

# What Do We Mean When We Say ‘Fight For Information’?

by LTC Nathan Palisca

The term *fighting for information* is used widely across our Army to describe the employment of cavalry squadrons in both reconnaissance and security operations. Unfortunately the meaning of that term is often just as widely misunderstood. Ask a group of maneuver professionals what it means to fight for information and you’re likely to receive a wide variety of answers.

This article will attempt to codify what fighting for information can and should mean for our cavalry formations and, by extension, for the maneuver force writ large.

As a phrase, *fighting for information* is common in both our professional conversations and in our doctrine. A word search of the four cavalry doctrinal manuals – Field Manual (FM) 3-98, **Reconnaissance and Security Operations**; Army Technical Publication (ATP) 3-20.96, **Cavalry Squadron**; ATP 3-20.97, **Cavalry Troop**; and ATP 3-20.98, **Reconnaissance Platoon**, plus FM 3-55, **Information Collection** – returns 45 hits for the term *fight* (or *fighting*) *for information*. Regrettably, all five of these manuals fail to define the phrase. The closest reference to a definition can be found in FM 3-98 that contains a vague description of cavalry units fighting to overcome enemy efforts to protect vital information. This lack of specificity leads to *fighting for information* being misused in many conversations as an umbrella term to generically mean “cavalry stuff.”

## Defining ‘fight for information’

So what do we mean when we say *fight for information*? What should we mean? The short answer is that it depends both on the tactical circumstances and the mission (i.e., reconnaissance or security). There are three broad definitions for *fighting for information* we should consider and integrate into our professional vocabularies. These meanings depend on context, are not mutually exclusive and, in many cases, can overlap during the course of a single mission.

Context-specific definitions of *fighting for information* should include:

- Fighting with the intent to cause an enemy reaction that can be observed and reported by either a cavalry unit or another sensor (unmanned aerial system (UAS), signals intelligence (SIGINT), rotary-wing aircraft, counterbattery radar, etc.). This is often an objective of a forceful, enemy-oriented zone reconnaissance, and it is the primary purpose of a reconnaissance-in-force.
- Destroying enemy reconnaissance assets to access and expose secondary threat echelons to friendly collection assets and potentially alter the enemy’s decision cycle. A cavalry squadron or troop conducting a screen that destroys threat reconnaissance elements and forces the enemy commander to deploy his/her main body earlier than intended provides valuable information about the threat’s disposition to the brigade combat team (BCT).
- Fighting to reach a position from which to conduct collection. An example of this would be a cavalry squadron fighting through an enemy disruption zone to establish contact with the enemy main body.

Regardless of the definition or context used, fighting for information entails the use of contact with an enemy force to generate information that will inform the higher headquarters’ common operational picture (COP) or otherwise further the information-collection (IC) effort.

## Tenets of fighting for information

It is important to note that in many cases fighting for information can, and should be, a synergistic effort. While a cavalry organization will collect and report information resulting from its reconnaissance or security operations, observation of secondary echelons or enemy reactions by other sensors (rotary wing, UAS, SIGINT, etc.) helps harness the breadth of information the cavalry squadron generates. Synchronizing all the BCT’s IC assets in time, space and purpose; using the management methods of cueing, mixing and redundancy; plus integrating the following tenets, are critical to achieving the necessary effects of fighting for information.

The six core tenets of fighting for information should include:

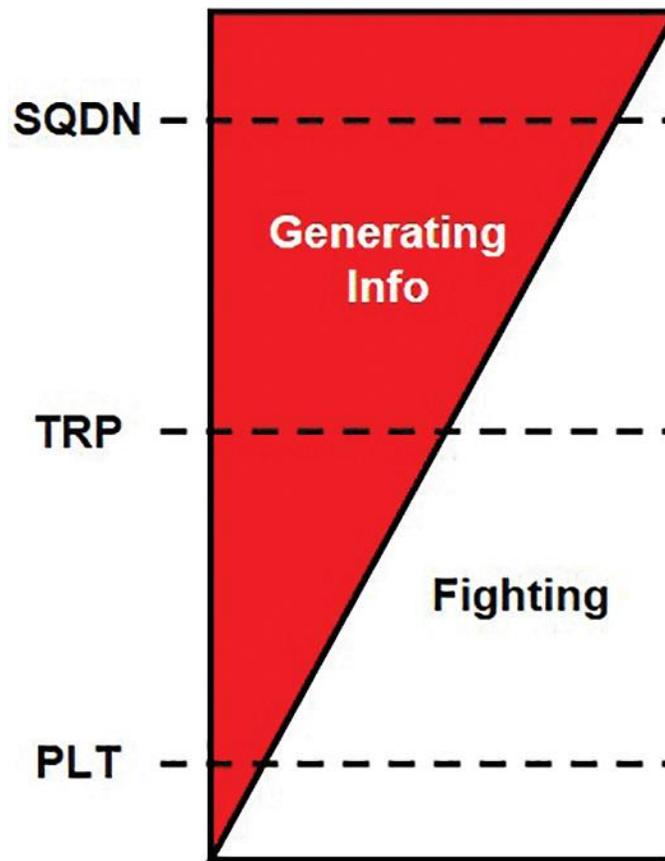
- **Winning first contact.** *Fighting for information* does not imply only direct-fire contact. Cavalry formations can collect information and potentially influence enemy forces through any of the eight forms of contact. Regardless of the form, establishing contact on the commander's terms and maintaining or seizing the initiative is critical to shaping the engagement. It sets the conditions to fight for information.
- **Focused and limited offensive or defensive action.** Whether engaged in reconnaissance or security operations, fighting for information ideally begins with U.S. forces initiating offensive or defensive action across the appropriate forms of contact. It is critical to keep the scope of this action focused on collection requirements and limited to prevent decisive engagement when possible. Circumstances under which to engage, with which form of contact and how much combat power to employ should be clearly outlined in the commander's reconnaissance or security guidance.
- **Retaining freedom of maneuver.** Throughout the course of the engagement, cavalry units must retain the freedom to maneuver. This allows them to reposition and expose more of the threat's order of battle or to conduct a battle handover with maneuver companies and/or battalions if necessary. It is important to keep the idea of retaining freedom of maneuver in perspective by echelon. A troop or squadron can retain freedom of maneuver even if one of their subordinate elements is decisively engaged.
- **Causing an enemy reaction that can be observed.** This is one of the most critical aspects of fighting for information. As cavalry units fight through and identify multiple threat echelons, the enemy will react. Potentially, the enemy's reaction will be in several ways simultaneously. Each of these threat reactions offers information on the enemy's strength, disposition and intentions. BCTs should synchronize and orient all the IC assets at their disposal (cavalry squadron, UAS, rotary-wing aviation, SIGINT, etc.) to derive maximum value from the cavalry's actions.
- **Rapidly developing the situation.** Once the threat has reacted to the initial engagement, it has changed the tactical situation in some way and potentially in several ways. Cavalry units must evaluate and report these enemy reactions, then act swiftly to either seize opportunities or reposition to identify a different enemy vulnerability. It is critical that cavalry commanders are empowered and trusted to act within the BCT commander's intent and in accordance with the principles of mission command.
- **Identification of enemy vulnerabilities to exploit.** Enemy units will generally reveal more of their strength and intentions throughout the course of an engagement. It is incumbent on the cavalry squadron to work in conjunction with the BCT staff to fuse information, identify enemy vulnerabilities and recommend ways to apply the BCT's combat power from a position of advantage. The cavalry-squadron S-2 (intelligence officer) and S-3 (operations officer) must maintain a continual dialogue with the BCT S-2 and S-3 to assess both the friendly and enemy situations, and to formulate recommendations for the BCT commander.

One of the most critical aspects of setting the conditions to successfully fight for information is the development and issuance of thorough commander's reconnaissance or security guidance. Descriptive and well-articulated guidance (focus, tempo, engagement/disengagement criteria and displacement criteria) clarifies the conditions under which subordinate elements are expected to fight (or not). Fully developed commander's reconnaissance guidance outlines how the reconnaissance is to be conducted; specifies what information must be collected and reported; and preserves the squadron's combat power by avoiding unnecessary engagements. The key to producing sound commander's reconnaissance guidance is balancing between being descriptive enough to provide focus but not prescriptive to a point that it limits subordinate leaders' flexibility of action.

It is important to keep the term *fighting for information* in perspective by formation type. All cavalry squadrons (armored BCT (ABCT), Stryker BCT and infantry BCT) possess the ability to fight for information, but each formation type is best used against specific types of threats. Understanding the capabilities and limitations of a specific formation type and assessing available combat power relative to the enemy is critical to understanding the conditions under which a cavalry squadron can fight for information successfully.

While keeping formation type in mind is important to understanding a unit's ability to fight for information, it is equally important to focus on what it means to fight for information at echelon. While all cavalry organizations

have a requirement to identify, understand and report what they are observing or are in contact with, the responsibility to analyze and distill meaning from those reports increases at higher echelons. (See Figure 1.) Specifically, squadron staffs should correlate reports and place them into context with respect to the entire BCT area of operations. They should continuously communicate and work with the BCT staff, adding to the overall COP. Critical to this process is the staff's understanding of the linkage between BCT-level decision points, the priority intelligence requirements (PIR) that inform those decisions and the named areas of interest (NAIs) where answers to the PIR can potentially be found.



**Figure 1. Inverse proportion of fighting and analysis at echelon.**

Although the squadron S-2 and S-3 are likely not fighting directly, this analysis at the squadron level generates the information that is the second half of the *fighting for information* equation. Fighting is the first half; capturing and making sense of reported information that informs the BCT commander's decisions is the other half.

This is not to imply that cavalry troops and scout platoons don't have a responsibility to understand and refine the information they report. On the contrary, this is where the refinement of collected information should begin. The proportional shift in responsibility to generate information is simply a function of increased analytical capability at higher echelons.

### **Fighting for information vs. developing the situation**

Some in the maneuver community would submit that *fighting for information* is simply *developing the situation* by another name. Those in this camp would point out that reporting is key to both terms, and that *developing the situation* is one of the fundamentals of reconnaissance. In both cases, they would be correct. However, although the two phrases are unquestionably close cousins, they are nonetheless discernibly different.

Take the case of a maneuver battalion conducting a movement-to-contact. At the point when contact is made with the enemy, the battalion's formation is relatively massed (i.e., companies are likely within mutual supporting distance of each other). Upon making contact, the battalion commander assesses the situation within the

battalion's area of operation, identifies positions of advantage and maneuvers to destroy the enemy. In this situation, the battalion's goal is the destruction or defeat of the enemy. Reporting the combat information occurs as a matter of course during the engagement.

A scenario where a cavalry squadron conducts a force-oriented zone reconnaissance shares many similarities with the movement-to-contact example, but it also has some critical differences. When enemy contact is made, the squadron is almost certainly not massed. Instead, it's likely dispersed across the entirety, or at least the bulk, of the BCT's frontage. Upon contact, the squadron commander assesses the situation, decides to fight or displace based on engagement/disengagement/displacement criteria, avoids decisive engagement if possible and, above all, strives to maintain situational awareness and continued reporting across the entirety of the BCT's front or flank.

In this scenario, the squadron's goal is the collection and reporting of information to inform the BCT's COP to enable decision-making. Destruction or defeat of the enemy is only useful to the cavalry squadron as it relates to furthering the IC effort. Developing the situation occurs in due course of the engagement rather than being the immediate imperative it is for the maneuver battalion.

The following vignette seeks to illustrate some of the key concepts of fighting for information. Note that all the units in this vignette are fictitious. They are not meant to depict the actions of an actual unit either during an operational deployment or at a combat-training center (CTC).

### Vignette: zone reconnaissance

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Squadron, 23<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Regiment, supporting effort (SE) No. 1 for the BCT, is assigned to conduct an enemy-oriented, rapid and forceful zone reconnaissance in support of a deliberate attack by 2/88 ABCT against a defending reinforced enemy mechanized-infantry battalion. The BCT situation template (sittemp) is depicted in Figure 2.

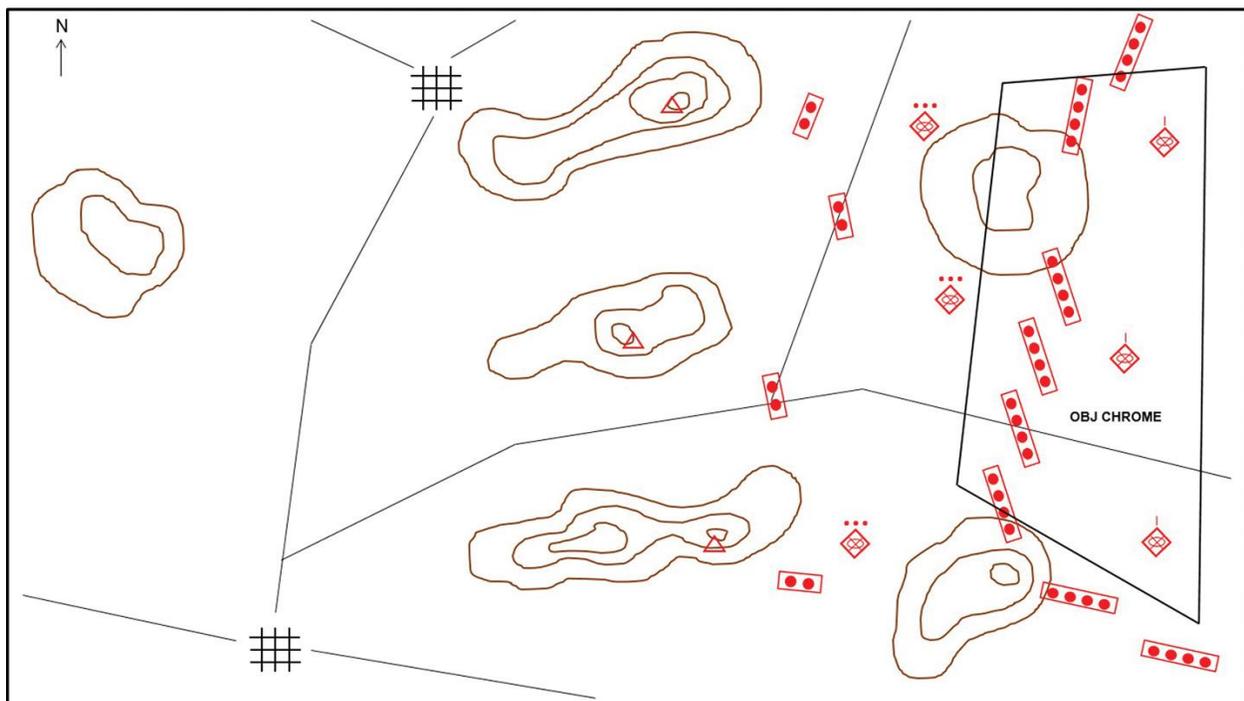


Figure 2. 2/88 ABCT sittemp.

**2-23 Cav mission:** 2-23 Cav conducts an enemy-oriented zone reconnaissance from Phase Line (PL) Dallas to PL Denver not later than 290500OCT20XX (military time = 5 a.m. Oct. 29, 20XX) to cause the collapse of the enemy disruption zone and identify the main defensive belt to enable the BCT's seizure of Objective Chrome.

**2-23 Cav commander's reconnaissance guidance:**

**Focus:** Our primary focus during this reconnaissance is to identify enemy defensive positions; our secondary focus is to identify terrain that supports the BCT scheme of maneuver. Reconnaissance objectives include: 1) the enemy disruption zone; 2) the enemy main defensive belt (including obstacle locations); 3) bypasses for any manmade or natural obstacles; and 4) terrain that supports assault positions, attack-by-fire (ABF) positions or support-by-fire (SBF) positions for the maneuver battalions.

**Tempo:** Rapid and forceful. Stealth is not critical, and time is of the essence. We must quickly collapse the disruption zone by either destroying or forcing the displacement of the enemy's counter-reconnaissance forces. Locate bypasses around any disrupting obstacles to allow us to maintain momentum and quickly identify the enemy's main defensive positions.

**Engagement/disengagement criteria:**

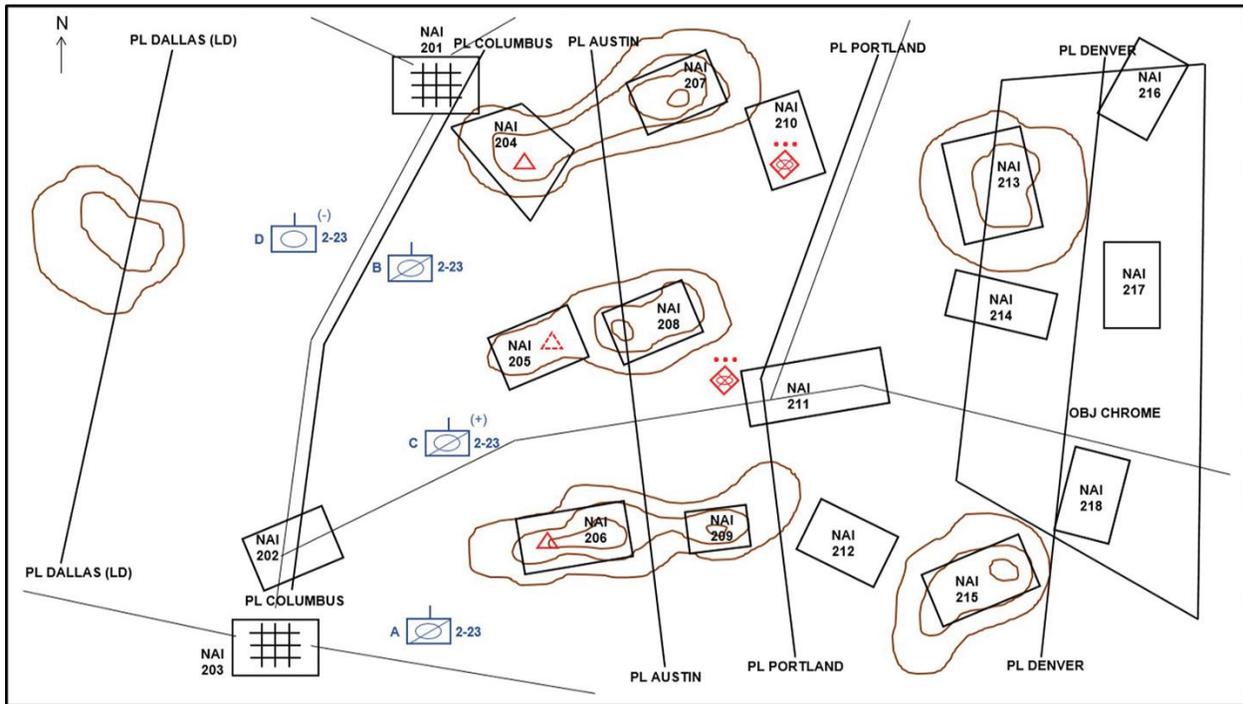
**Cavalry troops:** Immediately engage enemy BRDMs [Boyevaya Razvedyvatelnaya Dozornaya Mashina – a Russian scout vehicle] or BMPs [Boyeva Mashina Pekhoty – a Russian fighting vehicle] of platoon size or smaller. The preferred method is to engage with indirect fire and transition to direct fire when enemy vehicles begin to displace. Do not engage enemy tanks without support from D/2-23 Cav (the tank company) except in self-defense. You are free to engage anything on the high-payoff target list with indirect fire or attack aviation. Request authorization to engage these targets with direct fire. Be prepared to transition to a screen or a hasty defense once the enemy main defensive belt is identified.

**Tank company:** Your primary focus is destroying enemy tanks. Allow the cavalry troops to develop the situation before committing our armor. Tank platoons will engage individual enemy tanks and sections; the tank company will engage enemy tank platoons.

**Displacement criteria:** Enemy armored vehicles greater than platoon size and closer than 1,500 meters are criteria for displacement. Assess the situation, report if displacement criteria has been met, recommend a course of action and request authorization to displace. We must maintain contact even if we are forced to displace.

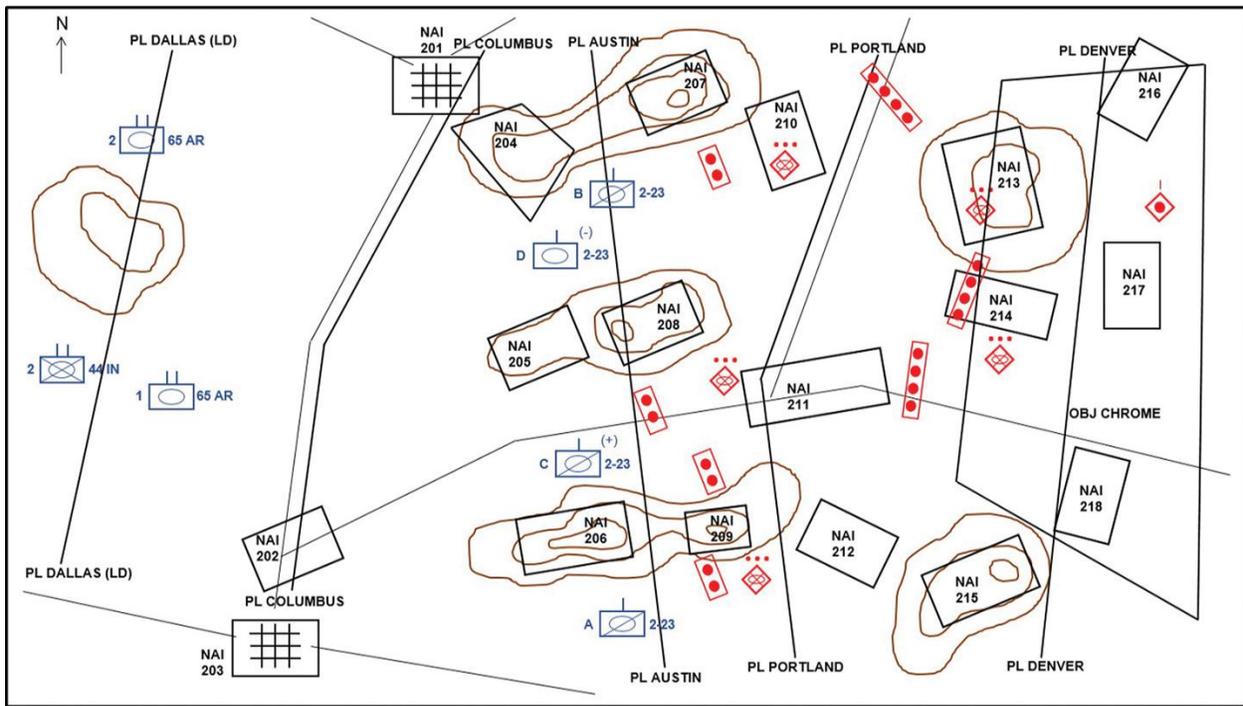
With this guidance, 2-23 Cav arrays one cavalry troop against each avenue of approach (AoA): Troop B in the north, Troop C in the center and Troop A in the south. The squadron has task-organized a tank platoon to Troop C and directs Company D (-) (tank company) to follow and support Troop B in the north. The 2-23 Cav crosses PL Dallas line-of-departure (LD) at 9:30 p.m. Oct. 28, 20XX.

At 1 a.m. Oct. 29, 20XX, 2-23 Cav identifies and destroys two enemy observation posts in NAIs 204 and 206, and observes a third displacing to the east from NAI 205 (Figure 3). This indicates that the enemy's disruption zone is farther west than was originally depicted in the BCT sittemp. An attack-weapons team (AWT) in direct support of 2-23 Cav identifies two enemy BMPs in NAI 210 and three BMPs west of NAI 211. The 2-23 Cav commander recognizes that these BMPs indicate the location of the enemy's disruption zone and reports to 2/88 ABCT.



**Figure 3. 2-23 Cav identifies the enemy's disruption zone at 1 a.m.**

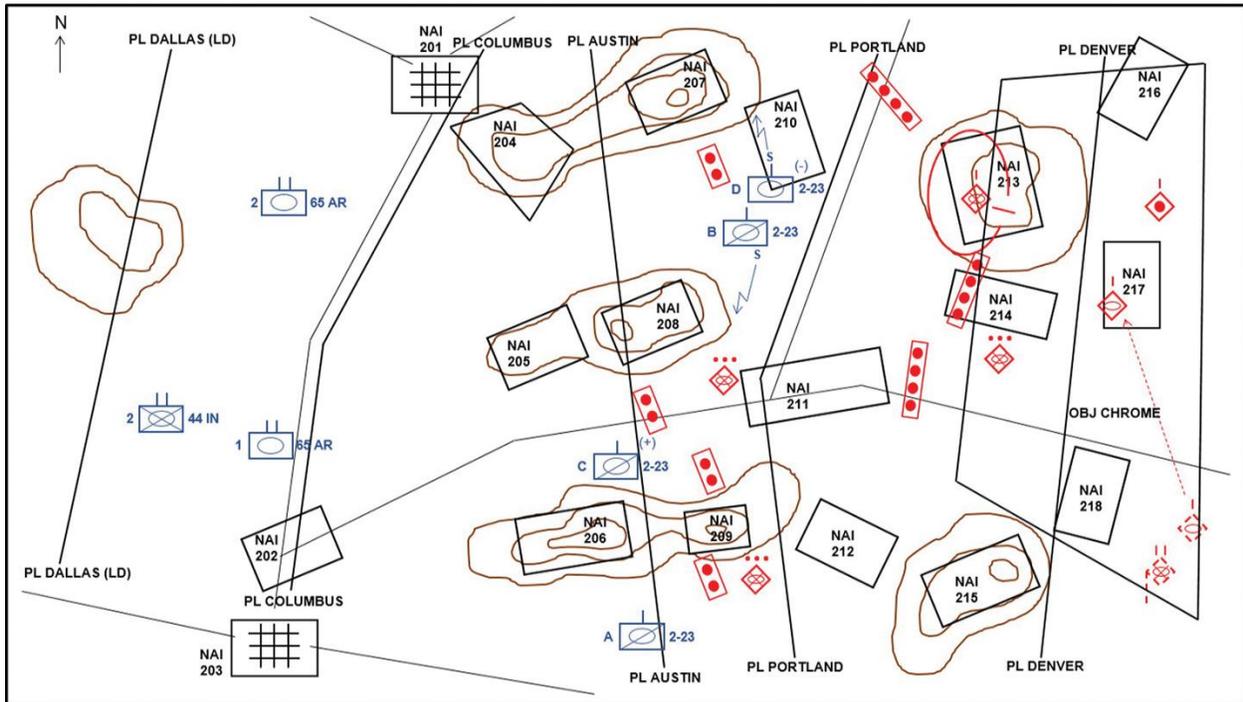
By 2 a.m., 2-23 Cav has made contact with disrupting obstacles (mine-wire) overwatched by BMP platoons on all three AoAs and has confirmed the enemy's disruption zone. The 2/88 ABCT counterbattery radar has identified the location of several pieces of enemy artillery north of NAI 217. The 2/88 ABCT's UAS identifies two platoons of BMPs moving into prepared defensive positions supported by obstacles in NAI 213 and south of NAI 214 (Figure 4), indicating the location of the enemy's main defensive belt.



**Figure 4. 2-23 Cav identifies obstacles and the enemy main defensive belt by 2 a.m.**

The 2/88 ABCT crosses PL Dallas (the LD) with 1-65 Armor (main effort) oriented on the central AoA and 2-65 Armor (SE 2) oriented on the northern AoA. The 2-44 Infantry (SE 3) is directed to follow and support 1-65 Armor.

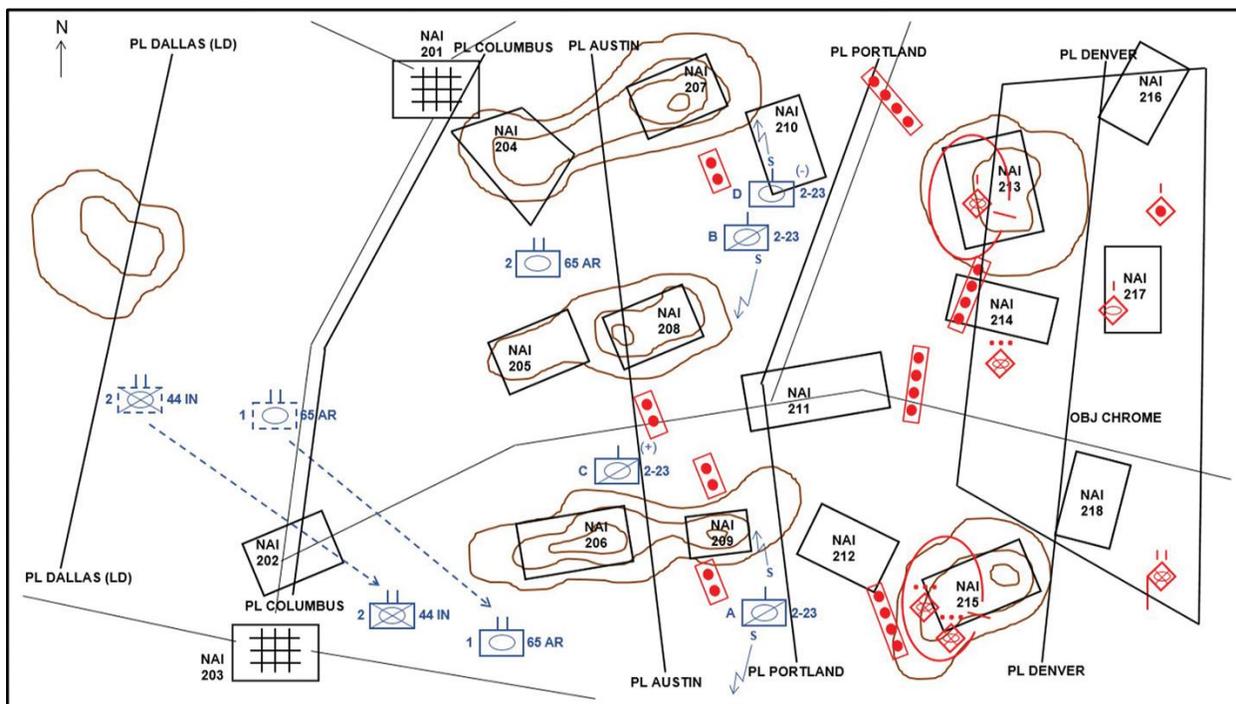
At 3:10 a.m., Troop B and Company D (-) have forced the displacement of three BMPs from NAI 210 and identified a bypass around the northern disrupting obstacle. As they move east of the obstacle, they come into contact with an enemy mechanized-infantry company in defensive positions and cannot advance more. Troop B positions guides at the bypass around the obstacle and establishes a screen in conjunction with Company D (-) to maintain contact with the enemy (Figure 5). Troop B also initiates reconnaissance of terrain that will support assault positions and ABF positions for the maneuver battalions.



**Figure 5. 2-23 Cav identifies enemy reserve and establishes guides at the northern bypass at 3:17 a.m.**

At 3:17 a.m., an AWT identifies six to eight enemy tanks moving north to NAI 217 and reports this action to the 2-23 Cav command post. The squadron commander determines that the enemy is repositioning its reserve and reports to 2/88 ABCT. BCT SIGINT assets detect increased communication signatures and tentatively identify the enemy battalion command post (CP) southeast of NAI 218.

By 3:25 a.m., Troop A has destroyed or forced displacement of three BMPs, identified a sizeable bypass around the southern obstacle and has established a screen to maintain contact with at least two platoons of enemy BMPs defending in the vicinity of NAI 215 (Figure 6). Troop A has established guides identifying the bypass around the obstacle and begins reconnaissance of terrain that will support assault or ABF positions for the maneuver battalions.



**Figure 6. 2-23 Cav establishes a bypass in the south at 3:25 a.m. 2/88 ABCT commits to the main effort.**

Troop C (+) has forced the displacement of a platoon of BMPs in the vicinity of NAI 211 but has been unable to identify a suitable bypass around the disrupting obstacles in the central AoA.

The 2/88 ABCT commander recognizes that the enemy disruption zone has collapsed, the central AoA is impassable and that the enemy's reserve has repositioned to the north. The BCT commander redirects 1-65 Armor (main effort) and 2-44 Infantry (SE 3) to conduct battle handover with Troop A in the south, and to attack to destroy the enemy company in the vicinity of NAI 215 and the enemy battalion CP southeast of NAI 218. The 2-65 Armor (SE 2) is directed to fix enemy forces in the vicinity of NAIs 213 and 214 to prevent them from influencing the BCT's main effort in the south.

### **Not always appropriate**

Fighting for information is certainly not appropriate in every tactical situation. There are a host of scenarios that require stealth, patience and a deliberate approach to collecting information on the part of our cavalry squadrons. The ability to employ both stealthy and aggressive techniques, the flexibility to transition between them and the tactical wherewithal to understand when each is appropriate is a critical skill for the leadership of our cavalry formations. However, for the purposes of this article, the preceding vignette illustrates a scenario where aggressive reconnaissance is both appropriate and capable of generating information through action.

In the vignette, the BCT was able to identify most of the defending enemy battalion, either directly through the cavalry squadron or by other sensors that detected enemy reactions to the squadron's operations. Fusing this information informed the BCT's COP, allowed the BCT commander to recognize the southern AoA as a position of advantage and then adjust the scheme of maneuver to apply combat power against it. Once the decision was made to alter the scheme of maneuver, the cavalry squadron was positioned to facilitate the BCT's transition by guiding it through the established bypasses and to ABF/SBF positions that had been reconnoitered.

### **Conclusion**

*Fighting for information* remains a useful, if somewhat vaguely defined, term within our professional lexicon. Regardless of whether it is used to convey 1) fighting with the intent to cause an enemy reaction; 2) destroy enemy reconnaissance assets to access and expose secondary threat echelons to friendly collection assets; or 3) fighting

to reach a position from which to conduct collection, *fighting for information* has the power to accurately describe what we expect and require of our cavalry squadrons during both reconnaissance and security operations.

With these definitions in mind, the next logical step is to fully incorporate a comprehensive description of *fighting for information* into our maneuver, intelligence, fires and mission-command doctrine. Programs of instruction for our professional-military-education courses and points of emphasis during leadership training programs and CTC rotations will naturally follow in time. Doing so will help create a shared understanding between commanders and staffs in regard to the planning and execution of reconnaissance-and-security operations. It will also clarify ways our cavalry squadrons can be of maximum benefit to their BCTs.

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## **Acronym Quick-Scan**

**AoA** – avenue of approach

**ABCT** – armored brigade combat team

**ABF** – attack-by-fire

**ATP** – Army technical publication

**AWT** – attack-weapons team

**BCT** – brigade combat team

**BMP** – *Boyeva Mashina Pekhoty* (Russian fighting vehicle)

**BRDM** – *Boyevaya Razvedyvatelnaya Dozornaya Mashina* (Russian scout vehicle)

**COP** – common operating picture

**CP** – command post

**CTC** – combat-training center

**FM** – field manual

**LD** – line of departure

**IC** – information collection

**NAI** – named area of interest

**PIR** – priority intelligence requirement

**PL** – phase line

**SBF** – support-by-fire

**SE** – supporting effort

**SIGINT** – signals intelligence

**Sittemp** – situational template

**UAS** – unmanned aerial system