The Bradley Reconnaissance Fighting Vehicle

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"The bayonet has always been the weapon of the brave and the chief tool of victory."

— Napoleon Bonaparte

The Infantry community has no shortage of critics of the M2 Bradley Fighting Vehicle (BFV). Ranging from the size, speed, lethality, comfort, or the perceived antiquity of the platform, critics of one of the most lethal vehicles ever employed by the U.S. Army find a home in the crowd. However, the Bradley is not only undeserving of such criticism, but it fulfills the role put forth by its inception in both doctrine and combat. The M2 BFV is lethal and mobile, effective in both combat and reconnaissance, and useful across the spectrum of conflict ranging from peacekeeping to large-scale combat operations (LSCO). The M2 BFV platform effectively fulfills the role of a reconnaissance vehicle.

Despite advances in technology, the fundamentals of combat remain consistent. In the 2015 Army Operating Concept, LTG H.R. McMaster described the timeless characteristics of war as a human, political, uncertain contest of wills.[1] This enduring definition of the nature of warfare transcends the abstract and theoretical level and applies through all levels of war: strategic, operational, and tactical. Timeless principles of war also include actively fighting to determine the strength, composition, and disposition of a thinking enemy who actively practices deception. Because of this dynamic competition in the recon/counter-recon fight, reconnaissance units have always had to fight for information. In addition to actively fighting for information, the pressing forces of time and space on both forces, the pace of mechanized combat and the timeless nature of warfare have the majority vote in the outcome of armed combat.

Despite commanders' attempts to reign in the outcomes of battles, when two human opponents meet head-to-head in high-intensity conflict (HIC), the characteristics of warfare that LTG McMaster mentioned come to light. The 1973 Arab-Israeli War revealed that lightly armored reconnaissance formations were not survivable on the modern battlefield.[2] Western observers of the Arab-Israeli conflict took note and used that example to drive the development of one of the Army's "Big Five" modernization efforts — the M2 BFV. The M2 had its trial by fire in Operation Desert Storm (ODS). ODS was the first conflict for U.S commanders to demonstrate their attempt at digitized battlefield control. The Blitzkrieg maneuvers by allied armored and mechanized forces validated the BFV as both a reconnaissance and fighting

Soldiers assigned to the 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division maneuver a Bradley Fighting Vehicle during a training exercise at Drawsko Pomorskie Training Area, Poland, on 6 June 2020.

Photo by SGT Evan Ruchotzke

vehicle. After action reviews revealed that information developed too quickly to pass all the way to brigade and above commanders, so tactical leaders exploited the initiative and fought on. The tempo set by the very nature of armed combat outpaced the ability of command and control systems, thus revealing again a defining characteristic of reconnaissance in modern warfare: Reconnaissance formations must actively fight for information.[3]

Essential to framing a vehicle fit for a reconnaissance task is first understanding the fundamentals of reconnaissance. FM 3-90-2, *Reconnaissance, Security, and Tactical Enabling Tasks*, lists these fundamentals:[4]

- Ensure continuous reconnaissance
- Do not keep reconnaissance assets in reserve
- Orient on the reconnaissance objective
- Report information rapidly and accurately
- Retain freedom of maneuver
- Gain and maintain enemy contact
- Develop the situation rapidly

Photo by SSG Elizabeth Tarr

Soldiers assigned to 1st Battalion, 68th Armor Regiment, 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, conceal a Bradley Fighting Vehicle in wooded terrain on 20 January 2017 in Poland.

The BFV fulfills all of these fundamentals. History reveals time and again that reconnaissance formations are engaged in the fight for the duration of maneuver, are best used forward in the fight to answer the commander's priority intelligence requirements (PIRs), and require the lethality to develop the situation and the mobility to retain freedom of maneuver. The BFV receives criticism that its size and noise make it unsuitable for conducting reconnaissance; however, the fundamentals of reconnaissance, as well as countless historical examples, reveal a reconnaissance fight that is fast-paced, deadly, and loud. Listed below are the common criticisms and counter-arguments for the BFV as a reconnaissance platform:

Too Loud

As discussed, the characteristics of LSCO reveal a reconnaissance fight that is dynamic and chaotic. The Army designed the Bradley for this exact purpose, and its battlefield performance validates its efficiency. While observations at the Combat Training Centers (CTCs) are invaluable, it must be acknowledged that brigades do not fight alone, and the results of those experiences need to be cross-checked with after action reviews from combat. The BFV also maintains a "silent watch" capability which allows the crewman to use the commander's independent viewer (CIV) while the vehicle is turned off.

Too Tall

At a minimum, platoon leaders are responsible for conducting map reconnaissance as part of the troop leading procedures (TLPs). Map reconnaissance identifies intervisibility (IV) lines that allow masking vehicle movements, as well as templating enemy direct fire weapon systems placement. When BFVs conduct a movement to contact or a reconnaissance patrol to answer PIRs, an effective technique is to dismount Soldiers before an IV line and peek over the top with optics. While time consuming, confirming an enemy situation before exposing the BFV fulfills the principle of making contact with the smallest force possible. The BFV is also capable of using the TOW and conducting observation with the CIV in the turret defilade position, making it lethal to any enemy ground element while in the defense as well as reducing the signature of the platform.

Too Big

A similar concern to the "too tall" argument; this criticism argues that the Bradley is too big to effectively hide. Again, the Bradley can both be hidden out of line of sight (LOS) behind IV lines, in between trees, in the open with camouflage nets, or anywhere you can fit it. The mobility of the Bradley is superior to even the Stryker, especially in muddy terrain such as that in Eastern Europe, and the BFV can get to more places than any other Army fighting vehicle. Strict adherence to formations while concealing the BFV should

be the last concern with the first concern as security. Crews are responsible for conducting active and passive steps to conceal the vehicle, and NCOs are responsible for enforcing these measures.

The Army continues to refine its modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) to better prepare itself for LSCO.[5] Lessons from the CTCs and the "6x36" Force Design Update (FDU) to scout platoons in the armored brigade combat team (ABCT) recognize the need to switch the M3A3 Cavalry Fighting Vehicle (CFV) with the M2A3 Infantry Fighting Vehicle to accommodate for more dismounted soldiers.[6] While scout platoons in all formations are moving to this "6x36" formation, the greatest benefactor of this FDU is the scout platoon in the ABCT. This FDU gives the commander flexibility of conducting multiple types of reconnaissance in accordance with his recon guidance with the M2 as the foundation of the formation. The six M2s create a capable offensive and rapid option, while the 36 Soldiers offer a more deliberate and stealthier option. The mechanized platform that infantrymen are familiar with conducts reconnaissance tasks better than the CFV. The M2 holds more dismounts than its cavalry brother, and allows more flexibility to the scout platoon leader to employ a variety of reconnaissance formations and techniques. Along with the commander's reconnaissance guidance (CRG), scout platoon leaders conducts their own mission analysis according to METT-TC (mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops and support available, time available, and civil considerations). The M2-equipped scout platoon in the "6x36" configuration has the flexibility and lethality for any mission. The M2 is lethal, mobile, and fast, making it an ideal reconnaissance platform. Doctrine has always supported it, and history proves it to be an effective vehicle in many roles, unworthy of such unfounded criticism and worthy of praise for its battlefield performance and capabilities.

Notes

[1] LTG H.R. McMaster, "The Army Operating Concept: Continuity and Change," *Military Review*, 2015.

[2] John J. McGrath, *Scouts Out! The Development of Reconnaissance Units in Modern Armies* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 2008).

[3] Curtis D. Taylor, "Trading the Saber for Stealth: Can Surveillance Technology Replace Traditional Aggressive Reconnaissance," The Institute of Land Warfare, Association of the United States Army, September 2005.

[4] Field Manual (FM) 3-90-2, *Reconnaissance, Security, and Tactical Enabling Tasks*, 22 March 2013.

[5] Cavalry Squadron Universal Operational and Organizational Concept, Volume III, Standard Scout Platoon (6x36). Headquarters, Department of the Army, 10 February 2017.

[6] COL William C. Lindner, "Branch Update," given to resident Command and General Staff College students, 1 August 2018.

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Photo by PFC Shelton Smith

Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, dismount a M2 Bradley during platoon live-fire qualifications on 18 December 2017 at the Novo Selo Training Area in Mokren, Bulgaria.