Forgotten Fundamentals in Reconnaissance and Security

by CPT Christopher E. Kiriscioglu and CPT Jordan L. Woodburn

Executing mission tasks that are built from mere running estimates, fighting for information to inform higher headquarters and shaping an enemy with few "knowns," cavalry squadrons routinely lean on the reconnaissance-and-security (R&S) fundamentals while operating in austere environments. Through the ability to fight for information and answer intelligence requirements, cavalry organizations enable freedom of maneuver and decision-making for commanders at echelon.

However, trends indicate many cavalry formations are falling short in their ability to shape the fight, retain combat power and set conditions for the brigade's main effort. When the fundamentals of R&S are neglected, the squadron becomes an inhibiting liability rather than a dominating enabler.

From multiple rotations at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC), the message is clear: cavalry organizations are forgetting the fundamentals.

Adjacent unit coordination

Orient on the protected force, fundamental of security, Field Manual (FM) 3-98. (Illustrated on back cover.) Communication issues will always be at the heart of every unit after-action review, but most will be focused on communication up to the higher headquarters, or communication down to subordinate units. Few, however, will focus on lateral communication issues inherent in coordination with adjacent units.

This is paramount for a cavalry organization due to the nature of reconnaissance handovers (RHO) during forward-passage-of-lines and rearward-passage-of-lines. The RHO consists of a battle handover (BHO), or transition of area-of-operations responsibility, as well as an intelligence handover, transition of targets and collected information requirements. Squadrons must be able to facilitate the transition of intelligence, targets and terrain knowledge to the protected force during RHO to set conditions for the follow-on force to accomplish its mission.

Figure 1. Abrams tank crews from 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, pull security Feb. 2, 2020, during Combined Resolve XIII at JMRC, Hohenfels, Germany. *(Photo by Army National Guard SGT Fiona Berndt)*

The largest obstacle inhibiting effective RHO is failure to plan and rehearse with adjacent units. During planning, units fail to exchange mutually supporting operations graphics or mission intent prior to execution. This inevitably leads to miscommunication, lost engagement opportunities and preventable combat loss. To mitigate degraded adjacent unit coordination, squadrons must include representatives of all units involved in RHO at the combined-arms rehearsal (CAR).

In the defense, the RHO must be rehearsed at respective squadron/battalion CARs, even to troop level if possible. All observers and leaders in the cavalry (down to the platoon-leader level) should know what platoon or element is behind them, along with their future task and purpose. Cavalry troops must have mutually supporting graphic-control measures, at minimum, and target-reference points along key avenues of approach (AoA) to rapidly pass a target and facilitate its subsequent destruction.

Simply reporting to brigade is not enough to enable a timely target acquisition or transition. Special considerations must also be established to account for the surface-danger zones of defending and screening units. The probability of fratricide directly correlates to the level of dissemination and coordination of direct-fire-control measures among adjacent units. Squadrons must take ownership of coordinating shared understanding along unit boundaries, especially during displacement operations.

In the offense, successful cavalry squadrons not only seek to answer priority intelligence requirements (PIRs) for the brigade, but they also identify how their scheme of maneuver ties into the overall concept of operations. For example, if the cavalry squadron is conducting a zone reconnaissance leading to an objective, discussions between the squadron and the follow-on assaulting battalion should occur, focused on what the battalion commander will need to know to enable the attack.

Battalion PIRs, route trafficability, obstacles, enemy composition and disposition, suitable AoA and any other specified information are all likely information requirements the cavalry squadron needs to provide. These reports should not only flow to the brigade but also to the customer battalion immediately to the cavalry squadron's rear. This is the true definition of enabling timely decision-making.

Displacing the squadron

Retain freedom of maneuver, fundamental of reconnaissance, FM 3-98, and **provide reaction time and maneuver space, fundamental of security, FM 3-98**. With special consideration to the defense, cavalry squadrons rarely define what it means to reach their displacement criteria. When the trigger is met to displace, troops and squadrons have rarely prepared to displace in contact or under pressure.

Ideally, displacement must consist of pre-planned (and rehearsed) subsequent battle positions that are supported by indirect fires to enable the cavalry squadron to transition while maintaining combat power. Units must also be deliberate, not hesitant, in initiating their displacement. It exists for a reason and ultimately allows the cavalry to properly transition while maintaining the ability to continue to fight for the brigade.

Triggers to initiate displacement must be clear and easily understood to the lowest level. Hesitation at the transition will lead to unnecessary combat losses.

Part of maintaining freedom of maneuver also relies on the squadron's ability to deny freedom of maneuver to the enemy. Since aggressive direct-fire engagements are likely to compromise observation posts (OPs) and increase unwanted decisive engagement, obstacles become the squadron's primary means of disrupting enemy force maneuver.

Effective obstacle emplacement continues to be the most neglected component for cavalry organizations conducting a security-mission task, almost to the point of non-existence. Although the squadron's obstacles will not be as robust as obstacles that are along the support brigade's main defensive belt, they still need to be just as deliberate. Emplacing obstacles directly correlates to providing increased reaction time and maneuver space for the protected force, especially during a guard.

Enduring operations in R&S

Retain freedom of maneuver, fundamental of reconnaissance, FM 3-98, and **provide early and accurate warning, fundamental of security, FM 3-98**. While not the perfect solution for enabling security operations, the use of engagement-area development in the screen undeniably enables success for the cavalry squadron.

By using all the steps in the process (including the commonly neglected rehearsal, which should include adjacent units, a verification of the RHO plan and the displacement plan), the cavalry can ensure it is prepared to answer intelligence requirements, fight for reconnaissance if necessary and retain combat power. Any deadspace should be mitigated by the use of dismounted OPs in depth, which should be employed by platoon leaders and troop commanders after careful analysis of the sector sketch.

Furthermore, establishing a narrative of how to interact with the enemy, codified as engagement criteria within commander's reconnaissance/security guidance, will allow the squadron to impose deliberate lethality as well as preserve combat power. Too often, squadron staffs relegate engagement criteria into the rudimentary box checks, "engage enemy infantry fighting vehicles but not tanks," rather than guiding the echeloned engagement of weapon systems to balance lethality with economy-of-force (for Phase II, use 155mm to destroy enemy OPs undetected; use 120mm mortar fire to disrupt or displace enemy mounted recon; use vehicle-mounted anti-tank systems to initiate direct-fire contact with section-sized or below *Boyevaya Razvedyvatelnaya Dozornaya Mashina*; employ .50-caliber weapons for squad-sized dismounts, etc.).

To retain combat power, the cavalry squadron must tailor its engagement criteria appropriately to avoid becoming decisively engaged. Engagement criteria must be definitive and eliminate the guesswork for the scout on the ground. Otherwise, reconnaissance units will become unnecessarily compromised and unable to continue intelligence-collection efforts due to OPs meeting disengagement or troop-displacement criteria.

Feeding brigade info-collection plan

Ensure continuous reconnaissance, fundamental of reconnaissance, FM3-98; **orient on reconnaissance objectives, fundamental of reconnaissance, FM 3-98**; **report all information rapidly and accurately, fundamental of reconnaissance, FM 3-98**; and **perform continuous reconnaissance, fundamental of security, FM 3-98**.

Cavalry formations continue to struggle with leveraging R&S operations to enhance the brigade's information-collection plan. Whether it's from collecting on irrelevant PIR that do not enable the brigade commander to make an advantageous decision, or failing to answer PIRs within the latest-time-information-is-of-value (LTIOV), reconnaissance organizations routinely neglect their critical role in information collection.

Figure 2. Scouts assigned to 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry Regiment, conduct intelligence collection during troop dismount reconnaissance training for a platoon external evaluation at Hohenfels, Germany, Jan. 26, 2021. *(U.S. Army photo by SGT Julian Padua)*

To influence the collection plan, squadron staff must integrate with their higher headquarters during intelligence preparation of the battlefield or risk degrading the full development of a focused reconnaissance objective and supporting PIRs. Nesting with brigade during the earliest steps of the military decision-making process will enable the squadron staff to synchronize across all warfighting functions with its higher headquarters and ensure that the ground-reconnaissance elements understands their role in answering PIRs.

Inversely, failure to synchronize with higher headquarters will contribute to a domino effect of ambiguous reconnaissance objects, confusing information requirements and wasted effort from troop-collection assets that feed into an unfocused brigade collection plan. It's not just information that the squadron must collect, it's the development of that information through analysis and feedback to the brigade that will lead to answering PIR.

Cavalry organizations transition information into intelligence to drive brigade operations. Information itself is worthless unless it contributes to intelligence, and intelligence is useless unless it contributes to an assessment. With supporting intelligence, assessments are what allow the brigade S-2, and ultimately the brigade commander, to visualize the operational environment and make advantageous decisions within it. The lower in echelon that assessments can be made, the timelier and more accurate they will portray the true events of enemy forces on the battlefield.

Furthermore, troop commanders who are empowered to make decisions will decrease the amount of time it takes to answer a PIR within LTIOV and, in turn, allow the brigade commander to exert control over the enemy's decision-making cycle. To provide assessments, commanders at echelon must be able to comprehend and differentiate between the multitudes of possible enemy courses of action, which only occurs when the squadron staff is fully nested and integrated with brigade planning cycles.

All-weather, day or night

Cavalry squadrons provide the most reliable set of eyes and ears for their higher headquarters to employ. Charged to dominate the operational environment, they must ensure shared understanding of both enemy and terrain, and do so by adhering to a set of universal fundamentals – fundamentals that, if ignored, prevent ground-reconnaissance elements from achieving the reconnaissance objective and subsequently keep the brigade from realizing its decisive operation.

Cavalry formations must be prepared to provide early warning and detection, generate assessments from collected information requirements and destroy select enemy targets to enable reaction time and maneuver space for the protected force. Cavalry squadrons can't accomplish this task if they are compromised, destroyed or fixed by enemy reconnaissance. To live up to the status of being all-weather, day or night, squadrons must embrace ***all*** the R&S fundamentals.

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Acronym Quick-Scan

ABCT – armored brigade combat team
AoA – avenue of approach
CAB – combined-arms battalion
CAR – combined-arms rehearsal
CLC – Cavalry Leader's Course
FM – field manual
JMRC – Joint Multinational Readiness Center
LTIOV – latest-time-information-is-of-value
O/C/T – observer/coach/trainer
OP – observation post
PIR – priority intelligence requirement
R&S – reconnaissance and security
RHO – reconnaissance handover