



## One Size Fits All: the Future of the Scout Platoon and Squad

by SFC David J. Neuzil

If someone asked you to describe the organization of a U.S. Army scout platoon, could you do it? Many leaders in the Army cannot answer, since the right answer is “it depends,” which often results in a misunderstanding of the scout mission and scout-platoon capabilities.

This is because we currently have scout platoons in four types of brigades (armored, infantry, Stryker and battlefield surveillance brigades), and these brigades’ scout platoons have different organizational structures, even within their respective brigade combat team. (See Figures 1-6.) All our existing scout-platoon organizations are not tactically optimized to operate in our current environment or in anticipated future environments, as compromises were made to stay within the constrained force structure. As we transition to the new BCT structure and add the needed third maneuver battalion, now is also the time that we optimize and standardize the scout-platoon structure across BCTs by developing the proper balance of mounted and dismounted capabilities to succeed in full-spectrum operations.

This article recommends that U.S. Army ABCTs and SBCTs organize all their scout platoons with six Bradley Fighting Vehicles or Stryker vehicles and 36 personnel. These Soldiers would further organize into three dismounted squads of six scouts each, working with six crews mounted on scout platforms.

For IBCTs, I propose 10-wheeled platforms and 36 personnel. The 6 x 36 or 10 x 36 platoons offer more tactical versatility with the balance of dismounted and mounted capability and better command and control. This will provide standardization across the BCTs and increased firepower, mobility and protection, anticipating a transition back to decisive-action operations and additional tactical versatility through the addition and organization of dismounted personnel.

There is one disclaimer – this article is referring to modified table of organization and equipment and to doctrinal organization, and acknowledges that other enablers are often added to the scout platoon.

Lastly, to standardize across combined-arms formations, I propose to assign the titles “squad leader” to replace “section sergeant” and “team leader” to replace “squad leader.”

As already stated, our scout-platoon organizations vary from unit to unit. Some scout platoons’ squad MTOEs call for three troopers, while others have five. This article argues that a six-man squad is the best organization for the scout squad. This six-man squad would consist of two noncommissioned officers and four junior-enlisted Soldiers. The SL would be a staff sergeant, and the TL would be a sergeant.

To round out the platoon, there is a platoon leader squad and a platoon sergeant squad, both containing six total personnel. (See Figure 1.) This organization gives the scout platoon up to six squads, with six Soldiers per squad, for 36 assigned personnel in all scout platoons. (See Figure 2).

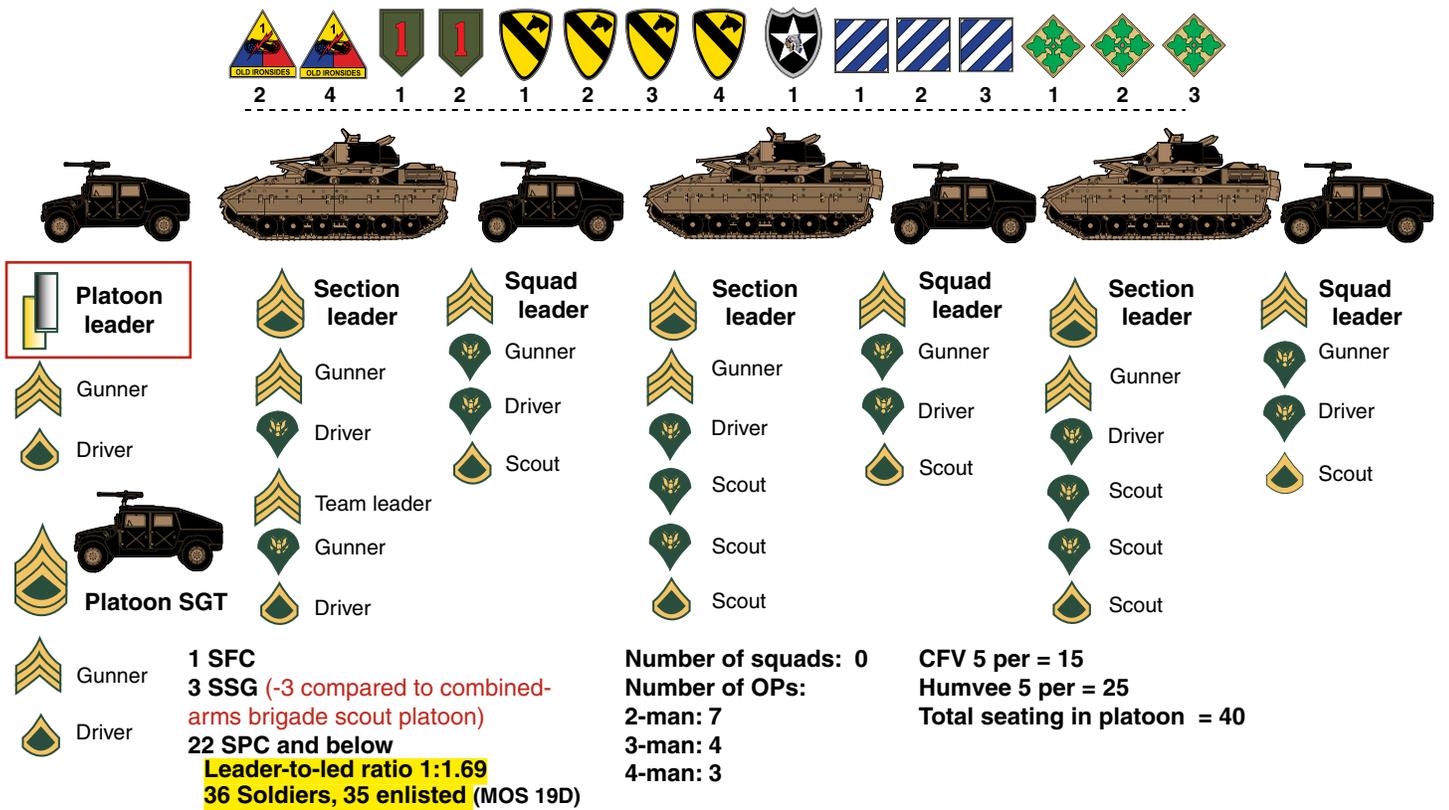


Figure 1. The structure of the ABCT's current armored reconnaissance squadron.

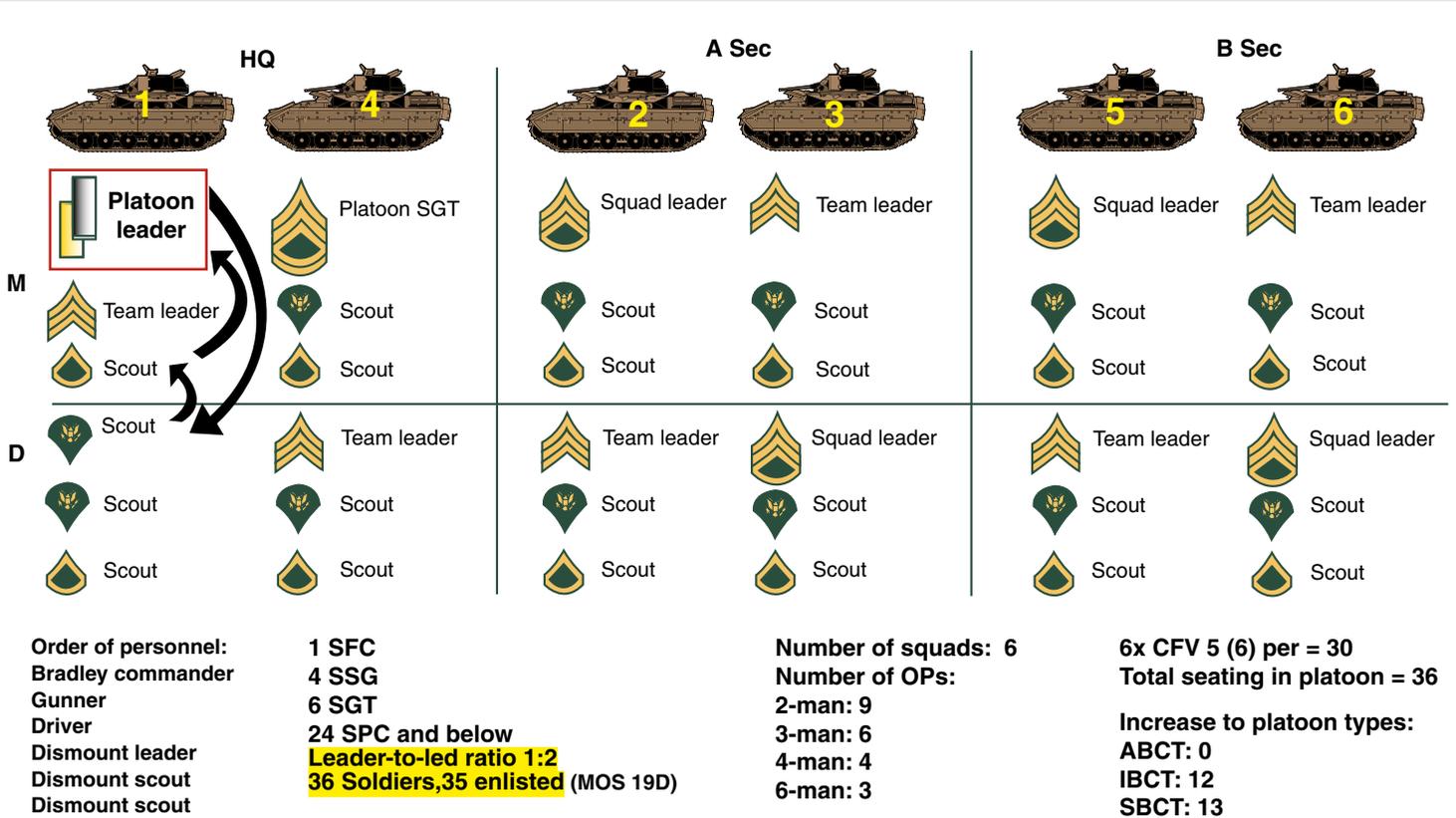


Figure 2. The recommended scout platoon as a Bradley platoon.

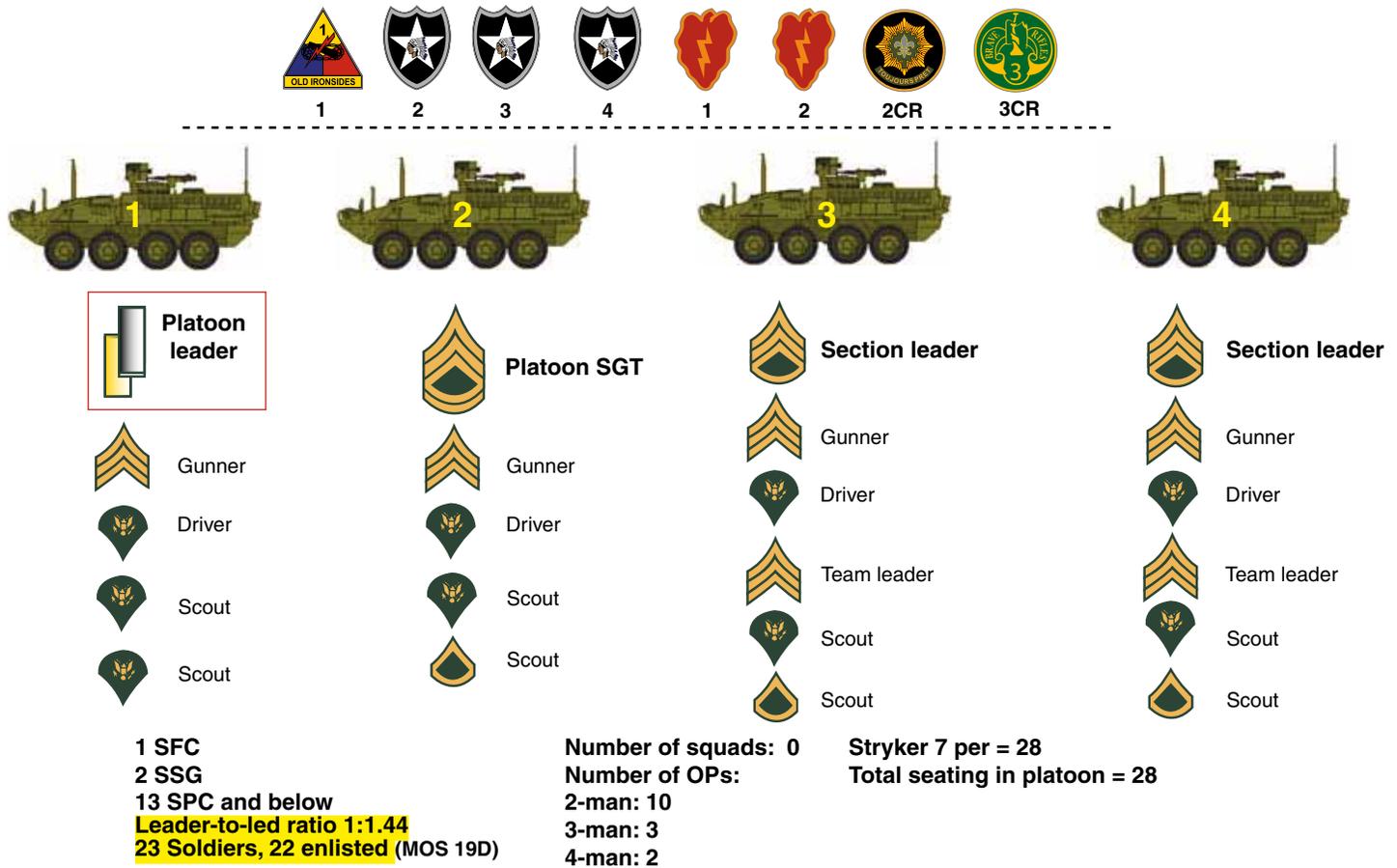


Figure 3. The SBCT's current reconnaissance squadron.

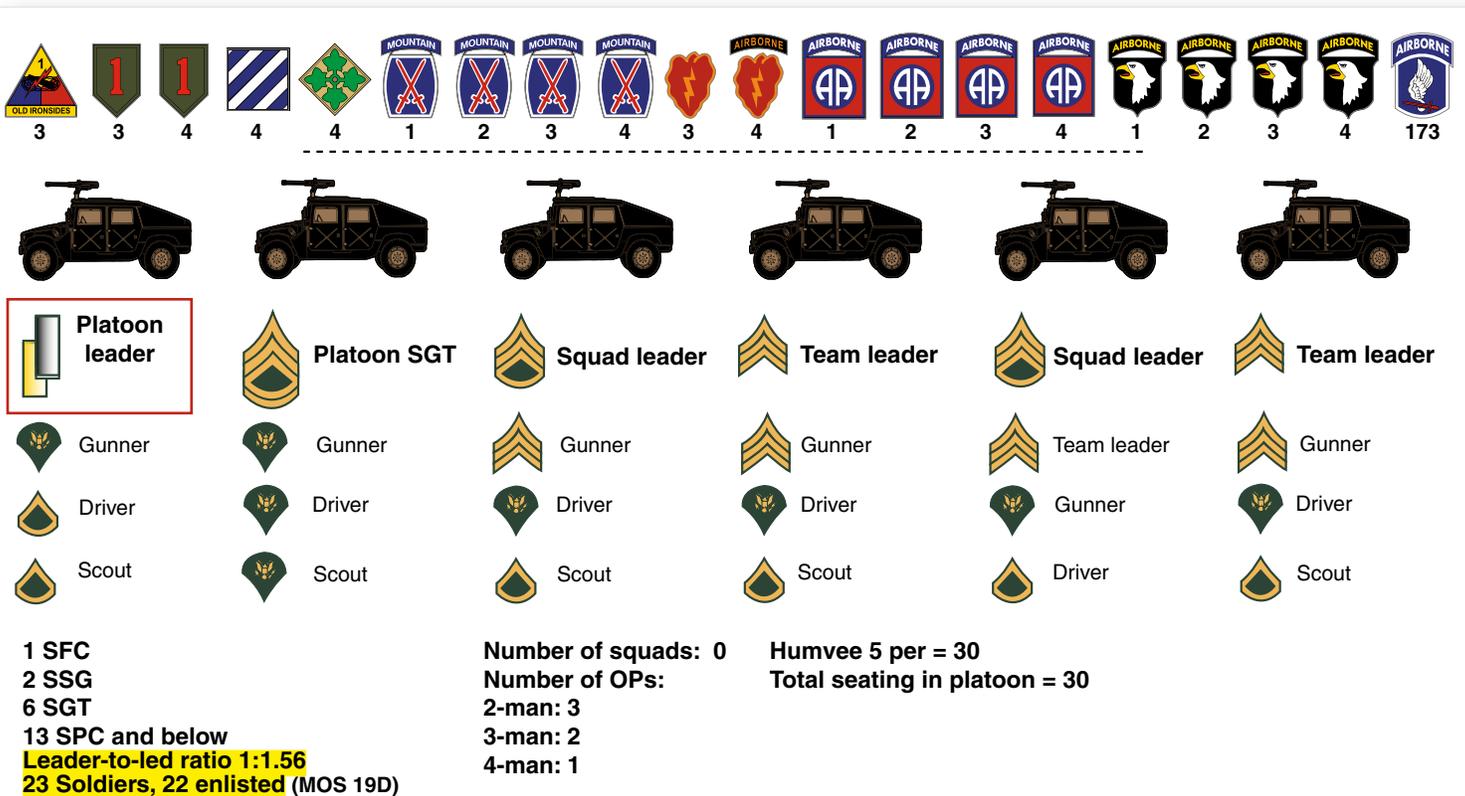


Figure 4. The IBCT's current reconnaissance squadron.

The six-man squad increases the platoon's "leader-to-led" ratio and offers a better distribution of leadership across the platoon. When mounted, the platoon leader leads the platoon with his platoon sergeant and NCO vehicle commanders. During dismounted operations, the platoon sergeant assumes control of the mounted element, and the PL is in charge of the dismounted element and the platoon as a whole. The proposed organizational structure shown in Figure 2 would also reduce the amount of leader movement within the vehicles when deploying dismounted squads. The only scouts who would move inside the vehicles in this proposed platoon are the PL, his gunner and one dismounted scout. This dismounted scout will train to serve as the PL's backup gunner.

In Figure 5, you can see distinct lines dividing the platoon into familiar sections, and then another line dividing the platoon between mounted and dismounted elements. This proposal changes our current manning to four staff sergeants in the platoon, but recommends that only two be assigned as vehicle commanders or mounted squad leaders. The other two staff sergeants will serve as dismounted squad leaders. This organization gives all six squads a senior and junior leader, which would allow commanders the flexibility to task-organize the platoon and squads into NCO-led teams if necessary.

The next benefit of this six-man squad over existing squad structures is increased versatility. To explain this point, we will consider a Bradley platoon with six BFVs as a model. Each section is large enough and has adequate leadership to operate independently. For example, if the platoon must dismount to search an urban area and the PL does not want to bring in large tracked vehicles, the mounted element could establish an overwatch or

support-by-fire position to support the dismounted element's movement. In the event of contact, the mounted element can support with long-range precision fires, additional maneuver or casualty evacuation as the situation requires. Because the mounted section has six vehicles assigned, the mounted teams can deploy. As a further example, if there is a casualty-producing event, two or three vehicles could quickly move to recover the casualties, and the remaining three to four vehicles can remain in the support-by-fire position to continue to provide overwatch and precision long-range fires.

This proposed configuration also anticipates a return to combined-arms maneuver and decisive-action operations. It also allows for more robust operations, providing enough manpower for more dismounted scouts for extended observation-post operations. In ABCTs and SBCTs with six squads of six Soldiers each, the scout platoon now has the ability to employ up to 18 dismounted scouts while retaining an 18-man section mounted on six vehicles. Given current tactical guidance from Afghanistan and from experience in Iraq, this gives the troop commander the ability to employ each section independently or as a 36-man element based on mission, enemy, terrain, troops available, time and civilians involved. The commander may elect to employ any number between six and 36 personnel with ready-made organic squads and adequate leadership to accomplish the mission. Building these robust dismounted elements is the best way to adequately meet the myriad of missions a scout platoon receives.

Finally, this recommendation deliberately uses the terms *squad leader* and *team leader*, which we acknowledge are the same titles used in the infantry. These terms are common across the

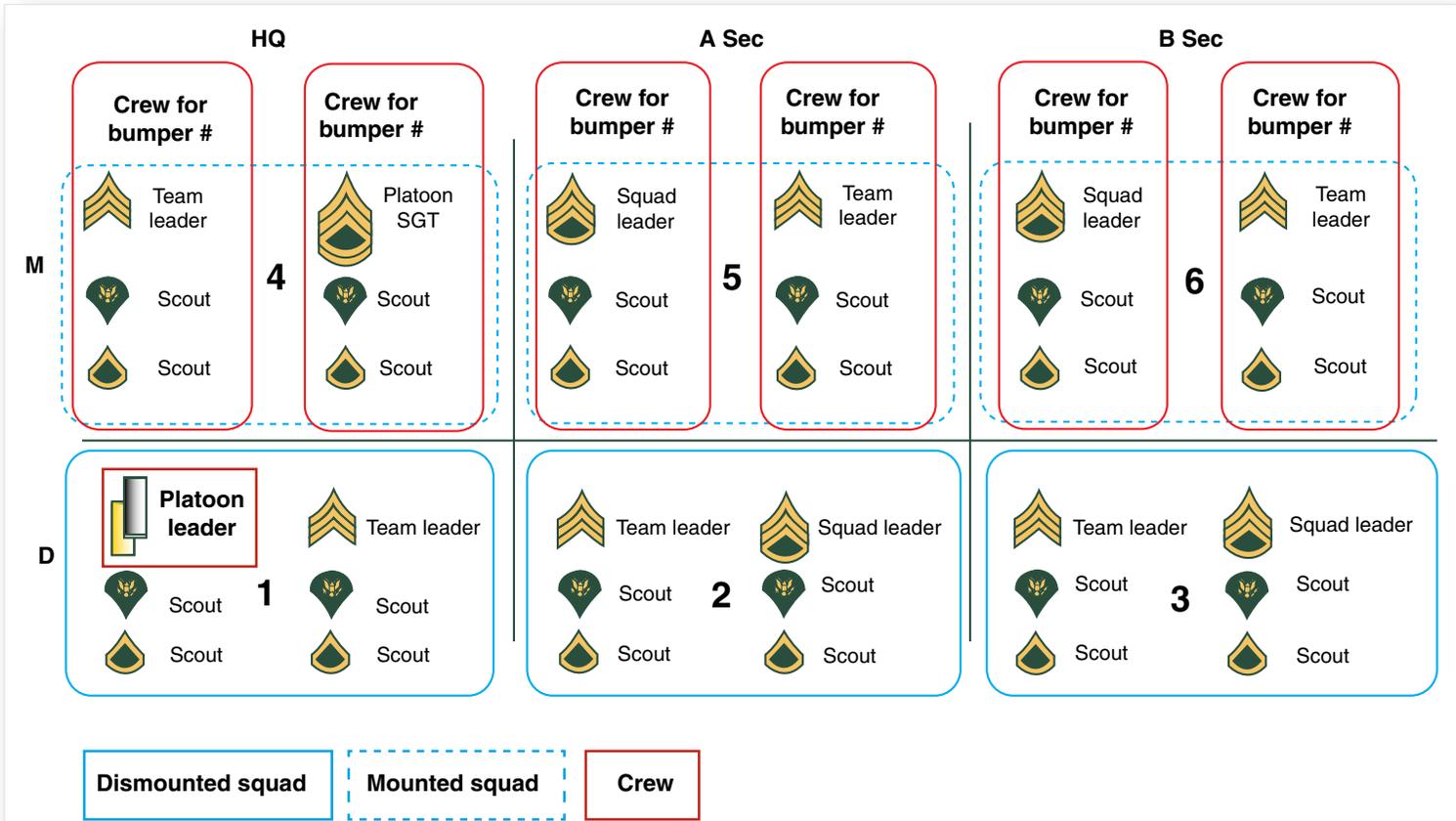


Figure 5. The recommended scout platoon.

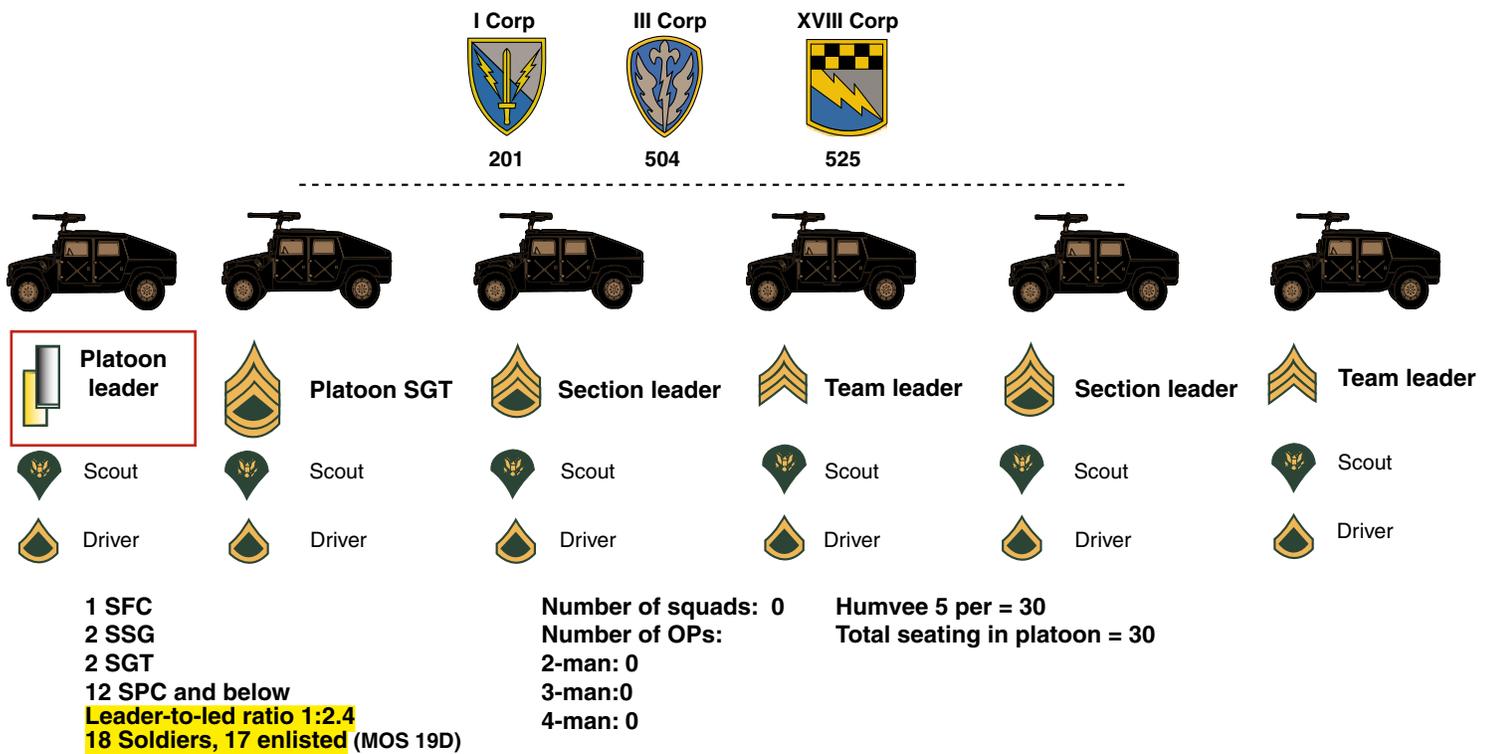


Figure 6. The BfSB's current reconnaissance squadron.

Army, since even sustainment units are broken down and equipped as squads. Units may still use terms like *section sergeant* and *senior scout*, but that is least preferred and would not be official terms on the unit-manning roster or evaluations. By comparison, terms such as *section sergeant* are not used in mechanized infantry units; they still refer to their staff sergeants as squad leaders. When scout NCOs are a vehicle commander in charge of two or more vehicles, they may refer to themselves as a "section sergeant," but even then, it is not their principle duty title, since the UMR would list them as a "mounted scout squad leader."

There are no perfect answers. This proposed 6 x 36 and 10 x 36 structures of the scout platoon address the core scout missions of route reconnaissance, area reconnaissance, zone reconnaissance and screening operations in current and future operating environments. In this article, we have discussed a number of topics surrounding the scout platoon 6 x 36 and 10 x 36 concepts. We redefined the scout squad and platoon, and recommended the use of terms standard across the Army for our scouts' duty positions. Most importantly, we demonstrated how this proposed organization will best increase the scout platoon's versatility. Finally, we offer that the 6 x 36 and 10 x 36 scout-platoon structures provide a more efficient organization for C2 at the platoon, squad and team levels.



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### ACRONYM QUICK-SCAN

- ABCT – Armor brigade combat team
- BCT – brigade combat team
- BFV – Bradley Fighting Vehicle
- C2 – command and control
- IBCT – infantry brigade combat team
- MTOE – modified table of organization and equipment
- NCO – noncommissioned officer
- PL – platoon leader
- SBCT – Stryker brigade combat team
- SL – squad leader
- TL – team leader
- UMR – unit-manning report