

# Solving the Identity Crisis: Modest Proposals for Redefining Roles in Cavalry Squadrons

by LTC Ben Ferguson and CPT Lennard Salcedo

The Army should take measures to increase and sustain the cavalry's ability to accomplish a full spectrum of mission sets and enable scouts to effectively train reconnaissance and security (R&S) operations.

The cavalry has served as an integral part in Army operations from its inception in 1776. Be it on horseback, armored-cavalry assault vehicles, Bradley Fighting Vehicles (BFVs), humvees or the next generation of scout vehicles, cavalry scouts have continually accomplished complex mission sets in combat that infantry and armor units are unsuited for.

Despite these unique conflicts and platforms, the cavalry gradually assumed an ambiguous form that leads to inefficient employment due to the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). We owe it to cavalry scouts to provide clear training guidelines and training progressions while they train for reconnaissance, security and the ability to fight for information. Such efforts will improve expertise in reconnaissance, security and surveillance operations, which will enable commanders to make better decisions at echelon. We believe we can achieve this level of expertise by establishing military-occupation specialty (MOS) 19L, reconnaissance scout.

## Current status

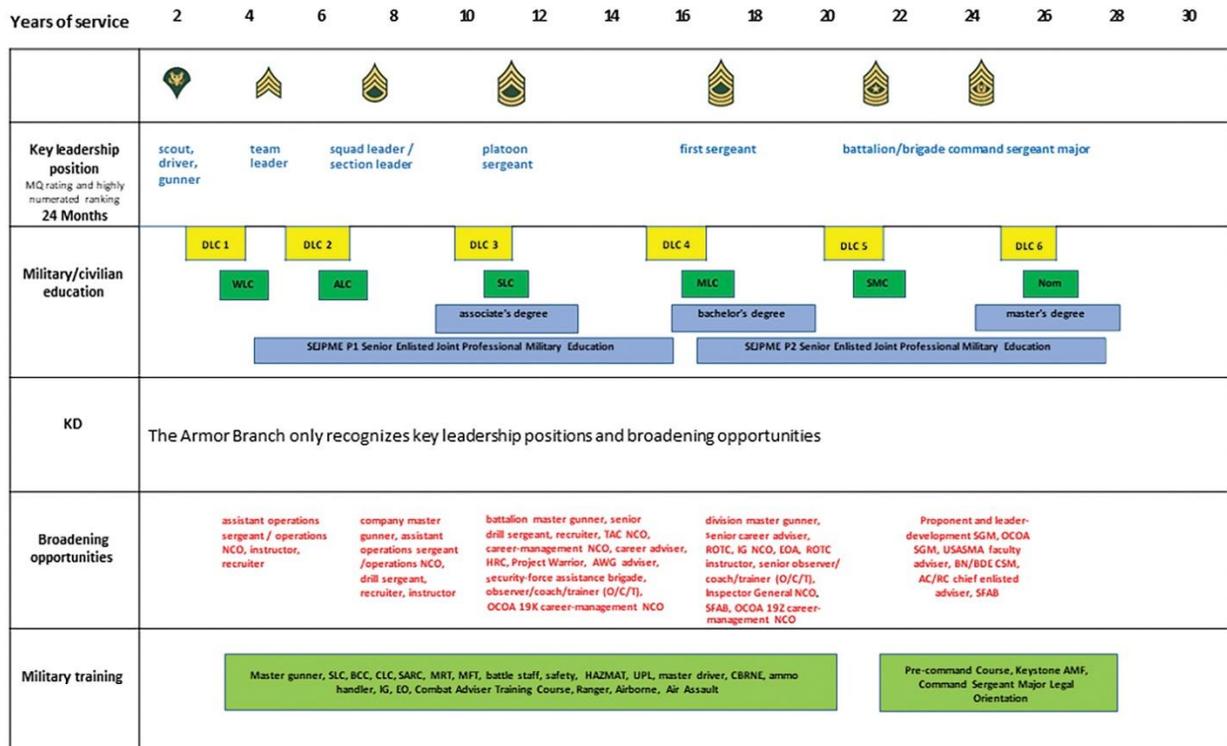
In addition to performing their R&S tasks, scouts have performed infantry-like tasks during GWOT. This reset expectations on what their mission set looks like as the Army transitions to multi-domain operations (MDO) and large-scale combat operations (LSCO). Having operated in areas of responsibility not requiring intensive doctrinal reconnaissance and surveillance operations, cavalry scouts were employed similarly as infantry for more than a decade by conducting cordons-and-searches as well as presence patrols; operating in urban terrain; and performing other tasks. Even combat-training centers shifted their training motif to include counterinsurgency (COIN) themes to prepare units for GWOT deployments.

Cavalry scouts now find themselves in ambiguous situations as they quickly shift their training focus to R&S during rotations to Europe, Korea and Kuwait.

U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) and the Armor School have helped eased the return to MDO and LSCO from COIN operations. Primarily through the Cavalry Leader's Course (CLC) and the Scout Leader's Course (SLC), students are receiving proper instruction on leading cavalry formations. Also, the Armor Basic Officer Leader's Course has altered its program of instruction (PoI) to focus less on R&S operations and more on tank employment. Even the extension of 19D one-station unit training has helped bolster cavalry proficiency at the entry level.

However, these efforts do not address the challenging career these Soldiers may experience. The current career progression model has 19D Soldiers alternating between dismounted and mounted positions. This makes sense at first glance as an industrial-age process, but it does create some issues.

The career progression provides flexibility but fails to build subject-matter experts. While junior-enlisted Soldiers are mostly guaranteed to be both a dismount and a driver, there is no guarantee to alternate between mounted and dismounted positions as manning becomes more difficult as noncommissioned officers (NCOs) are promoted. New NCOs transitioning from different types of brigade combat teams (BCT) often face a steep learning curve where they may be tempted to seek a key and developmental (KD) position conducive from the formation they came from (example: armored BCT (ABCT) 19Ds may seek to be assigned as a mounted section leader).



**Figure 1. 19D talent-development model.** As indicated by the timeline, there is no specification for 19D team- or section-leader time to rotate between dismounted and mounted operations. Thus their ability to rotate depends on the unit’s manning, training progression and other factors. (Adapted from a chart on the Office of the Chief of Armor (OCA) Website)

## How we got here

Twenty years ago, 11Ms filled the role as mechanized infantry on BFVs.<sup>1</sup> This enabled 11Bs to truly specialize in dismounted operations within infantry BCTs (IBCTs). While this may seem as mitigating flexibility, the result was a fighting force with a high degree of proficiency in mechanized-infantry units. Their expertise and lethality generated by their MOS was on par with the expertise expected of 19Ks on Abrams tanks that enabled ABCTs (then called “heavy” BCTs) to function efficiently and effectively.

With the Army’s decision to generalize some MOSs, combined with retention issues, all 11-series Career Management Field Soldiers can serve in mechanized-infantry units at various effectiveness. This trend includes the current requirement for 19Ds to man the Mobile Gun System in Stryker BCTs (SBCTs), but this takes away from the pool of junior-enlisted Soldiers that could be value-added to the reconnaissance troops.

Recent discussion over 19Ms replacing 11Bs on BFVs further reiterates the necessity for an MOS to focus on what value it adds to the operating environment.<sup>2</sup> The concept is for this force to spend their careers as BFV operators so that 11Bs can focus on dismounted operations.

As early as 1984, senior leaders communicated their concerns that R&S operations were not executed effectively. Martin Goldsmith’s seminal RAND article highlighted significant shortcomings in the reconnaissance fight that was causing units to consistently lose battles against the opposing force.<sup>3</sup> The multi-year study identified trends found that Blue Forces often didn’t answer priority information requirements (PIRs) and failed to prevent detection from the enemy at the National Training Center.

While courses like Heavy Weapon Leader’s Course developed to bridge the capability gap for 11M, the Armor School created the Scout Platoon Leader’s Course (now SLC) to teach and enrich the cavalry community. Combined with years of COIN operations, it is clear that R&S operations have not received the priority and resources they need to properly grow experts within the formation.

Also, the frequent turnover in duty positions to try to balance out 19D Soldiers careers results in turbulent crew and squad certifications within cavalry squadrons. In a budget-constrained environment, it becomes difficult to justify the frequent certifications that could be used for advanced training for the troops and squadron. Even if executing these certifications are not the most expensive thing a brigade does, the training becomes less effective for those who must serve longer in KD positions.

It is notable that running certification events is beneficial for planning and general training, but the organization must acknowledge that without the ability to greatly adjust live-fire exercise lanes and situational-training exercise lanes to reflect the unpredictable chaos of combat operations, it is training Soldiers to the “lane” instead of building versatile leaders.

Finally, it is notable that the current system defaults to manning requirements vs. slotting Soldiers where they can continue to grow their expertise.<sup>4</sup> While some senior NCOs have served on all or most platforms, there is likely a population who have primarily served in only one or who have a strong desire to continue serving in just one formation type.

The 19D branch managers try to keep staff sergeants and sergeants first class in the same formations to provide better leadership and maintain proficiency in platform employment. Initiatives such as Assignment Satisfaction Key – Enlisted Module (ASK-EM) cycles have been established to better assist enlisted Soldiers in having satisfying careers. However, manning requirements and availability move dates continue to be the driving force behind who gets slotted to which billets, which can come at a cost of tactical expertise and mentorship from senior NCOs.

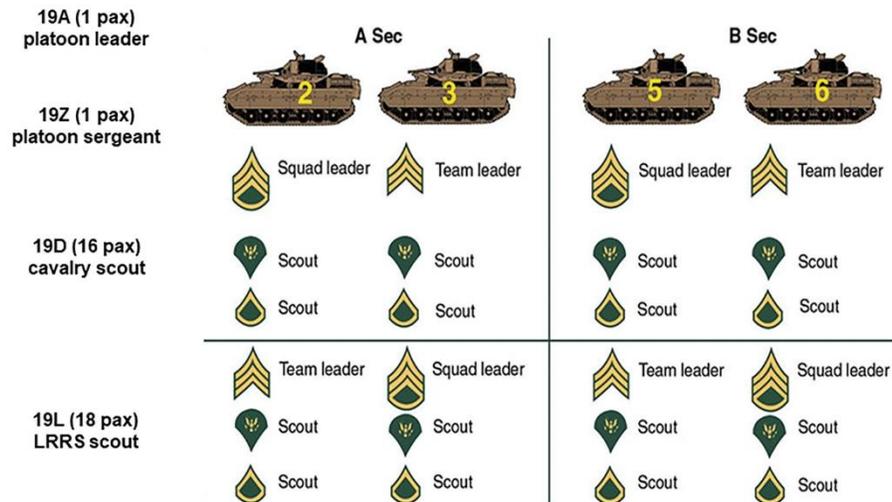
## **Proposal 1: 19Ds and 19Ls**

Delineating the current cavalry-scout tasks are the keys to rectifying the issues previously highlighted. Cavalry-scout 19Ds should retain guard-and-cover tasks, along with reconnaissance-by-fire and zone reconnaissance. This will keep them aligned with reconnaissance suited for LSCO similar to the cavalry groups of World War II and the Vietnam era. This does not discount their usefulness in COIN operations, as the ability to bring firepower into the fight quickly is required to win in LSCO and MDO. Their primary training focus will be operating mounted on vehicles for versatile responses to ambiguous situations.

The 19L (reconnaissance scout) draws more inspiration from long-range reconnaissance and surveillance (LRRS) units. Although LRRS units shut down only a few years ago, it is important to preserve their mission set and pass it along to the 19Ls.<sup>5</sup> The 19Ls would be tasked with screens and limited area-reconnaissance missions to answer PIRs deliberately.

This mission set is highly valuable in both COIN and LSCO operational environments by having a dedicated force to stealthy observation. Their ability to conduct these operations will improve reporting efficiency while also preserving the 19D force by preventing premature decisive engagements; this will allow the 19D force to respond appropriately. The 19L training will also provide the capabilities that LRRS units once provided on the division and corps levels.

These MOSs would still reside in the cavalry squadron within the BCT (or the successor of the BCT in the next organizational shift). Mounted-section leaders and their subordinates would be coded for 19D, while the dismount scout squad and their subordinates would be coded for 19L. While it may seem like a nuisance change, it is a necessary one to build a competent force capable of executing R&S missions in varying environments. The difference is now there is a clear delineation of which scouts within the cavalry squadron do which mission types; this will allow subject-matter experts to thrive and build effective formations. These subject-matter experts can further supplement TRADOC R&S schools with their lessons-learned to continue growing effective cavalry leaders throughout the Army.



**Figure 2. Example of section breakdown.**

It is worth noting that in the past, some IBCT and SBCT infantry battalions have conducted tryouts to select Soldiers to serve within the battalion scout platoon. While this may help the organization experience fewer administrative issues, these Soldiers are not quantifiably better suited or qualified to conduct R&S operations than a standard 19D. This is further quantifiable by the influx of cavalry scouts going to battalion scout platoons to alleviate the number of infantry Soldiers serving in the scout-platoon capacity. Improved institutionalized training that 19Ds and 19Ls receive will undoubtedly give more R&S capability and proficiency to battalion commanders – more so than a Soldier in a MOS that is better trained for a different mission set.

## Proposal 2: training progression and transition courses

Along with building expert 19Ls and 19Ds, we must revisit courses designed to progress their respective MOSs. The 19Ls would attend the Reconnaissance and Surveillance Leader's Course since it is oriented on their mission set already and designed to generate leaders formerly enroute to LRRS formations. The 19Ls would ideally attend this course immediately following the Basic Leader Course.

They should also continue to build proficiency through SLC immediately following the Advanced Leader's Course (ALC). The course would be adjusted to be teach students and enable a learning experience so graduates can return to their formations better understanding how to manage assets within the reconnaissance squad.

Finally, leaders would attend the Cavalry Squadron Leader's Course (CSLC) to help understand their role in cavalry-squadron operations and other considerations following SLC. CSLC is the hypothetical successor to the current CLC.

The 19Ls can further aid in LSCO by coding their MOS in the modified table of organization and equipment with one or two Pathfinder slots in any BCT with "conduct an air assault" in their mission-essential task list. This will enable the Army to continue training Pathfinders at a limited capacity but still have the knowledge base to grow Pathfinder capabilities when deemed necessary.

Soldiers with MOS 19D would begin to attend more platform-leader courses (Stryker/Bradley Leader's Course). These courses would adjust their Pol to talk less about statistics and familiarization and focus more on tactical employment, maintenance and best practices from those who have served on the platform for significant periods. Attendance to these courses would occur within 180 days of a permanent-change-of-station move to the new duty station.

The 19Ds would also attend CLC, a course parallel to SLC designed to help them validate their maneuver and ability to execute their R&S tasks at the section level through the Close-Combat Tactical Trainer (or vehicles provided at Fort Benning, GA) and through best practices taught by cadre with extensive experience. While this may sound like situational-training exercises, these revamped courses will be more intensive and focused on validating section leaders before they return to their formations from ALC. Thus the cavalry sections will see

better employment from experienced section leaders having both experience and section-focused training built into their professional military education.

Finally, leaders would attend CSLC to help understand their role in cavalry-squadron operations and other considerations following SLC.

To facilitate easier reclassification to 19L or 19D, courses would reorganize and validate Pol for these courses to also act as transition courses. This would facilitate seamless reclassifications (or additional-skill identifier (ASI) refreshers in lieu of split MOSs) to retain cavalry proficiency within squadrons.

Upon completion of CSLC, the MOSs would merge first to 19Z as sergeants first class and maintain 19Z as first sergeants/master sergeants. This concept still enables 19Ds and 19Ls to grow expertise and to coach both MOSs. This system would also enable more career satisfaction by allowing Soldiers to consciously decide to be mounted or dismounted.

### **Proposal 3: equipment and vehicle revamp**

All cavalry vehicles require the appropriate armaments for their BCT types to be able to fight for information against a near-peer threat. The 19Ds require a proper fighting vehicle regardless of the BCT. While the Next-Generation Combat Vehicle is conducting its second request for proposal to identify the Bradley's replacement, replacing the Stryker Reconnaissance Vehicle/Infantry Carrier Vehicle and the humvee in cavalry squadrons is necessary.

The Stryker Dragoon is a perfect example, as its 30mm cannon is formidable, but its survivability remains relatively unchanged. The humvee is another venerable platform that has earned its place in the IBCT cavalry squadron but lacks comparable effectiveness in fighting for information and survivability.

As the Army continues to modernize, continuous reviews in TRADOC should focus on what enables the cavalry to fight for information in the operating environment and how those fighting vehicles should be procured from either existing technologies or from longitudinal study and design:

- The M5 Ripsaw, the potential medium Robotic Combat Vehicle (RCV), could be reconfigured to replace humvees in the IBCT cavalry squadron.
- A sustainable motor, coupled with a 30mm or 50mm main gun, would provide the ability to fight for information at a sustainable pace with its electric motor or other engine (provided that this configuration is feasible from the vendor).<sup>6</sup>
- A stabilized fire-control system with an appropriate weapon system (potentially a 30mm with a Javelin command-launch unit) and reconfigured Joint Light Tactical Vehicle could also provide the desired ability to fight for information with a vehicle inbound to IBCTs.

The 19Ls require a significant change to authorized equipment via modernized technology to enable successful execution of their mission sets. For example, 19Ls should receive augmented dismount equipment:

- They would ideally possess portable, lightweight Joint Capabilities Release (JCR) to facilitate stealthy and deliberate reconnaissance. This version of the JCR would be configured for quick set-up to send and receive updates and then eliminate the signal to prevent detection from enemy cyber assets and communication interceptors.
- Recon scouts would carry improved ultra-high-frequency radios and Lightweight Laser Designator Rangefinders to further enable their operations.
- With the addition of RCVs, observation posts (OPs) could effectively double and provide limited ability to counter threats. At minimum, robotic scouts could continue monitoring named areas of interest or attacking enemy forces while OPs displace, providing valuable displacement time for scouts. By adding RCVs, operators could use these vehicles to fight first and preserve the rest of their forces until an exploit is identified.

## Alternative: more ASIs

If the creation of a new MOS is unfeasible, another potential solution to this issue is the use of ASIs. These ASIs would be associated with reconnaissance scouts or cavalry scouts to better slot them into formations where they can learn their desired craft through institutional training and experience.

Through this method, Soldiers could still be slotted anywhere but could develop more expertise via proper assignment and management through ASK-EM to positions requiring their ASI.

The major benefit is less administrative change by the Army to change the MOS and adjust manning numbers while also growing proficiency. The con is that ASI slotting is less of a requirement and more of a discriminator to help determine where Soldiers are slotted.

Thus the cavalry force is still at risk to go where they are needed for the Army, as opposed to where they can develop expertise and MOS proficiency. The ASI alternative could work, but the MOS-creation option ensures that the force is appropriately suited for its mission set.

## Conclusion

Developing proficiency within the cavalry community is essential to winning the tactical fight in the next major conflict. Creating the 19L MOS and redefining the 19D MOS enables the Army to train the cavalry to become more proficient at R&S operations while protecting Soldiers' ability to serve in their desired capacity.

Scouts are expected to operate in ambiguous environments and accomplish the mission against a near-peer adversary. While this has undoubtedly made cavalry scouts a venerable force, we do not believe it has helped develop the cohort of subject-matter experts that can continually capture best practices in both doctrine and in leaders. We can accomplish this by delineating what cavalry scouts do through a separate MOS or through ASI management and slotting.

As an organization, we owe it to the cavalry scouts to provide clearer guidance for career progression and leader development so that the subsequent generation of scouts are better prepared to succeed in the Army's next fight.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Steven Head, "Highly Specialized, Highly Lethal: Why the Army Should Replace Its One-Size-Fits-All Infantry Model," *Modern War Institute*, June 21, 2019, <https://mwi.usma.edu/highly-specialized-highly-lethal-army-replace-one-size-fits-infantry-model/>.

<sup>2</sup> Alex Turkatte, "MOS 19M: The Mechanized Warrior," *ARMOR*, Winter 2019 edition, [https://www.benning.army.mil/Armor/eARMOR/content/issues/2019/Winter/ARMOR\\_Winter2019\\_edition.pdf](https://www.benning.army.mil/Armor/eARMOR/content/issues/2019/Winter/ARMOR_Winter2019_edition.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Martin Goldsmith, "Quantifying the Battlefield," RAND Corporation, 1999, [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_briefs/RB3014.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB3014.html).

<sup>4</sup> MAJ Brett Matzenbacher, CPT Robert W. Humphrey and CPT Andrew Jenkins, "Reforging the Saber," *ARMOR*, January-March 2015 edition, [https://www.benning.army.mil/Armor/eARMOR/content/issues/2015/JAN\\_MAR/Jan-Mar\\_2015\\_edition.pdf](https://www.benning.army.mil/Armor/eARMOR/content/issues/2015/JAN_MAR/Jan-Mar_2015_edition.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Josh Tawson, "Fixing the Army's Deep Reconnaissance: Rebuild Its Long-Range Surveillance Capabilities," *MountainTactical.com*, Feb. 22, 2019, <https://mtnactical.com/knowledge/fixing-the-armys-deep-reconnaissance-problem-rebuild-its-long-range-surveillance-capabilities/>.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Cox, "This All-Electric Robotic Combat Vehicle May Accompany Army Units into Battle," *Military.com*, Oct. 9, 2020, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2020/10/09/all-electric-robotic-combat-vehicle-may-accompany-army-units-battle.html>.

## Acronym Quick-Scan

**ABCT** – armored brigade combat team

**AC** – Active Component

**ALC** – Advanced Leader's Course

**ASI** – additional-skill identifier

**ASK-EM** – Assignment Satisfaction Key – Enlisted Module

**AWG** – assessment working group

**BCC** – Basic Combatives Course

**BCT** – brigade combat team

**BFV** – Bradley Fighting Vehicle

**CBRNE** – chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosives

**CLC** – Cavalry Leader's Course

**COIN** – counterinsurgency

**CSLC** – Cavalry Squadron Leader's Course

**DLC** – distributed leader course

**EO** – equal opportunity

**EOA** – equal-opportunity adviser

**GWOT** – Global War on Terrorism

**HAZMAT** – hazardous material

**HRC** – Human Resources Command

**IBCT** – infantry brigade combat team

**IG** – inspector general

**JCR** – Joint Capabilities Release

**KD** – key and developmental

**LRRS** – long-range reconnaissance and surveillance

**LSCO** – large-scale combat operations

**MDO** – multi-domain operations

**MFT** – master fitness trainer

**MLC** – Mortar Leader's Course

**MOS** – military-occupation specialty

**MQ** – most qualified

**MRT** – master resilience training

**NCO** – noncommissioned officer

**O/C/T** – observer/coach/trainer

**OCOA** – Office of the Chief of Armor

**OP** – observation post

**Pax** – personnel

**PIR** – priority information requirement

**Pol** – program of instruction

**R&S** – reconnaissance and security

**RC** – Reserve Component

**RCV** – Robotic Combat Vehicle

**ROTC** – Reserve Officer Training Corps

**SARC** – sexual-assault response coordinator

**SBCT** – Stryker brigade combat team

**SEJPMME** – Senior Enlisted Joint Professional Military Education

**SFAB** – security-force assistance brigade  
**SLC** – Scout Leader’s Course  
**SMC** – Sergeants Major Course  
**TAC** – tactical operations center  
**TRADOC** – (U.S. Army) Training and Doctrine Command  
**UPL** – unit prevention leader  
**USASMA** – U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy  
**WLC** – Warrior Leader’s Course