

The cavalry squadron in Korea is the eyes and ears for U.S. Forces Korea's counterfire task force (CFTF), which is designed to defeat the artillery threat in North Korea. The squadron is the main organization available to the CFTF commander for his reconnaissance needs. By leveraging information gained from conducting Phase 0 reconnaissance, the cavalry squadron provides an advantage in complex terrain.

The advantage in Korea is the ability to train where one fights. Due to the megacity environment, the terrain changes constantly; buildings are constructed in open areas and the road networks change frequently. It is paramount that troops maintain a thorough understanding of the area where they will operate. Seasonal change affects rural terrain – for instance, Korean farmers flood their rice crops, making the terrain severely restrictive for heavy combat platforms during spring and summer. Those same fields become frozen in winter and make this terrain usable for combat operations. Finally, the terrain is changing from rural to urban as 25 million people live in and around the CFTF's area of operations.

As the squadron commander, I expected troops and platoons to constantly conduct Phase 0 reconnaissance patrols to update observation post (OP) locations, link-up locations, changes in terrain, fording sites, patterns of life and changes in concealment based on seasonal effects. Being able to train and conduct reconnaissance where we would fight gives us an advantage over the enemy and must be seized. I expected our platoons to go to their designated battlespace without maps, just as they would in their hometown. For example, in driving to Wal-Mart the first couple of times in a new location, you might use Google Maps, but after that the route is committed to memory.

We had the same opportunity in Korea, and this is how I defined Phase 0 reconnaissance. Conducting effective Phase 0 reconnaissance allows the cavalry squadron to achieve its purpose: to provide accurate and timely information to the brigade commander so he can make decisions ahead of the threat. Phase 0 reconnaissance needs to be seized as the rotational brigade combat teams continue conducting rotations to Korea, Europe and Kuwait. MG Scott D. McKean constantly taught us to train to ensure "we can do the things we say we can do," and Phase 0 reconnaissance ensures the cavalry squadrons are in a position to fight tonight, and keep fighting until we win. –LTC Greg McLean, commander, 2nd Squadron, 13th Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team (ABCT), 1st Armored Division

Cavalry Operations in the Republic of Korea: Phase 0 Reconnaissance

by CPT Colton C. Parr and
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Today there are many adversaries in locations across the globe that have the potential to erupt into armed conflict. Many of these locations are identified as areas of interest for the United States which, if engulfed in conflict, would destabilize the region and disrupt partnered and allied nations. As these potential conflict areas are identified, it is important to understand as much about the adversary and location as possible to be in the best position to react should diplomacy or military deterrence fail.

This is where Phase 0 reconnaissance becomes a critical factor in the United States' ability to effectively respond should armed forces be required to deploy to at-risk areas. This is true for U.S. forces deployed to deter conflict as well as for U.S. forces deployed to respond to an ongoing conflict. The more detailed information that can be collected on the adversary, operational environment, terrain, infrastructure, population and weather before the

commencement of hostilities, the better prepared combat forces will be.

This is the role of Phase 0 reconnaissance. Reconnaissance during this phase can answer critical information requirements concerning each of the preceding factors before U.S. forces are engaged in large-scale operations, and it has the ability to drastically increase the effectiveness of an armed response against an adversary.

Phase 0 examples

Examples of the importance of Phase 0 reconnaissance can be seen throughout history. During the Korean War, a detailed understanding of the massive tidal range around Incheon allowed U.S. forces to successfully conduct an amphibious assault that dramatically reversed the course of the war. Without this information, the assault would have been much more difficult.

The amphibious operation during the Battle of Gallipoli during World War I also highlights the importance of Phase 0 reconnaissance but in a negative manner. Lacking updated maps

and information regarding the coastline and water depth, the amphibious landing parties struggled to get ashore to their assigned landing zones. This resulted in the deaths of many Soldiers, as the enemy engaged their landing craft as they searched for a clear route to the beaches. Many other Soldiers drowned or were killed by machinegun fire while attempting to wade ashore in deep water.

Phase 0 recon's purpose

Phase 0 reconnaissance can take place in many different forms – from satellite imagery, to identifying the locations of enemy missile systems, to scouts on the ground collecting information on road networks and the local population. Regardless of the method, the goal of reconnaissance is still the same: to answer critical intelligence requirements that leaders need to make the most informed decisions about when and how to employ U.S. forces and capabilities.

When compared to reconnaissance performed in other phases of the

operation, Phase 0 has the distinct advantage of being conducted in the absence of flying bullets. This dramatically increases the freedom of maneuver scouts on the ground enjoy and allows them to conduct operations that would otherwise have been much more difficult.

In many situations, conducting Phase 0 reconnaissance enables the collection of detailed information over the course of a long period. U.S. forces stationed in Germany as a deterrent to Soviet aggression were able to collect information on infrastructure, terrain and adversary positions for years, making them intimately familiar with the area they could be required to fight in.

The freedom of maneuver possible during Phase 0 is also dependent on host-nation governments. The local government's rules and regulations concerning the movement of U.S. forces within their country can either be restrictive or permissive to U.S. forces operating there. Regardless of these rules, it is important to abide by them rather than risk damaging relations with the host-nation government, which may lead to increased restrictions.

Phase 0 reconnaissance must begin with a route reconnaissance of both the identified primary and alternate routes. There are two main purposes for conducting these route recons. The first is based on painting the picture for the supported unit. By conveying information on bridges, canalizing portions of the route and locations with enough clearance to enable convoys to turn around, scouts will enable their supported unit to be able to choose the most effective route. Also, lateral routes, bypasses to bridges and the general level of civilian traffic must be identified during Phase 0 to reduce friction on the route during the actual operation.

The second purpose is to build familiarity with the route within a scout's own organization. The officers, non-commissioned officers and drivers in the organization must know how to reach the reconnaissance objectives with the same degree of familiarity as they have with driving to their local

grocery store. Also, route reconnaissance should be conducted at different times of the day to establish a pattern for civilian traffic based on time. This information will enable a more accurate estimated time of arrival and will help produce specific windows of time that are optimal for movement.

Transitioning

Upon reaching the reconnaissance objective(s), it is essential to transition to an area reconnaissance to develop understanding of the potential enemy as well as the hydrological and geographical features. Unlike an area reconnaissance in the more traditional "tactical" sense, these area recons will generally be at either the key-leader level or as part of a reduced force. This must be decided carefully based on the level of covertness the force must maintain to prevent revealing portions of its plan via observation by a potential threat.

Within the reconnaissance objective(s), the first priority is to determine primary avenues of approach, infiltration routes and retrograde routes. This can be determined through both a mounted and a dismounted reconnaissance, with the patterns of life within the reconnaissance objective(s) factored in to determine the suitability of each route at different times of day.

The next focus should be on the location of primary, alternate and subsequent battle positions for the supported unit in addition to potential locations for the placement of command-and-control and sustainment nodes. Terrain must be understood and the effects accounted for to provide an advantage to the supported unit and enable achievement of its task and purpose.

It is important to note that during this portion of an operation, enemy contact is unlikely. The recon element must use this time and maneuver space to its advantage by carefully planning a transition from reconnaissance to security.

After identifying suitable locations for the supported unit to achieve its tactical task and purpose, the focus can switch to how to provide area security

to provide the protected force adequate time and maneuver space. The security plan must incorporate both mounted and dismounted OPs that use the terrain to advantage. Mounted OPs should be positioned to make full use of their long-range optics, while dismounted OPs can provide security within identified avenues of approach in restricted or severely restricted terrain.

A plan for when to transition from short-duration to long-duration mounted OPs must also be carefully considered to provide maximum security while the supported unit initially occupies the identified positions, and a specific trigger must be identified to transition to long-duration OPs to enable the recon element to be able to sustain its tempo. The recon element must identify all friendly OPs and submit no-fire-area requests to mitigate the possibility of fratricide. Also, the recon element must fully understand and be able to paint the security plan to the supported unit by identifying the location of friendly adjacent units while integrating any host-nation forces (HNF) into the security plan.

Transitions are periods of natural friction during any military operation. Major transitions during Phase 0 reconnaissance include a transition from route recon to area recon, a transition from area recon to area security, and the occupation of the reconnaissance objective by the supported force. To mitigate the risk of fratricide and to maintain the desired tempo, rapid but effective linkups must be conducted between adjacent friendly units and with the HNF. During Phase 0 reconnaissance, it is vital to develop and rehearse linkup procedures so they are readily understood by all participants. Far- and near-recognition symbols must be established, and the equipment available within HNFs must be understood to create a feasible plan. Operations graphics must be shared during Phase 0 to create a common understanding and to facilitate a quick linkup either in person or via radio.

An example of validated linkup procedures performed within the Korean Theater of Operations is contained in Table 1. It is important to note that this is not all-inclusive and will require

TASKS		STATUS
Prior to link-up		
Receive link-up time, place, unit, command/support relationship (operations order, operations plan)		
Coordinate in-person with receiving unit (if possible)		
Establish liaison (if applicable)		
Establish far recognition (establish comms in accordance with primary, alternate, contingency and emergency plan)		
Coordination while moving to link-up point		
Number/type of friendly vehicles on both stationary and moving elements		
Status of routes to link-up points; updates to rally points, chokepoints and checkpoints		
Friendly (joint/combined) forces in area, and location and disposition of forces		
Confirm communication information (frequencies, call signs, Joint Capabilities Release identification and chatroom)		
Verify fire-control measures or signals in effect		
Friendly adjacent units by location		
Provide/receive intel updates		
Finalize link-up location and rally point as well as alternate location due to contact if different from operation plan tactics, techniques and procedures and GTW positions		
Confirm near-recognition signal (day and night)		
Day (U.S. to U.S.) VS-17 panel with pink side facing out (RoK security forces/U.S.) Green flag/orange VS-17 panel	Night (U.S. to U.S.) P: infrared strobe/infrared panel A: red flashlight/chem light (RoK security forces to U.S.) green chem light/green flashlight	
Coordination at link-up point		
Establish local security		
Provide update on any constraints, limitations or restrictions that will affect mission		
Exchange graphics and brief active fire-control measures		

Table 1. Phase 0 recon checklist.

adjustment based on the supported unit’s capabilities and mission set.

Enablers are simply any asset or unit that can be used to aid mission success. Reconnaissance units must understand enabler capabilities, limitations and sustainment requirements to employ them effectively. The incorporation of these enablers is vital to create shared understanding for the operation and to allow the subject-matter experts, the enablers themselves, to provide bottom-up refinement for the plan. By having physical access to the terrain before execution of the operation, enablers can select the optimal location to ensure survivability and achieve the desired effects. Reduced-force rehearsals can be conducted on-site to enable early identification of friction points within the

plan, and defined triggers can be established to ensure that the right enabler is at precisely the right place, at the right time, to provide the right effect for the situation.

Phase 0 reconnaissance offers a rare opportunity to develop a detailed plan on the very terrain on which operations will be executed. Success enables capturing detailed information on the terrain, infrastructure, threat and societal aspects within an area of operations before the start of hostilities. Of equal importance, success enables the creation of shared understanding among the reconnaissance force, adjacent friendly forces and HNFs. Rehearsals among the aforementioned elements and additional assigned enablers can take place on the actual terrain where a planned

operation will take place. Time is one of the most precious resources that we as reconnaissance leaders have, and it must be put to good use!

As Michael Elliot-Bateman so fittingly said, “If we arrive, as our forefathers did, at the scene of battle inadequately equipped, incorrectly trained and mentally unprepared, then this failure will be a criminal one because there has been ample warning.”¹

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Notes

¹ Michael Elliot-Bateman, *Defeat in the*

East, London: Oxford University Press, 1967.

ACRONYM QUICK-SCAN

ABCT – armored brigade combat team

ABOLC – Armor Basic Officer Leader's Course

ARC – Army Reconnaissance Course

CLC – Cavalry Leader's Course

CFTF – counterfire task force

HHT – headquarters and headquarters troop

HNF – host-nation forces

MCCC – Maneuver Captain's Career Course

OP – observation post

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