

Understanding Reconnaissance Missions Instead of Focusing on Reconnaissance Platforms

By CPT Kyle Hoisington

The world of reconnaissance and security missions is vague to a lot of Soldiers and leaders despite no significant changes over the years. However, the platforms in which scouts use to conduct their missions vary greatly between the different brigade structures, ABCT, IBCT, and SBCT. Commanders should not look at the platform to determine a certain mission. How scouts conduct a reconnaissance mission is not formed by their platform. The scout's mission is formed through detailed commander's reconnaissance guidance. The argument that dismounted scouts conduct different reconnaissance missions than tracked vehicle scouts is invalid. The platform in which scouts move about the battlefield does not have as much of an impact on their mission as the commander's reconnaissance guidance.

This article will assist in creating an understanding of the five different reconnaissance missions with how the multiple reconnaissance platforms are used. For purposes of this article, reconnaissance platforms are described as types of platforms scouts utilize when conducting reconnaissance missions.

Reconnaissance Missions

To understand how commander's reconnaissance guidance impacts a reconnaissance mission more than the platform scouts use, we must have a common understanding of the forms of reconnaissance. ADRP 3-90 identifies the five forms of reconnaissance as route, area, zone, reconnaissance in force, and special.

Route reconnaissance is a directed effort to obtain detailed information of a specified route and all terrain from which the enemy could influence movement along the route (ADRP 3-90). Route reconnaissance missions can focus on either terrain or enemy template to influence a route. When focusing on the terrain of a route, commanders may want to know how to move their maneuver forces from the line of departure to their objective. When focusing on the enemy that influences the route, a route reconnaissance mission inherits more risk. A commander must determine if the organic capabilities of the scouts is sufficient enough to reduce the risk associated with an enemy focused route reconnaissance.

Area reconnaissance focuses on obtaining detailed information about the terrain or enemy activity within a prescribed area (ADRP 3-90). An area is commonly described graphically as a named area of interest (NAI), and can also be graphically described as a checkpoint. NAIs can encompass a large surface or a specific point. This is due to the amount of, or lack thereof, mission analysis conducted by the staff in developing the area of interest.

Zone reconnaissance involves a directed effort to obtain detailed information on all routes, obstacles, terrain, and enemy forces within a zone defined by boundaries (ADRP 3-90). A zone reconnaissance allows subordinate leaders to look everywhere within their boundaries for the priority intelligence requirements (PIR). This differs from area and route reconnaissance because during a route or area reconnaissance mission, the higher headquarters is directing the information collection asset to

look at a specific area. During a zone reconnaissance, the understanding of the area of operations is usually more ambiguous which requires subordinate leaders to take more initiative.

Reconnaissance in force is a deliberate combat operation designed to discover or test the enemy's strength, dispositions, and reactions or to obtain other information (ADRP 3-90). A reconnaissance in force is a mission that requires more protection for the scouts due to the enemy direct fire contact that is required to test the enemy's reactions. A reconnaissance in force differs from an enemy focused zone reconnaissance for several reasons. A reconnaissance in force is solely enemy focused whereas a zone reconnaissance may focus on terrain or civil based PIR. The intent of a reconnaissance in force is to discover a weakness in the enemy's formation to allow a main body to exploit the weakness. This differs from an enemy focused zone reconnaissance where the intent is to determine size and location to allow the main body to conduct offensive operations.

Special reconnaissance is reconnaissance and surveillance actions conducted as a special operation in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments to collect or verify information of strategic or operational significance employing military capabilities not normally found in conventional forces (ADRP 3-90). Special reconnaissance will not be addressed in this article because cavalry formations found in the brigade combat teams do not organically conduct special reconnaissance.

Insertion methods

There are multiple ways reconnaissance platforms are used by scouts when conducting a reconnaissance mission. Several of the methods include air insertion, dismounted insertion, wheeled vehicle insertion, and tracked vehicle insertion. All of these methods of moving scouts to their reconnaissance objective are found in ABCTs, IBCTs, and SBCTs. There are major differences in the mobility from one platform to the other. However, each platform is only the way a scout is moved from their line of departure to their reconnaissance objective. The actions on the reconnaissance objective are the same between all of the reconnaissance platforms.

When most people think of scouts, they first think of stealth. This is a common trend throughout the dismounted formations and even in some of the wheeled vehicle formations. Other people think of scouts as having large amounts of protection to survive first contact, and are able to send reports under direct fire contact. This trend is common in some of the wheeled vehicle formations, but predominantly in the tracked vehicle formations. I tend to look at the different types of platforms on a scale (see figure 1). On one end of the scale is the air and dismounted method with the wheeled vehicle method in the middle, with the tracked vehicle method on the far end of the scale. Along the same scale, stealth is directly correlated with the air and dismounted method with protection correlated with the tracked vehicle method. I use this scale to visualize how scouts would execute any of the reconnaissance missions. By using this scale, there is some kind of stealth associated wheeled vehicles while there is some kind of protection with wheeled vehicles. Of course the mission variables play a role when identifying which type of platform can best conduct a form of reconnaissance. Given this basic analysis, it is reasonable to state that each type of platform can conduct each form of reconnaissance as long as

the scout is given additional guidance on how to use their particular platform. This additional guidance is given in the form of commander's reconnaissance guidance.

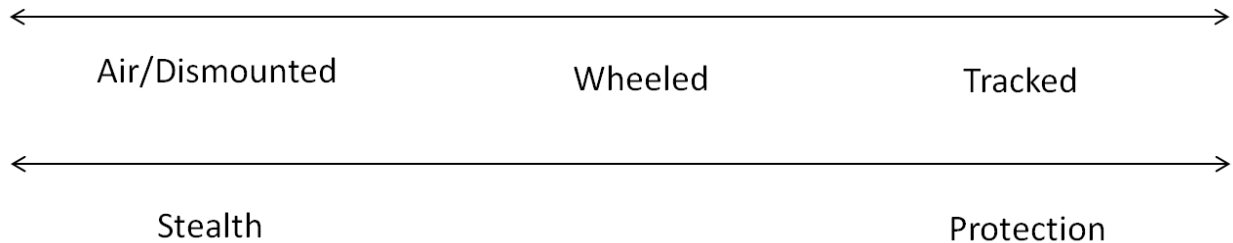


Figure 1

Recently, the development of the 6x36 scout platoon has given additional abilities in each formation to allow a combination of both stealth and protection in each of the platforms. With 18 dismounted scouts in a tracked vehicle formation, the tracked vehicle scout platoon can combine both stealth with protection based on the mission variables. This further builds on the statement that all types of formations can conduct all forms of reconnaissance with analysis on the mission variables.

Commander's Reconnaissance Guidance

Cavalry Squadron and Cavalry Troop commanders communicate their intent for each phase of the operation through commander's reconnaissance guidance. When scouts execute a reconnaissance mission, they look toward the six parts to commander's reconnaissance guidance: focus, tempo, engagement criteria, disengagement criteria, displacement criteria, and bypass criteria. To understand how commander's reconnaissance guidance plays an important role in shaping a reconnaissance mission, we must have a common understating of what commander's reconnaissance guidance consists of.

Focus gives the scout guidance about what information gaps are in the plan, and what information is important to report. Focus guides the scout when conducting the reconnaissance mission in order for the scout to know what type of information is most important to the mission. It also allows the subordinate leader to know what kind of risk is involved with the mission. For example, a threat focused reconnaissance involves more risk to the scout than a terrain focused reconnaissance mission.

Tempo directly relates to the operational timeline and tells the scout how quickly to conduct the reconnaissance mission. Tempo is described by four terms: rapid or deliberate, and stealthy or forceful. Rapid and deliberate refer to the amount of information the scout must collect within a reconnaissance objective. Either the scout will take a lot of time (deliberate) or the scout will spend a very short amount of time (rapid) collecting information within the reconnaissance objective. Stealthy or forceful refer to the amount of time it will take the scout to move from one reconnaissance objective to another. Either the commander wants the scout to move slowly and covert (stealthy), or the commander wants the scout to move as quickly as possible (forceful). Looking at figure 2, rapid or deliberate are (A) while

stealthy or forceful are (B). There is not a set amount of time associated with any of the four terms. Therefore, the commander can dictate through a timeline the precise time the scout should collect information and when the scout should move.



Figure 2

Engagement criteria establishes which targets the scout is expected to engage with direct and/or indirect fires (FM3-20.971). Engagement criteria should establish which weapon system to use when engaging those specified targets. The terms aggressive and discreet are clearly defined in FM 3-20.971, but even then, those definitions are open to interpretation. Engagement criteria is also clearly defined by answering: how will the scout engage the target, how will the scout synchronize fires with other scouts, and rules of engagement.

Disengagement criteria keeps the scout from being decisively engaged. This is the point at which the commander has identified the scout should not continue to engage the target. Disengagement criteria is solely enemy based and not time based. Disengagement criteria is often mistaken with displacement criteria, but the two criteria are completely different. Disengagement from the enemy commonly leads to displacement from the scout's position.

Displacement criteria is the event or time trigger for when a scout should move from one reconnaissance objective to another reconnaissance objective to continue the mission. The movement can be forward, backward, or lateral. When disengagement leads to displacement, the movement of the scout is usually in the direction of the main body in order to create space and lead to a rearward passage of lines.

Bypass criteria is established by the commander to inform the scout which information has priority of collection. For example, the commander may need to know about the specific aspects of the terrain before engaging with enemy scouts. Therefore, the commander would tell the scouts to bypass enemy scouts until the PIR is confirmed about the terrain.

Commander's reconnaissance guidance should be developed prior deciding what form of reconnaissance is being conducted. The differences in the criteria and focus could mean a difference between a zone reconnaissance and a reconnaissance in force. Identifying how much risk is associated with the reconnaissance mission through the focus allows the subordinate leader to plan how many observation posts to emplace, additional assets to request, and the scheme of maneuver. The amount of risk is greatly reduced by informing the scouts of their actions on contact through engagement and

disengagement criteria and the speed at which to move. With this detailed guidance, the scout can use any type of platform and still collect the information needed.

Conclusion

The importance of detailed commander's reconnaissance guidance cannot be overstated. By developing this guidance, the scout understands how to conduct actions on the reconnaissance objective. If leaders reduced the amount of time spent on attempting to figure out how to employ a specific platform, and spent their time on giving detailed commander's reconnaissance guidance, then subordinate leaders would have a better understanding of their assigned mission. Success does not come from how a scout moved from the line of departure to the reconnaissance objective. Actions on the reconnaissance objective make scouts successful during a reconnaissance mission.

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