

# Counterreconnaissance, Cavalry Corps and Division Operations

by CPT J.A. Perkins

The Army published a new Field Manual (FM) 3-0, **Operations**, in October 2022. Then FM 3-98, **Reconnaissance and Security Operations**, was published in January 2023. At Fort Cavazos, TX, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment, is now testing the division-cavalry (divcav) task-organization and mission.

Considering these new developments in task-organization and doctrine, this article is an analysis of those updates through a multidomain operations (MDO) lens to determine capabilities and gaps, as well as implications in future Cavalry missions. The purpose of this article is to clearly articulate the definition of *counterreconnaissance* and why understanding it is important to future MDO.

## Counterreconnaissance

Counterreconnaissance, counter-reconnaissance, or counter reconnaissance? FM 3-0 uses both *counterreconnaissance* and *counter-reconnaissance*.<sup>1</sup> FM 3-98 uses *counterreconnaissance*.<sup>2</sup> Training and evaluation outline (T&EO) reports use *counter-reconnaissance* and *counter reconnaissance*.<sup>3</sup> This question encapsulates the confusion surrounding *counterreconnaissance*, where multiple interpretations of what it means to conduct counterreconnaissance can all be true simultaneously.<sup>4</sup>

FM 3-98 defines *counterreconnaissance* as “a mission task that encompasses all measures taken by a commander to counter enemy reconnaissance efforts.”<sup>5</sup> *Counterreconnaissance* as it is currently defined is too broad, so that it has no meaning or no shared understanding.

The problems with this catchall mission task are highlighted using the following hypothetical scenario.

*A squadron commander orders troop commanders to conduct counterreconnaissance missions. The squadron commander orders troop commanders to execute a screen, with the primary task of conducting counterreconnaissance, but the squadron commander wants each troop commander to provide a backbrief with their proposed course of action (CoA).*

*The first troop commander has trained his/her unit using T&EO “Plan Counter Reconnaissance Measures at Company Level” and focuses on camouflaging the formation to prevent observation, and then the troop commander develops a communication plan for the troop.<sup>6</sup> This troop commander takes active steps that provide his/her formation passive benefits.*

*The second troop commander has recently read FM 3-98 and knows the “purpose of counterreconnaissance is to destroy, defeat or repel all enemy reconnaissance elements,” and chooses to focus on creating permissive engagement criteria to facilitate the destruction of the enemy reconnaissance.<sup>7</sup>*

*The third troop commander only plans to execute the screen mission. Whatever action the troop takes to protect friendly-force information and engage the enemy reconnaissance as part of the screen is the troop’s “counterreconnaissance,” but deliberately planning counterreconnaissance separately is not an action the troop commander intends to undertake. The troop commander plans the screen and anything that occurs during the screen that leads to the destruction of the enemy reconnaissance is “counterreconnaissance” because it is already a part of “all actions taken.”<sup>8</sup> For this troop commander, counterreconnaissance is not a tactical mission task per se but a byproduct of the screen mission.*

Which commander is correct in this hypothetical scenario? Each commander could justify his/her chosen CoA using current doctrine or training aids. However, the hypothetical scenario highlights common misunderstandings. How to conduct counterreconnaissance is not shared among Cavalry professionals. FM 3-90-1, **Offense and Defense**, Volume 1, states that “both the commander and the subordinate must have a common understanding of the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of the operation” in reference to each tactical task.<sup>9</sup>

## Old vs. new definition

The current definition of counterreconnaissance is “a tactical mission task that encompasses all measures taken by a commander to counter enemy reconnaissance and surveillance efforts. Counterreconnaissance is not a distinct mission but a component of all forms [types]<sup>10</sup> of security operations.”<sup>11</sup>

However, I propose the following definition: “Counterreconnaissance is a distinct tactical mission task that is the sum of active efforts by the commander to counter enemy reconnaissance efforts by destroying, defeating or repelling all enemy reconnaissance elements within capabilities.”

Counterreconnaissance needs to be a distinct mission vs. a component of all types of security for the following reasons:

- A tactical mission task is the specific activity performed while executing a type of operation, and reconnaissance and security (R&S) are shaping operations.<sup>12</sup>
- By comparison, a route reconnaissance may be executed as part of an area or zone reconnaissance or a reconnaissance-in-force. Route reconnaissance is not treated as a component of all reconnaissance operations, or tactical mission task that is not a distinct mission because it can be executed as its own distinct tactical mission task.
- Being a distinct mission implies deliberate planning and unique tasks that must be completed.

The proposed new definition focuses explicitly on active efforts because the current counterreconnaissance definition includes passive effects as part of the sum of all measures taken by a commander. Specifically, “Plan Counter Reconnaissance Measures at Company Level” includes as part of conditions the requirement to “develop a passive and active counter-reconnaissance [*sic*] plan.”<sup>13</sup> The standard for this task is to develop a plan that “prevents the enemy from collecting information about friendly operations and destroys enemy reconnaissance elements.”<sup>14</sup>

The performance measures that are evaluated for “go/no-go” status are camouflaging, developing a communications plan, establishing critical friendly zones and conducting troop-leading procedures.<sup>15</sup> Each performance measure is an active task with passive effects.

Passive effects are better captured by *masking*, a new concept introduced in FM 3-0. However, FM 3-0 does not provide a definition of masking. In a recent interview, retired COL John Antal provides a working definition of masking: “Masking is the full-spectrum, multidomain effort to deceive enemy sensors and disrupt enemy targeting.”<sup>16</sup> The passive elements of counterreconnaissance are better captured within this definition of masking because they achieve the desired deception and disruption. The passive efforts currently included in counterreconnaissance doctrine may contribute to success but arguably cannot directly cause the enemy reconnaissance to be defeated, destroyed or repelled.

The primary purpose of a Cavalry formation conducting any security mission is not simply to survive but to prevent the enemy from collecting intelligence about friendly information and CoAs. To do that, active measures must be taken to deny the enemy commander access to his reconnaissance assets and the information those assets provide.

The Cavalry performs a critical purpose for its respective commanders: to be the eyes and ears of the commander, enabling the commander to visualize, understand and direct subordinate units. The Cavalry fights the enemy reconnaissance as a zero-sum equation. The Cavalry prevents the enemy commander from being able to visualize, understand and direct his subordinates. Specifically, counterreconnaissance enables the friendly-force commander to get inside the enemy’s decision cycle by attacking the enemy’s reconnaissance assets and simultaneously places the friendly-force commander in a position of relative advantage on the battlefield.

The final concept to discuss is the focus on destroying, defeating and repelling all enemy reconnaissance elements within capabilities. A screen mission includes a requirement to conduct “counterreconnaissance to destroy or repel enemy reconnaissance units,” but the primary purpose of a screen is to provide early warning to the protected force.<sup>17</sup> The proposed primary purpose of counterreconnaissance as a distinct tactical mission task is the destruction or defeat of the enemy reconnaissance to blind the enemy commander.

As an analogy, use the examples of *reconnaissance-in-force* and *movement-to-contact*. A *movement-to-contact* is an “offensive operation designed to develop the situation and establish or regain contact.”<sup>18</sup> Contrast that mission with a *reconnaissance-in-force*, which is “designed to discover or test the enemy’s strength, dispositions and reactions or to obtain other information.”<sup>19</sup> A reconnaissance-in-force develops the situation to create favorable conditions for subsequent tactical tasks just as a movement-to-contact does. The focus of doctrine lies in the purposes of the respective missions.

A movement-to-contact is an offensive operation in which the goal is “to make initial contact with a small element while retaining enough combat power to develop the situation.”<sup>20</sup> A reconnaissance-in-force is “an aggressive reconnaissance, which develops information and intelligence in contact with the enemy to determine and exploit enemy weaknesses.”<sup>21</sup> The distinction is important because the specific tasks that must be accomplished change with the change in purpose. The intent is critical to mission command and disciplined initiative, and the distinction implies a difference in action by the follow-on force.

A movement-to-contact follows the characteristics of the offense and is an offensive task. If achieved, it enables the follow-on force to conduct an attack. A reconnaissance-in-force follows the fundamentals of reconnaissance and develops the understanding of the operational environment for the commander. In the discussion of a screen vs. counterreconnaissance, the purpose of conducting a screen is early warning and the purpose of conducting counterreconnaissance is the destruction of enemy reconnaissance. Recognizing that distinction in purpose necessarily creates different tasks that must be accomplished to be successful, provide a different intent for mission command and offer different follow-on actions for the commander.

## Training

Units can train to be successful at counterreconnaissance. Building out a full mission-essential task list is beyond the scope of this article, but the T&EO report, “OPFOR [Opposing Force] Execute Counterreconnaissance,” is currently the best doctrine for training and executing counterreconnaissance.<sup>22</sup> Given the inclusion of passive measures, the conditions and standards need to be modified, but the planning and execution performance steps and measures are a good framework for how counterreconnaissance can be executed.

During planning, the Cavalry formation can determine the objectives, identify collection requirements and task-organize to defeat enemy reconnaissance elements.<sup>23</sup> During execution, Cavalry formations can use ground maneuver, aviation, unmanned aerial vehicles or electronic-warfare assets to locate, monitor and set conditions for actions to destroy or defeat enemy reconnaissance.<sup>24</sup> Cavalry formations also execute movement and maneuver to identify routes, probable lines of contact and kill zones that support indirect fire and direct fire to destroy or defeat enemy reconnaissance elements.<sup>25</sup>

## So what?

In my previous article, “Multidomain Operations in Large-Scale Combat: A Cavalry Perspective,” in *ARMOR*’s Spring 2023 edition, I articulate the need for distinct Cavalry formations at the corps and division levels. The underlying premise of both articles is regardless of how force modernization comes to fruition regarding the Cavalry, even if a corps does not have an organic Cavalry formation, the corps should still have a Cavalry formation in large-scale combat operations (LSCO).

In combat, if a corps commander does not possess an organic Cavalry element, the commander of the joint, all-domain fight is going to requisition either a Cavalry unit from a subordinate unit, most likely a Cavalry squadron, or assign a R&S operation to a subordinate maneuver force, likely a brigade combat team. Thinking through what a corps R&S operation might entail in LSCO is the reason the definition and tasks associated with counterreconnaissance, as discussed in this article, are so important.

First, in terms of reconnaissance missions, corps will operate in a new theater where the commander’s understanding of the operational environment is not complete. This implies the use of a reconnaissance-pull technique to develop the situation by conducting zone-reconnaissance missions. A focus on counterreconnaissance training increases survivability during zone reconnaissance.

Second, the possibility of a Cavalry formation being able to realistically perform a guard or cover that prevents observation and direct or indirect fires in a multidomain environment is problematic. A screen mission is

achievable, but with the scenario of a corps attempting to disrupt and disintegrate anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) zones, providing early warning to the corps commander has limited impact. Executing counterreconnaissance is achievable to deny the enemy commander information in countering the disruption and disintegration of his/her A2/AD zone by friendly forces.

Cavalry formations serve their respective commanders; the corps Cavalry mission is different from the divcav mission. Historically, Cavalry formations conduct security missions more than reconnaissance operations.<sup>26</sup> For both penetration divisions, how is the divcav placing the division in a position of relative advantage on the battlefield? If the division is penetrating and security is the more common operation, then the divcav is likely executing a flank guard. If the divcav is conducting reconnaissance operations, then the corps has already developed familiarity with the operational environment, and divcav executes area reconnaissance to push into areas where specific priority intelligence requirements for the division commander can be answered.

## Conclusion

In summary, this article argues that counterreconnaissance is more correctly defined as the deliberate actions taken to defeat, destroy or repel the enemy's reconnaissance assets. The passive effects of current counterreconnaissance doctrine are better captured as part of the masking concept. If this redefinition is accepted in future doctrinal publications, supporting T&EOs require adjustments and the framework for those changes is supported by the T&EO "OPFOR Execute Counterreconnaissance."

While divcav is currently being developed and implemented, a clear gap remains at the corps level. It is critical to begin thinking through what those operations entail in a MDO environment before force structures are designed to fulfill future requirements. This article offers counterreconnaissance as the most suitable security mission for a corps Cavalry formation, relative to alternative security missions. Counterreconnaissance assists the corps commander in achieving decision-cycle dominance.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> FM 3-0, **Operations**, Department of the Army, October 2022.

<sup>2</sup> FM 3-98, **Reconnaissance and Security Operations**, Department of the Army, Jan. 10, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Task 71-9-6510 and Task 171-720-0008, "Plan Counter Reconnaissance Measures at Company Level," Department of the Army, July 22, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> For clarity, *counterreconnaissance* is used throughout this article. If a direct quote is used from doctrine, *counterreconnaissance* replaces any misspelling.

<sup>5</sup> FM 3-98.

<sup>6</sup> Task 171-720-0008.

<sup>7</sup> FM 3-98.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> FM 3-90-1, **Offense and Defense**, Volume 1, Department of the Army, March 2013.

<sup>10</sup> FM 3-98 now refers to types of R&S vs. forms. Doctrine referenced in this article that includes the term "form" is changed to "type or types" throughout the rest of this article.

<sup>11</sup> FM 3-90-1.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Task 171-720-0008.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Retired COL John Antal, “Sooner Than We Think: Command Post Survivability and Future Threats with retired COL John Antal,” “The Convergence – An Army Mad Scientist podcast,” Aug. 4, 2022, <https://theconvergence.castos.com/podcasts/5043/episodes/62-sooner-than-we-think-command-post-survivability-and-future-threats-with-col-ret-john-antal>.

<sup>17</sup> FM 3-98.

<sup>18</sup> FM 1-02.1, *Operational Terms*, Department of the Army, March 2021.

<sup>19</sup> FM 3-98.

<sup>20</sup> Army Doctrine Publication 3-90, *Offense and Defense*, Department of the Army, July 2019.

<sup>21</sup> FM 3-98.

<sup>22</sup> Task Number “71-CO-8506, OPFOR Execute Counterreconnaissance,” Department of the Army, Nov. 11, 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Nathan A. Jennings, “Reconsidering Division Cavalry Squadrons,” School of Advanced Military Studies, May 25, 2017.

## Acronym Quick-Scan

**A2/AD** – anti-access/area-denial

**CLC** – Cavalry Leader’s Course

**CoA** – course of action

**Divcav** – division cavalry

**FM** – field manual

**LSCO** – large-scale combat operations

**MDO** – multidomain operations

**OPFOR** – opposing force

**R&S** – reconnaissance and security

**T&EO** – training and evaluation outline