

# From the Screen: Why Does Cavalry Still Matter?

by CPT Timothy C. Lee

Students at the Cavalry Leader's Course (CLC) are asked a simple question on Day 1 about the cavalry and its role in large-scale combat operations: Why does cavalry still matter? After a few minutes of silence, students typically respond with a variety of answers. Some state that the role of cavalry is to serve as the brigade commander's eyes and ears, providing the information the commander needs to conduct detailed planning and understand the area of operations. Others state that the role of cavalry is to serve in an economy-of-force role, allowing the commander to expend only minimum essential combat power on supporting efforts. Finally, some students state that the role of cavalry is to protect the force to enable the commander to seize, retain and exploit the initiative.

While these are all great answers and doctrinally correct, they miss the mark. At its core, cavalry exists to enable the commander to make timely decisions and achieve positions of relative advantage by filling in identified information gaps and answering commander's critical information requirements (CCIRs).

The cavalry's role is clearly defined throughout Field Manual (FM) 3-98 and reinforced by FM 3-90-2. Paragraph 1-1 in FM 3-98 states that "[r]econnaissance operations allow commanders to understand the situation, visualize the battle and make decisions. Security operations provide reaction time and maneuver space to enable decisions and protect the force from unanticipated danger."

The critical word shared in these sentences is **decisions**. Cavalry units conducting reconnaissance and security (R&S) operations enable the commander to make decisions. **How** cavalry units do that is inferred from the next sentence in FM 3-98, "[R&S] tasks answer [CCIRs], mitigate risk, identify enemy weakness and isolate the enemy from sources of strength." FM 3-98 goes on to conclude, "[R&S] tasks allow [brigade combat teams] to achieve positions of relative advantage."

Figure 1 may assist in the understanding of cavalry's fundamental role.

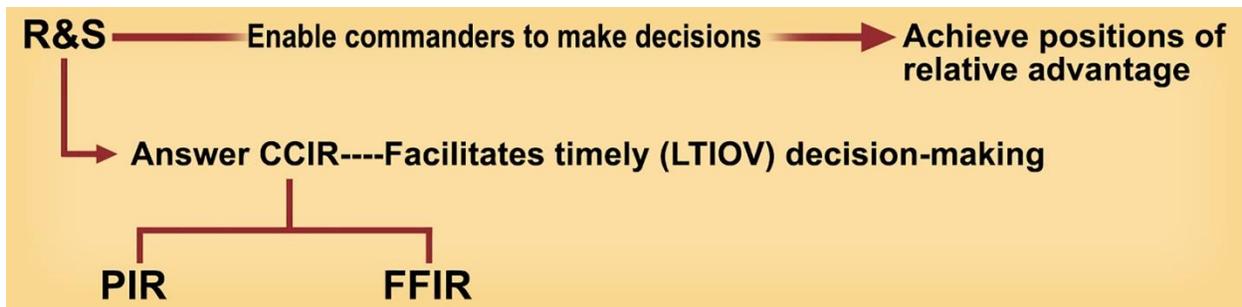


Figure 1. R&S and CCIR link.

In short, the fundamental role of cavalry units' R&S is to enable the commander to make decisions by precisely answering priority intelligence requirements (PIRs). As stated in Paragraph 1-24 of FM 3-98, "[R&S] tasks answer PIR and enable the commander to make decisions and direct forces to achieve mission success." Once again, **decisions** is the common word. All R&S operations undertaken must help the commander make informed decisions. By collecting information through reconnaissance tasks, the cavalry unit can turn gaps identified during mission analysis into information requirements and, ultimately, **intelligence** to enable the commander to capitalize on opportunities and exploit success.

While doctrinally correct, limiting the fundamental role of cavalry to just "eyes and ears" and "economy of force" significantly undermines the real purpose of the cavalry: to enable the commander to make decisions to retain a position of relative advantage. It is the responsibility of the commander and staff to focus the collection of information to drive informed, timely decisions in the area of operations. The entire purpose and fundamental role of the cavalry is to enable the commander to make decisions by answering CCIR.

While simple in concept, it is widely misunderstood, as cavalry units are often told to "screen" or "do reconnaissance" with little thought as to what the PIRs are for the operation. Before deciding to employ cavalry

units, commanders must always ask, “What information gaps can the cavalry help me fill, and what decision will that ultimately drive?” Only in this way can the cavalry genuinely serve as the commander’s “eyes and ears” on the battlefield.

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## **Acronym Quick-Scan**

**CCIR** – commander’s critical information requirements

**CLC** – Cavalry Leader’s Course

**FFIR** – friendly forces’ information requirements

**FM** – field manual

**LTIOV** – latest time is of value

**PIR** – priority intelligence requirement

**R&S** – reconnaissance and security