

Information-Collection Plan and Reconnaissance-and-Security Execution: Enabling Success

by MAJ James E. Armstrong

As the cavalry trainers at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC), the Grizzly Team members had opportunities to observe diverse rotations and learned that GEN George S. Patton Jr.'s quote, "You can never have too much reconnaissance," still proves true.

During the past year, we observed some common challenges in linking information-collection (IC) planning with reconnaissance-and-security execution at both the battalion and brigade levels across multiple nations.

Doctrine gives us an example timeline for parallel planning efforts at the brigade level, using the brigade planning process mapped to cavalry-squadron actions and the planning timeline. This is a helpful diagram to start the discussion within units on how we tackle IC planning and execution challenges. There are various ways we have seen this accomplished with all degrees of success. Units may appoint brigade reconnaissance officers who act as what some call the chief of reconnaissance. Some units have task-organized all collection assets under the cavalry squadron, while others have embedded a quality officer in the brigade plans shop to facilitate parallel planning.

Any combination of these may work, but most importantly, we must recognize that these efforts all strive for the same results, which is to facilitate planning to enable our reconnaissance-and-security assets to begin collection in a focused, meaningful and synchronized fashion to provide the commander with the information needed to make decisions.

Field Manual (FM) 3-98

Regardless of what approach we may take to solve these planning challenges and translate them into effective action, there are a few key points to keep in mind as we develop our unit's solutions:

- Recognize that cavalry operations consist of reconnaissance and security, and must be conducted at echelon throughout the formation; reconnaissance and security must go beyond the modified table of organization and equipment or the named reconnaissance-and-security units.
- Understand that every minute lost to wringing our hands about what to do with reconnaissance-and-security forces is initiative lost to the enemy.
- Accept that risk to reconnaissance-and-security forces is necessary to provide information to the commander, reducing the overall tactical risk to the main body.
- Finally, recognize that our published IC plan is the operations order for our reconnaissance-and-security forces, and it needs to be rehearsed.

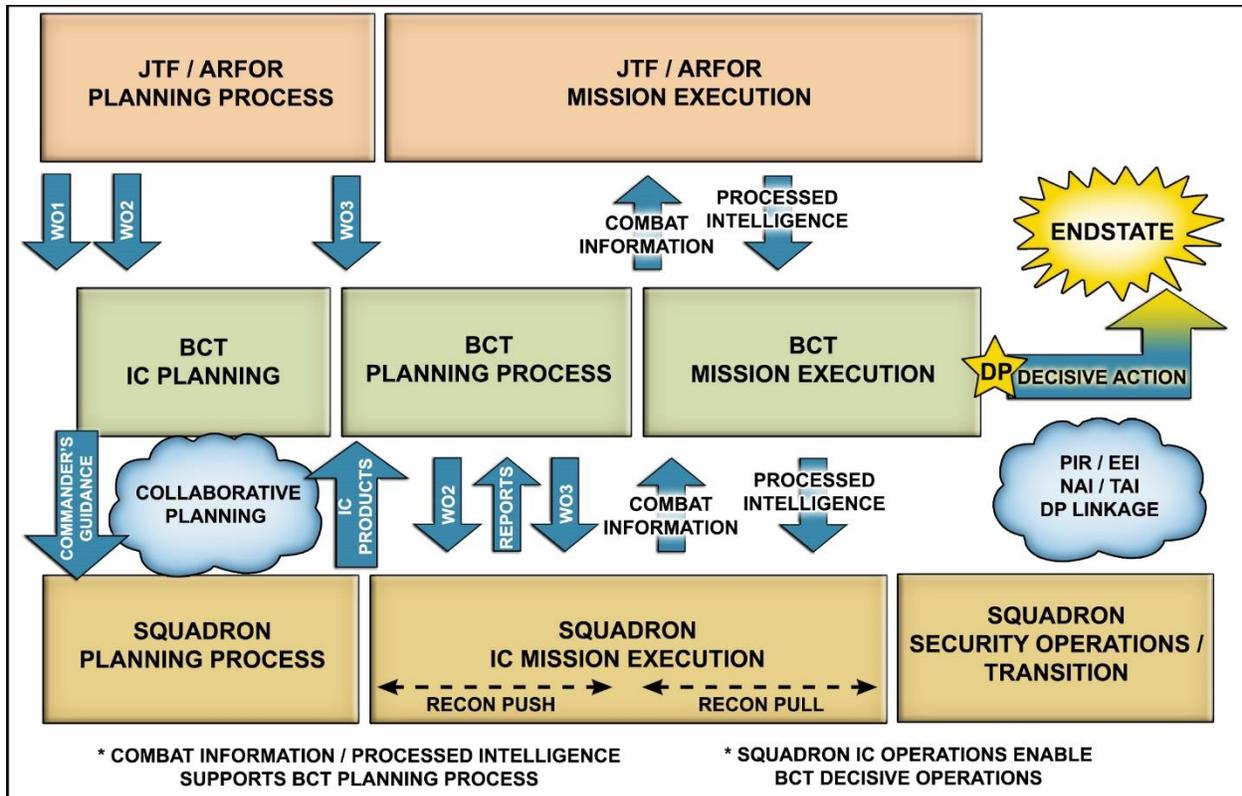


Figure 1. The BCT information-collection timeline. (Based on FM 3-98, Figure 4-4)

At echelon all the time

We cannot leave reconnaissance and security to only our named cavalry or reconnaissance units. Security is the first priority of work for all units. Reconnaissance is a troop-leading procedure executed at all levels and a fundamental point of security operations that must be done continuously. These are not tasks left to just the brigade's cavalry squadron or to the battalion's scout platoon. These tasks must be conducted across the unit at echelon and as a result of standard operating procedures (SOPs).

This is not a call for every Soldier a sensor. This is much more concrete than that. This is an acceptance that our task-organization may leave us without a cavalry squadron, scout platoon or a military-intelligence company. Our area of operations may extend beyond the capability of our cavalry squadron or scout platoon to cover the terrain. The weather may leave us with our only true all-weather reconnaissance asset. In any case, there are still information requirements to be answered and key terrain to be held, and the enemy will gladly take the initiative on either front if we don't. This is why throughout the rest of this article, you will read about reconnaissance-and-security forces, units or assets rather than cavalry squadrons or scout platoons.

We have seen many allied and partner units at JMRC create reconnaissance-and-security forces from within their maneuver task-organization at the lowest level with great success to allow their main body to maneuver out of contact to a position of advantage prepared to mass combat power at the decisive point.

Seize the initiative

Our IC plan must be planned as a result of staff integrated intelligence preparation of the battlefield and synchronized across all warfighting functions. It probably must be quite a few other things, but above all, it must be executed in time to provide the commander information needed to make decisions with enough time and maneuver space for it to matter. While our staffs will no doubt put a herculean effort into the daunting mission-analysis brief, commanders must recognize the critical role their ability and experience bring.

The commander alone may understand how our analysis at the early stages of the military decision-making process begins a process that will carry through to decision points in execution, mitigating key points of tactical risk. The staff's inexperience or inability to understand these links and the commander's visualization may result in an IC plan that does not provide our reconnaissance-and-security forces with the bottom-line products to enable success. This makes the commander's guidance for reconnaissance and security a critical part of the planning guidance. We need to understand the guidance for IC and how we support that plan across warfighting functions before we start complete course-of-action (CoA) sketches for the main body. Guidance from the commander must consist of more than just concurring with how and where we want to use unmanned-aerial-system assets.

Guidance includes focus, tempo, engagement/disengagement criteria and displacement criteria. It is also helpful if the commander shapes the staff's understanding of how initial collection efforts are important to refining their continued CoA development. Above all, simplicity in these initial steps is important because, in many cases, we are still working on planning assumptions. We must translate these assumptions into tactical tasks for reconnaissance-and-security forces; simplicity usually translates to speed. If the staff is allowed to struggle through the process on its own, the IC plan will likely be incomplete and not in time. While we are debating on when to send out the cavalry squadron, what task-organization changes we will make because our cavalry squadron was detached or which named area of interest (NAI) we should send the Shadow to, we will learn that the enemy just seized the key terrain. Now our forces must fight for it before they can begin collection.

Focus: threat, infrastructure, terrain and weather effects, and/or society (linked to information requirements and informed by information gaps).	Provide reconnaissance-and-security guidance that enables a clear understanding of your visualization of the battle and what you expect reconnaissance-and-security elements to accomplish.
Tempo: level of detail and covertness (rapid, deliberate, stealthy, forceful).	Tell subordinates what to look for and why – this will enable them to use disciplined initiative to answer your PIR sooner rather than later.
Engagement / disengagement criteria: when to fight, what to fight, what to bypass.	Thorough guidance also helps the staff understand how the commander visualizes reconnaissance and security as part of the overall operation and where he is willing to accept risk.
Displacement criteria: trigger(s) to withdraw.	

Figure 2. The commander's reconnaissance-and-security guidance should include these elements.

Mitigate, accept risk

Sending forces early in the mission timeline to conduct reconnaissance and security while we are still developing friendly CoAs does put them at risk. However, we must mitigate that tactical risk and be willing to execute. If we do not, then we have translated that risk to the main body and, ultimately, our higher unit's mission. We have a simple chart in doctrine that describes the relationship between information, risk and the commander.

Army Doctrinal Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-90

ADRP 3-90 emphasizes that "[i]f the commander lacks sufficient information to make an informed choice, the first priority must be to gain the required information to support decision-making while at the same time taking precautions to protect friendly forces from surprise."

We fail to recognize that our reconnaissance-and-security efforts, executed as soon as possible, are what provides this information and enables our analysis to produce intelligence. The commander does not want to keep a large reserve, but without confidence of enemy locations and enemy actions, the commander may decide to hold more forces longer while waiting for enough information to commit them. More information allows the commander to be more audacious in execution. Sending a tank company to attack the enemy's rear or conducting an air assault to destroy an enemy mission-command node is no longer a gamble. It becomes a mitigated risk when we know the disposition of the enemy main effort and security forces.

Risk	
Less information and intelligence	More information and intelligence
More uncertainty More risk to force	Less uncertainty Less risk to force
↓	↓
Commander employs:	Commander employs:
More reconnaissance and surveillance	Smaller reconnaissance and surveillance
Larger reserve	Smaller reserve
More security formations	Fewer security formations
Slower speed of operations	Faster speed of operations
Less distributed operations	More distributed operations

Figure 3. Risk-reduction factors. (Based on ADRP 3-90, Figure 1-1)

Reconnaissance-and-security operations order

Sending our reconnaissance-and-security forces out early and quickly emphasizes our responsibility to mitigate their tactical risk through the development of a plan to support them across the warfighting functions. If our IC plan is not truly owned by the operations staff section and we allow our intelligence section to develop a one-slide depiction of NAIs and priority intelligence requirements (PIRs), supported by a monster Excel document as a collection tasking matrix, we have failed our reconnaissance-and-security forces.

If the brigade has a cavalry squadron, that squadron staff can hopefully mitigate the lack of effort at the brigade level by putting together a comprehensive and complete plan. If we have a company/troop-level leader or platoon-level leader moving out at the publication of our IC plan with a PowerPoint slide full of NAIs and brigade-level PIR but with no detailed sustainment, medical, fires or protection plan, our plan will fail. In such a case, we can expect their first-contact report with the enemy to be their last. Doctrine leads us to think that the staff-integrated IC plan belongs in Annex L. Whether in a separate order or in Annex L, it must be done and done well.

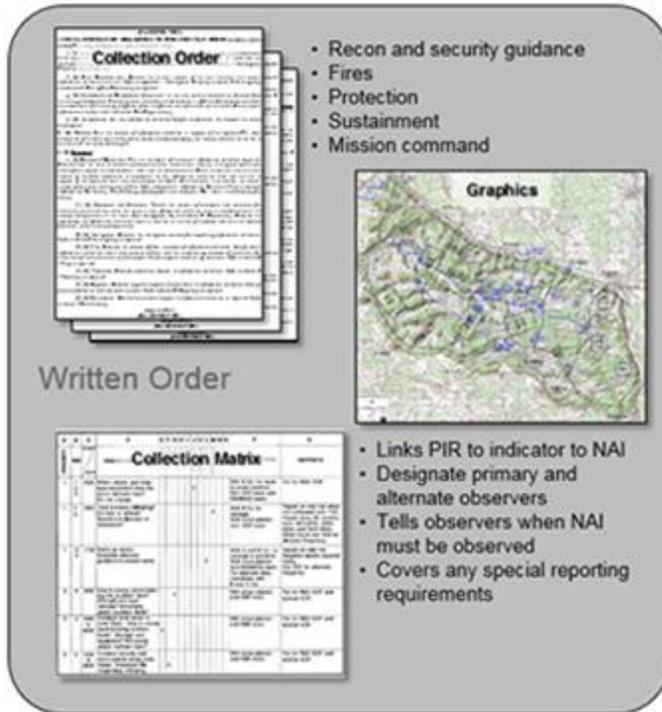


Figure 4. Annex L.

The collection order, also known as Annex L or the reconnaissance-and-security annex, clearly describes how IC activities support the brigade operation. At a minimum it should:

- Include the commander's guidance for recon and security;
- Explain how fires, protection and sustainment will support the collection plan;
- Explain command relationships, communications support and special-reporting requirements;
- Enable all elements to exercise disciplined initiative in support of the plan.

The IC overlay is a graphical depiction of the plan. It depicts IC in terms of time and space:

- Identify NAI or TAI;
- Link PIR to the same;
- Time(s) to observe;
- Reporting guidance
- Non-SOP fire support and airspace coordination measures.

In addition to a complete plan, we must rehearse:

- Do we combine the brigade IC rehearsal with the cavalry squadron combined-arms rehearsal?
- Do we combine the brigade IC rehearsal with the brigade fires rehearsal to address the recon-lethality link?
- Do we execute a separate brigade IC rehearsal as soon as we publish the collection plan?

Any one of these techniques, or one of the many not mentioned, can be effective. The critical part of the IC rehearsal is the results. We must synchronize our collection efforts to ensure we use our assets in the most effective and efficient manner. We have to address points of friction, anticipated contingencies and the reconnaissance handover. We must be able to demonstrate how we cue, mix and add redundancy to answer the commander's information requirements. Above all, we must walk away from the rehearsal with a shared understanding by all about how everyone contributes to the collection plan and the overall unit mission.

The last element for success must be to train as we fight. We must incorporate these actions into our training. Commanders must design exercises to allow reconnaissance-and-security operations to begin immediately upon deployment to the area of operations. We must do all we can to prevent unrealistic constraints on reconnaissance-and-security operations during training events. Allow units to deploy forces early and give them the opportunity to collect on and answer PIR. This must include indicators across the operational variables and not just on opposing forces. We must also make every effort to begin events with a "warm start" at staff levels to exercise parallel planning while in execution of reconnaissance-and-security tasks as a part of the IC plan.



<p>Task: Rehearse the collection plan and all IC efforts in the brigade.</p>	<p>Purpose of the rehearsal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Ensure that subordinate units' reconnaissance-and-security plans are synchronized with other units in the brigade; -Ensure that reconnaissance-and-security plans of all subordinate commanders will properly achieve the brigade commander's intent.
<p>Key attendees: brigade executive officer and S-3; brigade and battalion S-2s; air-liaison officer, assistant brigade engineer and chemical officer; Cavalry commander, aviation-battalion commander, field-artillery battalion commander, engineer-battalion commander</p>	
<p>Desired results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Shared understanding of how all elements contribute to the brigade collection plan and how reconnaissance-and-security operations will contribute to accomplishment of the brigade mission; -Shared understanding of reconnaissance handover among all elements and enablers; -Shared understanding of reaction to anticipated contingencies. 	

Figure 5. IC rehearsal.

We have seen constant improvements and creative solutions at JMRC. Task-organization and participating nations create their own challenges, but the after-action reviews often describe the same importance of information collection (or lack thereof), whether it is from a brigade from the Czech Republic, the United States or Italy. As a result of a diverse task-organization, units often do not have a standard Cavalry unit to execute the ground tactical IC plan. This creates a unique opportunity every rotation to see creative solutions at echelon to accomplish reconnaissance-and-security tasks and reinforces the imperative of conducting these tasks if there is any chance at winning on the battlefield.

Within the next month, we will have an opportunity to observe the 173rd Airborne Brigade (Sky Soldiers) conduct an airborne joint forcible entry with their cavalry squadron at Exercise Saber Junction 16, which is a simultaneous combination of offensive, defensive and stability missions with an emphasis on tactical interoperability among the Allied and partner-nation forces.

We look forward to having these discussions and capturing how the Sky Soldiers approach the problem. While we continue to look for the right ways to integrate cavalry squadrons within the brigade planning process, how to enable the brigade deep fight and whether or not our squadrons are designed correctly, we cannot lose sight of why we conduct IC. We must address these bottom-line issues because the enemy is already on the move to seize the key terrain.

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References

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