

# The Army Reconnaissance Course

by MSG Jacob Stockdill

Several years of combat have taught us many things. Combat can be ambiguous; it is also a physically grueling endeavor. Also, our ability as both an Army and a branch to conduct reconnaissance and security operations have been severely degraded. Army leaders should expect that any element conducting reconnaissance forward of the main body should be physically fit, mentally agile and led by tough, capable leaders in both the operational and institutional force.

The Army Reconnaissance Course (ARC) embraces this philosophy and uses it to develop reconnaissance experts who are educated, doctrinally sound and capable of meeting that demand.

Reconnaissance operations require not only the mental agility to think through a problem set and find solutions, but they also require great physical endurance. ARC tests both through a series of three- to five-day field-training exercises. The student is placed in leadership positions that require the ability to maintain cognitive abilities through long, arduous hours in all types of weather. If students do not possess the physical ability to persevere, it quickly becomes clear, as their capacity to retain information or make critical decisions decreases by the minute.

These two attributes, physical and mental, are symbiotic, especially when Soldiers conduct long-term reconnaissance and security operations over extended distances. To gauge physical acuity up front, ARC has instituted a physical-fitness test.

Many argue that a functional course should not require a physical standard. However, I could not disagree more. We cannot allow our cavalymen to be any less than excellent as we move closer and closer to the scout of 2020, where the expectation of junior leaders will be to fill information gaps at all levels of reconnaissance, conduct operations with indigenous reconnaissance elements and provide security to a multitude of joint formations. How can we expect anything less from our Soldiers and leaders within our community?

The greatest challenge academically in ARC is overcoming a fundamental lack of doctrinal knowledge from all students. ARC does not teach tactics, techniques and procedures; rather it reinforces these by demonstrating the places where they support doctrinal solutions.

ARC was the first course taught in U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command using Outcome-Based Training and Education after senior leaders recognized the need for reconnaissance leaders to be mentally tough and agile. Today ARC uses the Adaptive Soldier and Leader Training and Education (ASLT-E) methodology, maintaining its alignment with 21<sup>st</sup> Century Soldier competencies as well as the Army Learning Model 2015.

When students and cadre develop a peer-to-peer learning environment, ASLT-E works and a fuller understanding of doctrine begins. Once the student grasps doctrine in the classroom, the course forces them to execute and continue to learn in a field environment, where the second part of this process begins. By ensuring that each student is assessed academically against six base outcomes and seven leader attributes, ARC is able to clearly identify those who perform with a higher fundamental skill set. The ASLT-E methodology develops adaptive thinking by primarily taking the traditional Army instructor and placing him or her into a role of facilitator. Cadre members are then charged with being the catalyst for critical thinking in both the class and in the field while reinforcing doctrine.

High standards are a hallmark of our Army; should we not strive to achieve them at all times? Cavalry squadrons, troops and scout platoons are at a critical junction, forcing us to evaluate how we would conduct our role as part of an expeditionary Army deployed to an area that could be austere, contested, politically sensitive and at the limit of lines of communication. Those who graduate from ARC excel both academically and physically in the pursuit of achieving a "higher fundamental" understanding of reconnaissance and security operations. This course unequivocally develops tough, capable leaders who are physically fit and mentally agile. Simply put, ARC requires graduates to be the best reconnaissance Soldiers, ready to lead a scout formation.

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## **Acronym Quick-Scan**

**ABCT** – armored brigade combat team

**ARC** – Army Reconnaissance Course

**ASLT-E** – Adaptive Soldier and Leader Training and Education