



Brigade Combat Team's Reconnaissance, Security Achilles Heel: the Cavalry Squadron Liaison Officer

by MAJ James M. Plutt and
CPT Christopher M. Salerno

A cavalry squadron continues a deliberate and forceful zone reconnaissance, slowly collapsing the enemy forces' disruption zone. The squadron is in Hour 24 of continuous-reconnaissance operations against a near-peer threat. They have intentionally reduced their electromagnetic signature (EMS) while also facing every form of enemy contact, with three troops operating outside the mutually supporting range.

The brigade combat team's (BCT) main body crosses the line of departure in eight hours. The squadron was fully integrated in the BCT's initial military decision-making process before moving from the tactical-assembly area (TAA) to the initial screen position, and it is currently executing the BCT's information-collection (IC) plan. The BCT's unmanned aerial system (UAS) platoon determines that a named area of interest (NAI) lacks enemy presence, cueing a cavalry troop forward to the next NAI.

The field-artillery battalion has a

battery in position ready to fire against the BCT high-payoff target list and squadron-nominated targets. A Prophet (a 24-hour, all-weather, near-real-time, ground-based, tactical signals intelligence/electronic warfare capability) collection team oriented in a search area develops an NAI based on emitter activity, confirming an enemy force within the zone. A cavalry troop was maneuvering during an area reconnaissance of a different NAI, but the troop commander adjusts the scheme of maneuver to emplace the mortar section and employ the RQ-11B Raven small UAS (SUAS).

The mixing effect between the Prophet and the SUAS provides the cavalry troop an accurate picture of a mounted anti-tank (AT) section. The cavalry-troop commander is able to use the mortar section to suppress the AT threat while dismounted scout squads maneuver to destroy the AT section using Javelin. Based on the synchronized reconnaissance and security (R&S) guidance among the BCT, squadron and troop, the troop commander assessed the threat and destroyed it using the cueing effect from the Prophet

without unmasking the artillery battery or requesting BCT assets or an enabler not already allocated.

Synchronization among echelons is highest when units are close together and leaders can coordinate in detail at the start of the operations process. A BCT conducts multiple phases of the operations process simultaneously. This process is stressed as subordinate elements are in multiple forms of contact; commanders and leaders are dispersed across the depth and breadth of the BCT's area of operation; and the BCT battle rhythm is straining the primary, alternate, emergency and contingency (PACE) plan to maintain situational understanding. It becomes challenging to maintain synchronization.

How do BCTs do this at distance once outside the TAA? All BCTs should strive for this level of synchronization during the reconnaissance fight.

Cavalry squadrons can locate their squadron main command post (CP) alongside the BCT main to force this synchronization, but at a cost. The squadron tactical CP (TAC) must fight

forward more often, separating the squadron commander and operations officers from the planning process, limiting their ability to drive a continuous operations process nested to support the BCT.

This article proposes three suggestions for improving synchronization from the status quo:

- Option 1: mirror the liaison-officer (LNO) package of a combined-arms battalion (CAB) or infantry battalion;
- Option 2: use the headquarters and headquarters troop (HHT) commander and squadron targeting officer; or
- Option 3: create a brigade R&S element (BRSE).

This article recommends Option 3 as ideal and Option 2 as interim; the BRSE is the ideal solution to the cavalry-squadron LNO dilemma. The BRSE solves this problem and allows the squadron increased ability to fight the formation forward and remain aligned with the BCT over sustained operations.

Option 1

The squadron requires an LNO, but it is not currently authorized an LNO within the modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE). A squadron can use an excess officer, but this undermines the effort to build long-term proficiency or establish any importance around the position. The Army authorizes an LNO for the CABs and infantry battalions within the BCTs, and it equips those LNOs with the necessary equipment to move and communicate between the BCT and their respective CAB or infantry battalion. An MTOE update that includes an LNO and equipment similar to other units would better facilitate the linkage between the cavalry squadron and BCT.

A standard LNO package based off what the Army already authorizes would include an Armor first lieutenant with a vehicle, radio and Joint Battle Command-Platform. This would be a step in the right direction, but this option does not provide the right capability. A cavalry squadron needs an LNO who can effectively plug into the BCT's operation process.

A typical LNO is well-positioned to answer requests for information (RFI) between the BCT and his/her respective battalion. A squadron LNO could replicate this; his/her intimate knowledge of the squadron and its capabilities better enables the BCT during current operations. He or she could reach back to the squadron's main CP or combat-trains CP (CTCP) and ensure the brigade's common operating picture (COP) is accurate.

The quick reachback capability provides the operations officer the ability to address multiple issues at once without desynchronizing efforts across the brigade. The operations officer may want to know when the squadron will rise above 80-percent combat power while the brigade's main effort is seizing an objective. The ability to gather information enhances the BCT's decision-making process, but this type of LNO package is limited to aggregating decisions from multiple like units vs. advocating for enablers.

This solution fails to recognize that the cavalry squadron controls the preponderance of the BCT's ground R&S capability and serves as the headquarters that executes the BCT's IC plan. The cavalry squadron conducts operations earlier, more dispersed and across greater depth than any other maneuver formation organic to the BCT. Squadrons require synchronized support of the BCT across all warfighting functions. Also, the squadron needs access to echelons-above-brigade (EAB) resources at key times to accomplish its mission and enable the BCT.

The BCT and its cavalry squadron can achieve synchronization when all leaders within a BCT are in close proximity during the first turn of the operations process. This becomes untenable as the fighting progresses and squadron senior leaders are unavailable to assist the BCT in planning R&S efforts for the next phase. This portends a lack of influence in the BCT planning process and a decrease in the quality of R&S planning and warfighting products.

The cavalry squadron operates on a condensed timeline compared to the CABs and infantry battalions and is continuously conducting operations

while the BCT plans. Mirroring the LNO and associated equipment from a CAB or infantry battalion will prove insufficient for the cavalry squadron during large-scale combat operations (LSCO).

The squadron needs to be properly represented within the BCT's working groups to enable its success in LSCO. The recently updated Field Manual (FM) 3-96, **Brigade Combat Team**, aligns a battlefield framework with FM 3-0, **Operations**, and displays deep, close, rear, support and consolidation areas. FM 3-96 defines the deep area as "where the commander sets conditions for future success in close combat."¹

From the forward edge of the close area to the coordinating fireline, the BCT retains a deep maneuver area for conducting R&S operations. The cavalry squadron needs access to EAB assets to integrate lethal and non-lethal effects that enable it to conduct R&S in the deep area as part of the BCT's IC plan.

An example BCT battle rhythm outlined in Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 3-60, **Targeting**, outlines a targeting working group and targeting decision board.² There is no representation from the squadron outlined in either of the meetings as templated. The cavalry squadron's unique role requires it to be represented within the BCT main CP to ensure that it can execute combined-arms R&S operations over extended lines of communication to generate and preserve options for the BCT commander.

Option 2

A solution exists within the cavalry squadron already: the targeting warrant officer and the HHT commander. The cavalry squadron requires a leader who can advocate on the commander's behalf and is trusted as an adviser by the BCT commander. No individual short of committing one of the squadron's three field-grade officers meets this in the same way as the HHT commander – a trusted senior Armor captain already handpicked for that role by the BCT commander. Furthermore, the targeting officer, paired with the HHT commander, serves to align the squadron within the BCT's targeting process.

This package is suitable, flexible and acceptable within every BCT in the Army. It already exists within the formation and would serve to properly position leaders on the battlefield to best enable the cavalry squadron to support the BCT.

This solution provides more than simple ease of communication to action RFI, a role typical of a CAB LNO. It incorporates the cavalry squadron into the BCT battle rhythm, specifically within IC planning, R&S teaming, nesting transitions and targeting. This course of action puts a trusted leader into the main CP to interact with the BCT commander and BCT operations officer. It allows the cavalry squadron to project requirements aligned against the air-tasking order (ATO) and bring resources into alignment to support its actions in the deep maneuver area several days in advance.

The most compelling argument for this option is the ability to advocate for the squadron during continued

combat. It is unrealistic to maintain the full PACE plan from squadron to BCT over distance and against a near-peer adversary. Periodically the squadron will limit EMS operations to increase stealth and protection, which also limits its ability to coordinate and plan at distance.

There will also be windows of time when the squadron main CP is executing a movement. At that point, an alternate CP, often the CTCP, will execute command-and-control but with less capability to exercise the full PACE to the BCT. The squadron operating in the deep maneuver area and in a communication-denied environment will not have the ability to directly tie in to planning efforts in the BCT's main CP.

If a targeting meeting occurs over an Upper Tactical Internet (TI) medium and the squadron is not on Upper TI, it instantly becomes less nested with its higher headquarters as the BCT continues executing continuous operations and the squadron is unable to

conduct collaborative planning. As the BCT continues to plan for the next fight, the physical presence of the squadron HHT commander and targeting officer serves as the key to ensuring continuity of the operations process while the cavalry squadron conducts continuous R&S operations.

The downside of this option is that it removes the HHT commander from the CTCP. This, however, is easily mitigated. The forward-support troop (FST) commander is capable of commanding the CTCP. The FST commander can work with the S-1 and S-4 to maintain a COP and, when necessary, assume responsibility of the current operation, with the TAC joining the CTCP as the main CP jumps.

The FST commander is well-positioned to influence sustainment planning at the CTCP. The FST first sergeant, with the FST executive officer and a small team, can lead the field-trains CP (FTCP), either within the brigade-support area (BSA) or forward. The FTCP



Figure 1. Reconnaissance is continuous. (From the Maneuver Center of Excellence "Fundamentals of Reconnaissance" poster series, <https://www.benning.army.mil/armor/fundamentals/RF-3.html>)

remains positioned to facilitate the flow of personnel, equipment and supplies to and from the BSA.

This option is feasible within the current MTOE but lacks a critical capability. A key component missing is direct representation of the intelligence warfighting function from the squadron at the BCT main. Though the HHT commander is well-suited to advise the BCT commander and S-3 in the absence of the squadron commander and S-3, he/she may not be best suited to integrate into the BCT intelligence cell. Theater and joint echelons apportion IC resources to subordinate echelons. Corps and divisions allocate support and intelligence capabilities to the BCT. The HHT commander working alone on behalf of the squadron may be less useful in synchronizing BCT and EAB collection assets with the squadron's maneuver in the deep area than if he/she is paired with a military-intelligence (MI) captain working on behalf of the squadron.

Option 3

The final option presented in this article is to create a BRSE that plugs into the BCT's main CP. This can be adopted in one of two ways: it may be additive to the MTOE or represent slightly creative application to the existing MTOE.

Following are examples of each:

- **Package 1 (MTOE change)** – The total package would include an Armor Branch major, Armor captain, MI captain and the squadron's targeting officer. The Armor major, Armor captain and MI captain would be added to the current MTOE. This package provides maximum ability to simultaneously integrate with the brigade intelligence-support element, BCT plans, BCT current operations and the BCT fires cell.

The Army would need to authorize several more billets for this package. The Armor-major position may not be a key-development billet, and this may stretch time on stations and effect evaluations, but it does increase the squadron's synchronization with brigade.

- **Package 2 (MTOE reorganized)** – This package, less optimal than

Package 1, mitigates the weakness identified in Option 2. The BCT is currently authorized three MI captains and one MI first lieutenant. The MI captain slotted as the BCT assistant S-2 would be authorized to the squadron as part of the BRSE. By providing the MI captain from the BCT and pairing him/her with the squadron's targeting officer and HHT commander, the BCT can create a package that can advocate on the squadron's behalf, keep the squadron nested within the BCT operations process, and ensure integration and synchronization of enabling capability into the scheme of maneuver.

There is a common misconception that when reconnaissance ends, security begins, whereas the reality is that reconnaissance is continuous. (Figure 1.) It is often expressed that the squadron's efforts are offset from the brigade's efforts. The squadron is operating at a high level while the brigade prepares, but after the reconnaissance handover the squadron is now at a low tempo.

Another misconception is that a BRSE cell is excessive because it is only needed for part of the operation and is unnecessary once the brigade transitions away from R&S operations. This is a misconception because reconnaissance is continuous throughout the operation. A brigade that can truly synchronize its reconnaissance should use a BRSE to ensure reconnaissance is continuous.

The brigade's main effort may be actively seizing an objective, but the squadron is not sitting in a TAA awaiting a break in the battle. The squadron should be moving forward and setting conditions for the next transition. A BRSE cell contains the requisite experience required to facilitate this:

- The cell ensures ATOs support the squadron's movement.
- It helps ensure that the commander's critical information requirements remain current and valid to properly orient the squadron's reconnaissance efforts.
- It also ensures that the holistic effort of the BCT's IC plan properly integrates the capabilities and

capacity of the cavalry squadron in scheme of maneuver.

- Finally, the cell serves as the bridge between the squadron and the brigade, enabling the squadron commander to fight the formation.

Conclusion

The BCT operations officer is the primary staff officer who integrates and synchronizes the operation as a whole for the BCT commander. Options 1, 2 and 3 all provide an increased capability to assist the S-3 in integrating the cavalry squadron and in maximizing its ability to conduct R&S operations for the BCT. At extended distance and against a peer/near-peer threat, the cavalry squadron needs experienced leaders representing critical warfighting functions to represent the squadron across the BCT's battle rhythm events within the BCT's main CP.

There is a cost-benefit analysis that must be done regardless of what option is selected, but choosing Option 2 or 3 will have an outsized benefit to the squadron being able to maintain itself at the right place and time with the right resourcing and enabling capability to continue to maneuver during R&S operations. The Army should adopt Package 1 from Option 3 as an investment in the future of R&S operations.

MAJ Jim Plutt Jr. is the majors' career manager for Armor Branch at Human Resources Command, Fort Knox, KY. Previous assignments include cavalry-squadron executive officer and cavalry squadron S-3 trainer (Cobra) National Training Center (NTC) Operations Group, Fort Irwin, CA; S-3, 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM), WA; S-3, 2nd Infantry Battalion, 1st Infantry Regiment, 2-2 Infantry, JBLM; small-group leader, Maneuver Captain's Career Course (MCCC), Fort Benning, GA; commander, Bravo Troop, 3rd Squadron, 38th Cavalry Regiment, 201st Battlefield Surveillance Brigade (BfSB), JBLM; and S-3 Plans, 3-38 Cav, 201st BfSB. MAJ Plutt's military schools include the Armor Basic Officer Leadership Course, MCCC, Australian Command and Staff College-Joints, Basic Airborne School, U.S. Army Ranger School, Reconnaissance

and Surveillance Leader's Course, Joint Firepower Course and Jumpmaster Course. He has a bachelor's of business administration degree in finance from Kent State University and a master's degree in military and defense studies from the Australian National University.

CPT Christopher Salerno is a small-group leader at the Maneuver Center of Excellence's MCCC, Fort Benning, GA. Previous assignments include troop observer/coach/trainer "Cobra 12," Operations Group, NTC, Fort Irwin, CA; commander, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, Fort Hood, TX; commander, Troop C, 4th Squadron, 9th Cavalry Regiment, Fort Hood; executive officer, Headquarters and

Headquarters Troop, 1st Squadron, 89th Cavalry Regiment, Fort Drum, NY; and scout-platoon platoon, 1st Squadron, 89th Cavalry Regiment, Fort Drum. CPT Salerno's military schools include MCCC, Cavalry Leader's Course, Bradley Leader's Course, Maintenance Leader's Course, Army Reconnaissance Course and the Armor Basic Officer Leader Course. He has a bachelor's of science degree in business management from Boston College and a master's of science degree in organizational leadership from Columbus State University.

Notes

¹ FM 3-96, *Brigade Combat Team*, January 2021.

² ATP 3-60, *Targeting*, May 2015.

ACRONYM QUICK-SCAN

AT – anti-tank
 ATO – air-tasking order
 ATP – Army techniques publication
 BCT – brigade combat team
 BfSB – battlefield surveillance brigade
 BRSE – brigade reconnaissance and security element
 BSA – brigade-support area
 CAB – combined-arms battalion
 COP – common operating picture
 CP – command post
 CTCP – combat-trains command post
 EAB – echelons above brigade
 EMS – electromagnetic spectrum
 FM – field manual
 FST – forward-support troop
 FTCP – field-trains command post
 HHT – headquarters and headquarters troop
 IC – information collection
 JBLM – Joint Base Lewis-McChord
 LNO – liaison officer
 LSCO – large-scale combat operations
 MCCC – Maneuver Captain's Career Course
 MI – military intelligence
 MTOE – modified table of organization and equipment
 NAI – named area of interest
 NTC – National Training Center
 PACE – primary, alternate, contingency and emergency
 RFI – request for information
 R&S – reconnaissance and security
 SUAS – small unmanned aerial system
 TAA – tactical-assembly area
 TAC – tactical command post
 TI – tactical Internet
 UAS – unmanned aerial system

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