

# Keeping the Sabers Sharp: Maintaining Relevance in the Modern Era

by CPT Ken Segelhorst

Contact front! The Armor Branch is under fire. With impending budget cuts and military downsizing, the Armor Branch has found itself in the crosshairs of political and military leaders alike. As our leaders speak out against the future deployment of large American land-based formations to Asia, the Middle East and Africa, the Army will find itself increasingly challenged to justify the number, size and cost of its heavy formations.<sup>1</sup> There is already a school of thought emerging that the Army should transition many of its heavy units into the National Guard, based on the premise that a large force-on-force armor engagement is unlikely in the foreseeable future.<sup>2</sup>

So how do we deploy our forces against downsizing and budget cuts? Do we stoically charge against overwhelming odds reminiscent of Lord Cardigan's Light Brigade, or is there a better solution? I suggest we flank the issue.

While we may not be able to keep our tanks from being mothballed, we can take action to protect our branch and troopers from underemployment. Just as manufacturers update their products to meet the needs of the marketplace, we must tailor our product to meet the demands of a changing Army. To remain relevant, we must transform our image to that of a light and swift deploying force well-suited for expeditionary warfare; further enhance and expand our reconnaissance skills and capabilities; and establish our own elite formations capable of rapidly deploying alongside Special Operations Forces to participate in future engagements.



## Marketing Armor in an expeditionary era

Anyone who has studied marketing knows the importance of branding. Branding is the process involved in creating a unique name and image for a product in the consumer's mind. Branding is perhaps the most important facet of any business. It aims to establish a distinguishable presence in the market that attracts and retains customers. The image a brand, or name, evokes can have more to do with a product's fate in the marketplace than the performance of the actual product itself.

So, what does our branch's name say about us? To those outside the branch, the "Armor" name evokes images of heavily armored tanks, behemoths designed for combat on the open battlefields of dated force-on-force engagements. It also brings to mind images of long supply trains, substantial fuel requirements and sluggish deployment by massive, slow-moving cargo ships. While these images may have been a fair representation of Armor in past decades, today such images represent only one segment of the branch. Unfortunately for us, that segment happens to be ill-suited for our nation's projected demands.

No longer will the Army be structured for large-scale conflicts as it begins to downsize from 570,000 to 490,000 Soldiers.<sup>3</sup> Changes to U.S. defense strategy will demand units capable of conducting expeditionary warfare. The Army will increasingly demand light, flexible units capable of quick reaction and deployment for counterterrorism, security-force assistance and various stability-and-support operations around the globe. Some units within the Army's inventory are already extremely well-suited for such operations, including SOF and airborne infantry. Armor must repackage itself as a leaner, more agile force capable of contributing to these expeditionary operations.

Returning our name to "Cavalry" would offer a far more accurate representation of our branch and conjure a more attractive image to our "consumers." Today, more than 65 percent of our branch is serving in cavalry and reconnaissance roles, whereas only 35 percent is serving in traditional armor positions.<sup>4</sup> This division will only grow as policymakers continue to dismantle our heavy formations. We should update our branch's name and insignia to accurately reflect our current role as primarily a cavalry and reconnaissance force.

The "Cavalry" name may evoke images of John Wayne and the horse cavalry gallantly riding to the rescue of settlers in the Old West – not an unflattering image in the era of expeditionary warfare. Those more familiar with the present-day cavalry will recognize its role in reconnaissance and intelligence-gathering. To these individuals, the "Cavalry" name will likely bring to mind images of light and rapidly deployable vehicles maneuvering swiftly about the battlefield to conduct reconnaissance and surveillance operations. This is a far more attractive image for the modern era, where the value of timely and accurate intelligence cannot be understated and light, rapidly deployable units are desired. By embracing the Old West image and advertising ourselves as a modern-day cavalry capable of rapidly "riding to the rescue," we may enhance our marketability for future expeditionary operations.

## Expanding Armor's reconnaissance role and capabilities

While changing our name back to Cavalry may improve our image and marketability, we must also look to improve and expand the services we provide. With current emphasis placed upon intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance programs, it is only logical for Armor to appease consumer demand and focus its sights on this mission set. By expanding its reconnaissance and surveillance capabilities, Armor will improve its mar-

ketability and relevance for modern warfare. Armor should fight to establish itself as the "go to" branch for all ground reconnaissance operations, both mounted and dismounted; doing so will secure Armor a place within the Army's ever-changing force structure.

Before Armor can lay claim to dismounted-reconnaissance operations traditionally performed by the infantry, it must first ensure mastery of such operations. While schools like the Army Reconnaissance Course provide a solid foundation in reconnaissance, there are more courses available to further enhance our branch's reconnaissance capabilities. By increasing the number of officers and noncommissioned officers we send to schools like the Reconnaissance and Surveillance Leaders Course, Pathfinder, combat hunter/tracker, Sniper and Ranger schools, we will develop a more credible reconnaissance force with enhanced capabilities for modern warfare while substantiating our claim as the branch of choice for all ground-reconnaissance operations.

**RSLC.** The RSLC, created in 1986 to bridge the gap between the Army's long-range reconnaissance patrol and long-range surveillance units, is an elite course offered by the Ranger Training Brigade at Fort Benning, GA. Since that time, RSLC has become the Army's premier course for teaching dismounted reconnaissance and surveillance tactics, techniques and procedures. Using six-man LRS teams as the model for instruction, students are trained in a myriad of reconnaissance and surveillance TTPs, including close-target reconnaissance, reconnaissance-specific battle drills, surveillance- and hide-site construction, urban surveillance and various methods of insertion and extraction.

As reconnaissance elements must report their findings in a timely and accurate manner, RSLC also stresses communication and equipment identification. Students are trained to employ a variety of radio systems for voice and data communications. They learn proper reporting procedures, radio-wave propagation, antenna theory, and construction and employment of field-expedient antennas. To ensure they report accurately, students test on their ability to identify various vehicles, weapons and equipment from around the globe. All these skills are then tested during the course's final field-training exercise.

While RSLC was designed to train infantry officers and NCOs, 19-series Soldiers have much to gain by attending. Sending our scouts to RSLC gives them the tools they need to conduct successful dismounted-reconnaissance and surveillance operations. More important than recon TTPs, RSLC students learn to conduct meticulous mission planning, well beyond what is taught at the basic course or ARC. The detail with which students learn to develop their plans and contingencies produces forward-thinking leaders capable of successfully completing the most challenging missions while, at the same time, mitigating risk. By increasing the number of scouts we send to RSLC, we will enhance our dismounted-reconnaissance capability and overall performance as a reconnaissance force.

**Pathfinder School.** The Armor Branch should also take advantage of the Army's Pathfinder School to further enhance its reconnaissance capabilities and expand its role. While Army Pathfinders mainly provide navigational aid and advisory services to military aircraft, the Pathfinder mission is one deeply rooted in reconnaissance, as the name suggests. Pathfinders routinely insert ahead of the main body to conduct reconnaissance; establish and operate day/night helicopter landing zones; establish and operate day/night parachute drop zones; conduct slingload operations; and provide air-traffic control for rotary-wing and fixed-wing aircraft. Having qualified officers and NCOs capable of performing these tasks would greatly enhance any reconnaissance troop's capabilities, particularly those operating within highly mobile airborne and air-assault formations.

While Pathfinders are valuable force multipliers when working with aircraft, there are only a handful of Pathfinder units within the Army, none of which are organic to brigade combat teams. This means that battalion and brigade planners must often rely on individual Pathfinders spread throughout the ranks for Pathfinder support. Reconnaissance squadrons could help overcome this flaw in BCT organization by taking responsibility for Pathfinder support within each brigade. This would justify Armor Branch sending a higher number of officers and NCOs to Pathfinder School, providing reconnaissance squadrons with a pool of qualified personnel from which Pathfinder teams could be identified, equipped and further trained. By taking responsibility for Pathfinder support within the BCTs, Armor would be providing a valuable service while expanding its role.

**Combat hunter/tracker courses.** To enhance our scouts' abilities to locate and track the enemy, we should send our 19Ds to tracking courses. Despite being one of the oldest skills known to mankind, tracking skills have all but disappeared among today's computer generation. While tracking, or signcutting, may seem primitive in today's digital age, the reality could not be further from the truth. Even with all the technological advances we have seen in the last decade, technology has not been able to match a human tracker's ability to interpret subtle visual cues inadvertently left behind by the enemy.

Tracking is particularly well-suited for counterinsurgency operations. Insurgents often employ guerrilla tactics and quickly flee the area after contact, seemingly without a trace. The inability to give chase and locate the enemy can frustrate even the most disciplined counterinsurgent force. In many cases, however, skilled mantrackers could provide these units with invaluable intelligence, helping turn the tables on the enemy and transforming them from the hunters to the hunted. The use of mantracking to fight modern-day insurgencies is not a new concept. Trackers have been employed by counterinsurgents throughout Asia and Africa with great success, particularly in Malaya and Rhodesia. If properly trained, our scouts could bring these skills to bear in Afghanistan and future operating environments.

Despite the fact that tracking has proven to be a relevant skill that has been successfully employed in several counterinsur-

gencies, neither the Armor School nor Infantry School currently offer courses in modern tracking techniques. Until Training and Doctrine Command recognizes the need to dedicate a formal course to this skill set, we have but two options for our scouts to receive formal instruction. The first option is the U.S. Marine Corps' Combat Hunter Course.

Combat Hunter is a 10-day course developed by expert trackers, world-renowned big-game hunters and Marine infantry instructors who train Marines to observe, profile and track the enemy. In the culminating exercise, each student must track the path of an instructor who is given a several-mile head start. While the Army has sent select officers and NCOs to this course, it is unlikely we will be able to send our scouts in large numbers. However, Armor could use the Marine's Combat Hunter Course as a model for the development of a similar course under the Armor School.

Our second option is the Tactical Tracking Operations School mentioned by SFC Brian Lackey in *ARMOR* magazine's September-October 2010 issue. TTOS is a privately owned business founded by David Scott-Donelan, an ex-Rhodesian Selous Scout and a major player in the development of the Marine Corps' Combat Hunter Course. TTOS has trained many SOF and conventional military units as well as law-enforcement agencies. Possibly contracted through the General Services Administration, they offer a variety of course formats, including a 100-hour course taught by mobile-training team. To quote Lackey, a graduate of TTOS, "[s]implistic in theory and in action, scout trackers belong in our units ... without question."

**Sniper School.** Now that the Armor School has relocated to Fort Benning, we should also begin taking advantage of the Army's Sniper School. Army snipers' primary mission is to deliver long-range precision fire. Equipped with a sniper weapon system, M-14 or simply an M-4 with advanced combat optical gunsight, sniper-qualified scouts can provide their leaders with accurate and discriminating small-arms fire on reconnaissance and surveillance objectives. Such discriminating fire can be used to eliminate targets while preventing collateral damage and civilian casualties. While a sniper must be highly trained in



long-range rifle marksmanship, this constitutes only a quarter of the training at Sniper School.

A sniper's secondary mission is the collection and reporting of battlefield intelligence, not unlike that of our scouts. Snipers are extremely well-suited for this mission. They become masters of concealment and camouflage. They are trained to detect their targets and patiently stalk them, moving about unseen. Like trackers, snipers undergo intense observation training and exercises.

The lessons learned at Sniper School would greatly enhance our scouts' ability to move stealthily about the battlefield and provide direct observation and precision fires on reconnaissance and surveillance objectives. As such, we should increase the number of scouts we send to Sniper School and legitimize their sniper skills by fighting to award them the B4 (sniper) skill identifier, which is currently withheld from 19-series graduates of the Sniper School.

**Ranger School.** Lastly, producing Ranger-qualified leaders is essential to building our branch's credibility. Ranger School is the Army's premier course in small-unit dismounted operations. Students conduct patrolling operations in squad- and platoon-size elements in austere environments, including the mountains of northern Georgia and the swamps of the Florida panhandle. For more than 61 (at a minimum) grueling days, the lessons of light-infantry tactics are battered into the minds of Ranger students until they become second nature. Above all, Ranger School is a leadership school. It tests a leader's ability to plan missions, make decisions and lead Soldiers under some of the most stressful conditions outside of combat. As the sign says at the entrance of Camp Rogers, Ranger School is "not for the weak or fainthearted."

In addition to the leadership and light-infantry skills developed during Ranger School, students also gain credibility by earning the Ranger tab. The Ranger tab earns 19-series officers and NCOs a proverbial "seat at the table" within traditional light units and provides them with increased respect among their peers in the infantry and other branches. The reason BCT commanders want Ranger-qualified leaders goes well beyond the skills they learn at Ranger School. As members of an elite brotherhood, Ranger School graduates share a common bond. Having voluntarily subjected themselves to the trials and tribulations of Ranger School, graduates share an increased sense of trust and understanding with one another. When a commander sees a Ranger tab, he knows the man wearing it will accomplish his mission though he be the lone survivor.

By sending our 19-series officers, NCOs and troopers to these schools, we will develop a more versatile and adaptive formation capable of a wider range of reconnaissance and surveillance activities. Increasing our number of RSLC and Ranger graduates will greatly enhance our branch's credibility pertaining to dismounted operations and help legitimize Armor's bid for missions once reserved for the infantry. Producing trained Pathfinder teams will allow our branch to offer a service not currently found at the BCT level. Training our scouts as man-trackers and snipers will give our branch more skills to market. By sharpening our skills and providing these services, we will increase our legitimacy as a reconnaissance force and further enhance our marketability all at a nominal cost.

## Forming an elite cavalry organization

The Armor Branch would also benefit from having an elite organization to call its own. The development of an elite 19-series formation would improve esprit de corps, increase performance, keep talent within the branch and provide a cadre of leaders with unique knowledge and experience. These benefits are evident in the infantry's 75<sup>th</sup> Ranger Regiment. The entire Infantry

Branch takes pride in the 75<sup>th</sup>'s accomplishments, contributing to a high level of esprit de corps within the infantry.

The desire to join the Ranger Regiment also lends itself to increased performance among infantrymen who must compete to join the regiment. The Ranger Regiment also helps retain top performers by offering a more challenging and rewarding career path within the branch. Conventional infantry units also benefit from the Ranger Regiment as both NCOs and officers rotate back into conventional units, bringing with them invaluable knowledge and experience. The Armor Branch would surely see similar benefits from forming an elite Cavalry squadron.

Like the Ranger Regiment, an elite cavalry squadron would need to be light and rapidly deployable to meet the demands of modern warfare. The squadron could be formed within the U.S. Army Special Operations Command. Within this organization, the squadron could operate independently or in support of other SOF elements. Independently, the squadron could conduct deep reconnaissance and direct action as a highly mobile force, much like the British Long-Range Desert Group of World War II. Operating in support of other SOF elements, the elite cavalry squadron could develop a relationship like that of the LRDG and Special Air Service in World War II or the Navy's special boat teams and sea, air and land teams today. The squadron could support other SOF elements by providing platforms for heavy weapons, infiltration/exfiltration, casualty evacuation and quick-reaction forces.

The squadron would require Armor's most adaptive and forward-thinking leaders, willing to mitigate risk through superior training and tactics rather than heavy armor and large combat formations. An elaborate selection process would be required to ensure the admittance of only the best and brightest 19-series personnel. Like the Ranger Regiment, leaders would rotate between conventional units and the elite squadron. Leaders would be required to prove themselves at each level of command prior to service in the squadron. For example, the Army would first require a captain to complete a successful command in a conventional unit before being eligible for command within the elite organization.

A special squadron would require special equipment. While the mine-resistant, ambush-protected all-terrain vehicle or ground mobility vehicle could prove an adequate vehicle for some operations, the mobility and flexibility offered by other vehicles would greatly enhance the squadron's adaptability, making it more flexible and rapidly deployable. The Land Rover 110 multi-role combat vehicle has been used by SOF elements around the world. While it lacks heavy armor, it is significantly smaller and lighter than most combat vehicles in the Army's inventory, and parts are readily available throughout the Third World.

A CH-47 Chinook helicopter can carry two combat-ready MRCVs internally. The Chenoweth Advanced Fast-Attack Vehicle would be an excellent option for desert operations. The AFAV is light, fast and rapidly deployable. It can be transported internally by CH-47 or CH-53 Sea Stallion helicopter, and up to three AFAVs can be carried by a C-130 aircraft (two when configured for airborne operations). Exploration of the use of Polaris all-terrain vehicles and military utility vehicles' ability to navigate rough terrain may prove useful. This assortment of vehicles, equipped with the latest weaponry and communications packages, could prove lethal in the hands of our most elite scouts.

## Infiltrating the Ranger Regiment

In addition to an elite cavalry squadron, add a troop of 19-series personnel to each Ranger battalion. The proposed cavalry troop would be responsible for manning the various combat vehicles in the Ranger Regiment's inventory, including Strykers. These

Strykers are primarily used for carrying Rangers to the objective. Who better to crew these vehicles than those specifically trained in mounted combat operations? The Regiment's Stryker fleet can also be supplemented with the M1128 Stryker Mobile Gun System. Manned by experienced 19As and 19Ks, the MGS could provide the regiment with precision fires from its 105mm cannon and 7.62mm coax. The 105mm would provide a column of Ranger Strykers the ability to engage and destroy hardened enemy positions and armored vehicles. Canister rounds would further enhance the Rangers' ability to engage and destroy light-skinned vehicles and dismounted personnel. The 105mm cannon could also be used to create breach points in walls through which Rangers could pass.

The Ranger battalions would benefit from having dedicated crews of 19-series personnel manning their vehicles. Unlike infantrymen, 19-series Soldiers would arrive at the regiment, after successful completion of the Ranger Assessment and Selection Program, already trained in mounted warfare, including crew drills, gunnery, vehicle maintenance and mounted tactics and techniques. Veteran scouts and tankers would bring with them years of experience in mounted warfare. They would undoubtedly outperform infantrymen less experienced in mounted operations and enhance the regiment's overall combat effectiveness and forced-entry capability.

Adding a cavalry troop to each Ranger battalion would also free manpower and reduce training requirements on Ranger infantry companies. By eliminating their need to fill vehicle-crew positions, Ranger companies would have more infantrymen available for dismount at the objective. Eliminating crew requirements would also reduce the number of individual and crew-level tasks needed to be trained by Ranger companies. This would provide company commanders more whitespace on the training calendar for dismounted-infantry tasks.

## Conclusion

As the Army faces impending budget cuts and post-war downsizing, there will be increased infighting for missions and funding. The Armor Branch must take action to outmaneuver policymakers' crosshairs and remain a relevant force for future operations. Armor must change its image from that of sluggishly deployed and logistically demanding branch to that of a light and agile force capable of swift deployment to global hotspots. By changing our name back to Cavalry and advertising our reconnaissance- and intelligence-gathering capabilities, we will increase our marketability.

By embracing the SOF truth that men are more important than hardware and further developing our reconnaissance skills through formal education and experience, Armor will develop a force capable of challenging the infantry for dismounted-reconnaissance roles. The Armor Branch would also see significant benefits from an elite organization, whether it is an independent cavalry squadron or the Ranger Regiment. An elite organization

would improve esprit de corps and help keep talent within the branch. It would provide Armor leaders with invaluable experience and provide an outlet for testing the latest mounted TTPs and equipment. Most importantly, it would help keep our 19-series Soldiers relevant for years to come.



*CPT Ken Segelhorst has served as executive officer, Military Transition Team 4110, Maysan Province, Iraq; maneuver adviser, Military Transition Team 3215, Diyala Province, Iraq; executive officer, Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 4th Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, Camp Hovey, Korea; and platoon leader, Pathfinder Company (Airborne), 4th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment, Salah ad-Din Province, Iraq. His military education includes Armor Officer Basic Course, Airborne School, Air Assault School, Scout Leaders Course, Pathfinder School, Ranger School, Reconnaissance and Surveillance Leaders Course, Basic Military Transition Team Training, Advanced Military Transition Team Training and Maneuver Captains Career Course. He holds a bachelor's of arts degree in history from the University of Missouri.*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Gates, Robert, "Address to United States Military Academy Corps of Cadets," West Point, Feb. 25, 2011, <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1539>.

<sup>2</sup> Ewing, Philip, "Upgrades Continue Amid Questions about Armor's Future," Jan. 9, 2012, <http://www.dodbuzz.com/2012/01/09/upgrades-continue-amid-questions-about-armors-future/>.

<sup>3</sup> Bacon, Lance, "Cutting the Army," *Army Times*, Springfield, IL, Feb. 6, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Tucker, MG Terry, retired, "From the President," *Cavalry and Armor Journal*, Fort Knox, KY, June-August 2010.

## ACRONYM QUICK-SCAN

**AFAV** – Advanced Fast-Attack Vehicle  
**ARC** – Army Reconnaissance Course  
**BCT** – brigade combat team  
**LRDG** – Long-Range Desert Group  
**LRS** – long-range surveillance  
**MGS** – Mobile Gun System  
**MRCV** – multi-role combat vehicle  
**NCO** – noncommissioned officer  
**RSLC** – Reconnaissance and Surveillance Leaders Course  
**SOF** – Special Operations Forces  
**TTOS** – Tactical Tracking Operations School  
**TTP** – tactics, techniques and procedures