, ADA, engineers). No one wants to waste time during the fight chasing a misoriented medic instead of hunting an enemy scout.

From the aforementioned paragraph, one can see that LOGPAC will be anything but standard. Configure it not for what is immediately needed but to carry the unit until its next window for resupply. MREs instead of upcoming "A" rations is nothing new for a cavalry unit. Likewise the standard timeline or LOGPAC window may not work for this mission. The distance required and the inability to conduct a service station may mean the LOGPAC for the counterrecon fight must leave the trains ahead of others and remain forward with the force for an extended period of time. Accept this and adjust. If the SOP won't work, then it's better to adjust the "standard" timeline than to attempt to meet it by conducting an incomplete LOGPAC and coming up short later. Develop the CSS timeline from an assessment of the impact of the event, as compared to the higher's standard logistic timeline.

Air Defense Artillery: During the hustle of mission preparation, things in the periphery are often not assimilated. Do not let this happen with ADA. By the nature of their mission, ADA assets often work as general support to a

higher unit, regardless of whose sector they operate in. Despite the clear responsibility for terrain management, and delineated reporting requirements, the movement of ADA is frequently not clearly understood by the maneuver force, and vice versa. Take the time to find out what ADA assets are in sector. Then physically identify them and, as a minimum, make FM coordination.

Execute

Maneuver: It's almost a given with the quality of today's soldiers and troopers that each will understand the mission. Not as clearly understood are the "On Order" and "Be Prepared" missions additionally assigned. Define these and the criteria for each. This, in turn, will make command and control easier.

As the mission unfolds, seek to further refine NAIs. Based on the "Threat Database," adjust or move these in regard to the enemy sought. Hand in hand with this, adjust the TAIs. Ideally, we should be able to use the tenets of FM 17-97/98 to walk the enemy from the point of acquisition to destruction using the depth of our sector. Using multiple combat and combat support mechanisms is integral to having a successful counterrecon battle; doing this maintains the integrity and security of the screen by not requiring the hunters to engage with direct fire. The pieces used in the elimination of the enemy (the killers) reposition as necessary be-

hind the surveillance unit (the hunters) to maintain flexibility and their security.

Here it is, the high payoff task for the counterrecon fight: "go to ground." At about the time when the screen is established, but certainly not later than EENT, have *everyone* go to ground, and stop moving in the sector of the counterrecon fight; this includes CSS, engineers, etc. Use this time the way a dismounted patrol uses a listening halt, after crossing the LD, to adjust to the battlefield. At the time of the freeze, identify what elements are still moving and get control of them. This also serves as a backstop to find forces in sector you are not aware of. From this point on, all movement in sector is controlled by the CP. It approves all movement (mounted and dismounted) and ensures its dissemination throughout the sector. Movement from higher is monitored by the CP and passed to all attachments and subordinates.

Intelligence: During the execution, keep score off of the "Threat Database." Use this to identify periods when contact can be expected and maximum vigilance is important. Using the "Threat Database" as a score card, the CP can have a pretty solid idea where the enemy forces are, and then focus the hunters to find them (see Figure 3). In a worst case, the counterrecon commander can use this matrix to template when an enemy element might have penetrated, and accordingly alert subsequent forces of the possibility of the "Threat" in their sector. For example, a "negative report" during a templated event time may indicate a successful enemy infiltration.

Fire Support: As the mission wears on and fatigue develops, remember to update no-fire areas as patrols begin and end, and when maneuver and support forces reposition in sector.

The second nugget of learned information is "shoot it" with indirect! The criteria for engagement during a large caliber mission is different from the criteria of a counterrecon fight. Let's face it, at the time of this fight, it's probably the only game in town, hence the indirect assets are not heavily tasked. Assuming the fires are cleared, shoot the target, even if the conditions for target effects are not ideal. Regardless of the precise results, this action will take the initiative from the enemy

and can force him to a premature action. This sequence, was known formerly as harassment and interdiction fires (H & I fires).

Battle Command: Delineating if two spot reports are in fact two separate spottings or two sightings of the same enemy is one of the hardest leader tasks of the counterrecon fight. Then factor in darkness and the potential for a spot report to be a sighting of a friendly vehicle moving in sector and the task becomes horrendous. Ground burst illumination can be a tool to sort out these situations. Have our indirect friends fire an illumination round with "burst illum" at impact. Then have observers give their spot reports with a declination from the illumination marking (or have friendly attachments update their position from the source of the illum). Plot these updates on the observation plan and confirm or deny the spot reports.

The counterrecon fight is like deer hunting; it is a contest of patience and vigilance. A highly useful tool in maintaining vigilance is to have the troop/unit CP act as a stimuli throughout the night. To do this, the CP keeps subordinates busy by asking questions and directing activities throughout the night, keeping each one alert and reporting. For example, have observers switch NAIs, or activate other NAIs for specified periods. Regardless of the techniques, the CP keeps all on the net (back to the good commo piece) throughout the mission.

Mobility/Countermobility: If engineers are available at mission execution, consider incorporating them in the dismounted patrol plan, as a counter-obstacle force in preparation of upcoming missions (METT-T dependent). Also, ensure that the engineer element reports the status of tasked obstacles to the unit CP, as well as to higher. Additionally, if a FASCAM is to be fired in support of an upcoming mission, have the engineers adjust and observe it rather than distract an element on surveillance.

Combat Service Support: Because of competing demands across the sector, and the added complexity of darkness, obstacles, and friendlies moving in sector, all CSS tasks will not be possible or equal. Accept this up front and be prepared to assume risk in the CSS arena. When a decision is made to exe-

cute a logistic action, lead that asset to the point of execution. Our CSS assets simply are not authorized the density of NCOs and commo equipment that many of us take for granted. When the counterrecon fight begins, it is too late to wonder if the moving vehicle is the enemy or a wayward fuel HEMTT. Don't take the chance; lead them to where they need to go.

Air Defense Artillery: Although not doctrinal, if available, consider using the Avenger's radar in the ground surveillance mode. It can provide a field expedient back-up to confirm or deny a spot report. During the battle, ensure the ADA assets in sector are kept abreast of the tactical situation and changes in friendly air activity.

ADA assets are often in a position where they must share responsibility for their own security. Notice the word "share;" the force conducting the counterrecon fight must work to protect ADA assets in sector, especially from enemy recon units who see ADA systems as a high payoff target.

Conclusion

Ideally, the application of these procedures coupled with integration of proven tactics and doctrine will serve to ensure future successes in the counterrecon fight and, consequently, subsequent battles. As a minimum, we

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hope that this article spurs thought towards better ways to win this fight. It is through similar discourse and discussion that direct fire planning and EA development has evolved to what we enjoy today (see "Direct Fire Planning," *ARMOR*, Nov-Dec 93). All comments and improvements are welcome, for we share the same goal — to win. Above all else, good hunting.

Notes

¹As noted by scout platoon leaders attending the course at Ft. Bliss in May 1995.

²True at the NTC and similar open terrain, but arguable at CMTC or forested areas where there are many avenues of approach.

³As a minimum engineer assets, as part of the main effort, must coordinate with the counterrecon commander before coming forward to prevent fratricide.

⁴Used effectively during the 3d ACR's Troop ARTEPs, squadron maneuver exercise, and NTC 95-12.