

# From the Screen: The Reconnaissance Objective: Not a Physical Location

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Soldiers understand the importance of priority intelligence requirements (PIRs). The members of staffs understand the importance of mission analysis during the military decision-making process. Understanding how to link the two components is nuanced. The Cavalry squadron will not have a defined objective on the map to orient on. Orienting on the reconnaissance objective is vital in understanding the role of the Cavalry squadron in information collection.

It is essential to break down the meaning of the words in use. *Reconnaissance* is defined throughout Field Manual (FM) 3-98, *Reconnaissance and Security Operations*, and is reinforced by FM 3-90-2, *Reconnaissance, Security and Tactical Enabling Tasks Volume 2*. Throughout this article, the term is used as the mission conducted to obtain information for a commander about the terrain, threat, infrastructure or society. A commander uses the information collected during a reconnaissance mission to facilitate timely decision-making.

Army Doctrine Reference Publication 1-02, *Terms and Military Symbols*, defines *objective* as “the clearly defined, decisive and attainable goal toward which an operation is directed.” Using this definition allows flexibility, and it is the conceptual idea of why an operation is conducted. The same concept is then applied to the combination of these words.

Therefore the reconnaissance objective is not a specific location in the operational environment. “Orient on the reconnaissance objective” is a fundamental of reconnaissance, and it does not specify a specific location on the ground. Instead, a named area of interest (NAI) orients the Cavalry squadron on a specific location to collect indicators and answer PIRs. However, the reconnaissance objective is the broader perspective of the operation and must be written as a statement.

An example is a terrain-focused area reconnaissance of a river crossing. It is not enough to say that the unit will only conduct reconnaissance of the bridge in that area, just as it is not enough to say the reconnaissance is terrain-focused. If the bridge is not there or is impassible, the reconnaissance is not complete and the commander’s endstate is not met. Instead, the commander should define the reconnaissance objective as “determine viable wet gap crossings,” which leaves the statement broad enough to allow mission command and still relay the most important result of the reconnaissance effort. The unit could miss the larger purpose of the phase or operation if the commander is too specific with the reconnaissance objective.

FM 3-98 clearly establishes that the purpose of the reconnaissance objective is to allow mission command. During mission analysis, the staff breaks down the commander’s critical information-requirement indicators and specific information requirements (SIRs) to focus those collection assets through the information-collection matrix. A direct result of the mission analysis is the development of the focus of the collection effort framed by the threat, infrastructure, terrain and/or society (see FM 3-98). Leaving the focus as a single word to define the reason for the operation is insufficient. Therefore, the staff must take one more step in analysis to develop the reconnaissance objective, which must support the commander’s endstate and link with the PIRs. The staff can then use the indicators and SIRs to assign NAIs to focus collection during the operation.

Likewise, limiting the reconnaissance objective to a specific place limits the organization’s ability to understand the importance of reconnaissance. It is the responsibility of the commander and staff to focus the collection of information to drive informed timely decisions in the operational environment. The reconnaissance objective acts as the guiding purpose in conducting these operations and allows subordinate units to exercise good mission command while achieving the commander’s endstate. Ultimately this will establish conditions for brigades to seize, exploit and retain the initiative.

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## Acronym Quick-Scan

**ABCT** – armored brigade combat team

**ACR** – armored Cavalry regiment

**ARC** – Army Reconnaissance Course

**BCT** – brigade combat team

**BOLC** – Basic Officer Leadership Course

**CLC** – Cavalry Leader's Course

**FM** – field manual

**MCCC** – Maneuver Captain's Career Course

**NAI** – named area of interest

**PIR** – priority intelligence requirement

**SIR** – specific information requirement