

Bridging the Gap – Outfitting Standard Scout Platoons with M113A3s

by retired SFC David J. Neuzil

Armored brigade combat team (ABCT) Cavalry squadrons are setting the conditions to implement the standard scout platoon force-design update (FDU). The FDU fields Cavalry squadrons with six Bradley Fighting Vehicles (BFV) and 36 Soldiers per scout platoon. This configuration has proven to meet operational demands of reconnaissance and security missions more effectively than the current 3x5 BFV/uparmored humvee (UAH) mix. A squad leader is in charge of each of the six scout elements, and the configuration provides versatility, survivability, protection, mobility and firepower to perform all reconnaissance and security missions required against any opponent in the future operational environment.¹

However, this transition will take time to complete and may not be implemented across the total force. How then can we provide the ABCT combined-arms brigades (CAB) the benefits of the FDU in the meantime?

A short-term solution could be a scout-platoon design that features three BFVs by three M113A3 armored personnel carriers (APC). CAB leadership could reallocate the M113A3s already within their formations. This proposed solution would allow commanders to begin training in a six-vehicle configuration to expedite the development of internal standard operating procedures and contribute to doctrinal refinements.

The most significant advantage to using the M113A3 APC instead of the UAH is the increased troop-carrying capacity and the flexibility it affords without sacrificing protection, mobility or lethality. In the current 3x5 BFV and UAH mix, a platoon leader has the ability to dismount 12 scouts or two squads. The proposed short-term solution enables that same leader to dismount 18 scouts or three squads to conduct reconnaissance maneuver via the substitution of three M113A3s for the five UAHs.

Also, leaders would have added flexibility to transport attached Soldiers and conduct more effective casualty evacuation thanks to the added space inside the APCs, which enables treatment of casualties enroute to the next level of medical care. Treating casualties enroute is not possible with the UAH.

Lethality or increased recon?

Some argue that the loss of the UAHs decreases lethality of the formation because there would only be six platforms on the battlefield rather than eight (with the current five UAHs). However, the counterargument is that even with the eight vehicles of the current BFV and UAH mix, a platoon has to dedicate at least six Soldiers to move the extra vehicles (without degrading a crew), which leaves fewer Soldiers for dismounted maneuver. Therefore, fewer vehicles actually is a positive for the proposed solution because commanders can maximize reconnaissance elements forward with increased dismount capabilities. Arguably this enhances the ability to inform decisive action and provide mission command.

Also, the potential solution maintains the scout platoon's Long-Range Acquisition System capabilities with only slight modifications necessary to the M113A3.

Another advantage to the proposed solution is the increased survivability for the scout platoon with the use of M113A3s. History demonstrates the UAH has survivability shortcomings in a decisive-action environment against a determined threat. However, the M113A3 provides superior survivability and protection to the scout squad compared to the UAH. When it's fitted with a rocket-propelled-grenade cage, the squad has a much greater chance to survive first contact in the APC.

The M113A3 also provides more versatile mobility than the UAH. An element with all tracked armored vehicles allows enhanced cross-country maneuver not available in the current 3x5 scout platoon configuration. In addition, the M113A3 still has capabilities similar to the UAH on paved surfaces but with the added advantage of being able to navigate in close quarters. The range of operation is another benefit to the proposed solution because an APC can travel farther than an UAH on a single tank of fuel.

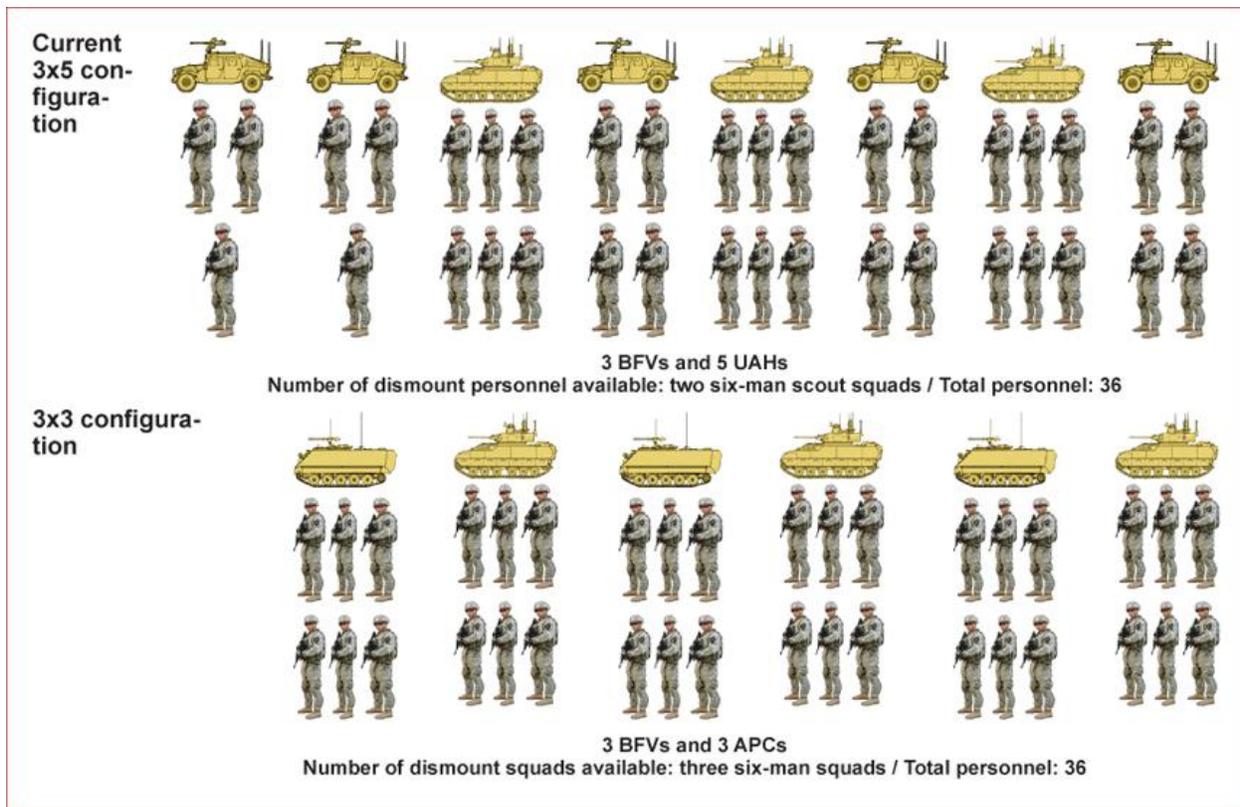


Figure 1. Comparison of current 3x5 configuration with proposed 3x3 configuration.

Also, the location of the fuel tanks for both vehicles is another positive for the proposed short-term solution. The APC has the advantage in this area due to its external tank that provides an added safety benefit for the scouts with respect to survivability while maintaining the internal area for cargo.

Summary

Until the Army can outfit all scout platoons with six BFVs, a potential short-term solution could be to replace the element's current five UAH platforms with three M113A3 APCs. With the reorganization of brigade combat teams across the force, M113A3 platforms are a feasible solution to bridge the gap. The M113A3 provides commanders the ability to adhere to the fundamentals of reconnaissance and security while maintaining troop flexibility, mobility, survivability and lethality in a decisive-action environment.

SFC David Neuzil is now retired. When he wrote this article, he was a career manager with Office of the Chief of Armor, U.S. Army Armor School, Fort Benning, GA. His previous assignments included operations noncommissioned officer, 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, NC; platoon sergeant, Troop K, 3rd Squadron, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, Fort Hood, TX; recruiter, Chico Recruiting Station, Chico, CA; section sergeant, Troop A, 1st Squadron, 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment (Light), Fort Polk, LA; and squad leader, Troop C, 1st Squadron, 1st Cavalry, 1st Armored Division, Armstrong Kaserne, Buedingen, Germany. His deployments included Operation Joint Endeavor Implementation Force, Bosnia; Operation Joint Forge Stabilization Force, Bosnia; two tours for Operation Iraqi Freedom; Operation Unified Response, Haiti; and Operation New Dawn, Iraq. SFC Neuzil's military education included the BFV Transitions Training Course, Pathfinder Course, Senior Leader Course, Army Recruiting Course, Basic Instructor Training Course, Basic Airborne Training, Air Assault School, Advanced Leaders Course and Warrior Leader Course. He was also inducted into the Excellence in Armor Program. He holds an associate's degree in business administration from American Intercontinental University.

Acronym Quick Scan

ABCT – armored brigade combat team

APC – armored personnel carrier

BFV – Bradley Fighting Vehicle
CAB – combined-arms brigade
FDU – Force Design Update
UAH – up armored humvee

Notes

¹“Standard Scout Platoon Proof of Principle,” U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command Capability Manager-ABCT and Reconnaissance, Capabilities Development and Integration Directorate, Maneuver Center of Excellence, April 16, 2014.