

Raising the Guidon: Leveraging Cultural Excellence for Reconnaissance and Security Operations

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You win or you die in the profession of arms. As GEN Donn A. Starry argues, we cannot rely on technology.¹ We also cannot be terrified by the prospect of peer-threat large-scale combat operations (LSCO).² Winning matters,³ and to develop a cohesive team focused on achieving their best, it is vital to foster a culture of excellence to be better than your enemy.

Reconnaissance and security (R&S) operations are essential to all successful LSCO.⁴ Therefore developing and leveraging a culture of excellence in R&S operations is particularly important in Cavalry units at all echelons.

But culture is hard to influence. It is iterative and takes time as personnel rotate through units. This difficulty is exacerbated if achieving excellence is not perceived as crucial to winning. Given the importance of the Cavalry to the commander in allowing brigade combat teams to achieve positions of relative advantage,⁵ how can leaders harness the potential that exists within their people to be better than the enemy?

This article discusses three frameworks for the Cavalry to leverage a culture of excellence in R&S operations:

- First, through a better understanding of how enemy and friendly forces will fight.
- Second, through consistency of planning sessions combined with tough training under realistic combat conditions.
- Finally, through the correct employment of reward and recognition that reinforces lessons-learned and effort applied toward R&S training.

This article concludes that most mechanisms proposed apply more widely than R&S operations and that developing and maintaining a culture of excellence is vital to the success of the U.S. Army and its allies into the future.

Disclaimer. The author wishes to acknowledge that effective leadership and communication are persistent and fundamental factors within each of the following frameworks and recommended mechanisms. However, these will deliberately not be included as a focus of this article.

Understanding enemy and friendly forces

Mission analysis. Understanding both the threat and the friendly forces you are going into battle with is essential for the Cavalry, who generally operate ahead of the main body in R&S operations. During planning sessions, mission analysis is the most important step of the military decision-making process (MDMP) for this very reason. As the 2012 version of Field Manual (FM) 6-0 concisely articulated, “Since no amount of subsequent planning can solve an insufficiently understood problem, mission analysis is the most important step in MDMP.”⁶ But how is it possible to develop a culture of excellence in these areas?

Know the enemy. Without a good understanding of the enemy, it is impossible for commanders to provide focused and relevant training for R&S operations. Accordingly, following initial training, developing a baseline understanding of pacing challenge and acute threat^{7 8} capabilities should be prioritized given that they are more foreign to Cavalry leaders than their own forces.

Commanders can accept some risk in lack of complete familiarity with enemy forces given that tactics, techniques and procedures will evolve over the course of a conflict. Both the armed forces of Ukraine and Russia attempted to adapt, with varying degrees of success, in 2022.^{9 10} However, once a threat to the nation is realized and a campaign is underway, investing time in understanding the specific enemy commander and the precise capabilities faced will produce significant dividends.

To strengthen information collection of a threat force’s course of action (CoA), Cavalry professionals should be encouraged to attend the Cavalry Leader’s Course (CLC) and military-intelligence courses to enhance their ability to rapidly answer priority intelligence requirements (PIRs). Use of simulation, combined with professional-development briefs (at different security levels) using realistic potential adversaries, will also ground Cavalry mindsets in reality and mitigate the risk posed by insufficient division and brigade funds to train in the field at unit level.

Force-on-force competition in the field that employs an opposing force (OPFOR) mimicking enemy capabilities and methods of fighting based off doctrine is a recommended technique that can produce a beneficial performance-pressure environment.¹¹ If unit-level resources do not allow for this mechanism, a similar effect can be achieved at a smaller scale using games, either wargaming or barracks-based competition. From a lessons-learned perspective, it is essential that OPFOR provide backbriefs on how they successfully targeted U.S. forces, mirroring combat-training center (CTC) OPFOR during rotations. These backbriefs should occur at the lowest level possible to assist all personnel in Cavalry units to understand their own strengths and weaknesses.

Know yourself. Understanding friendly forces, including joint and international allies, and enablers is similarly vital to leveraging cultural excellence in R&S operations. During CLC many students are initially unable to apply the fundamentals of R&S because they are unaware of how to employ their assets. They lack the knowledge of and experience with certain capabilities for correct employment.

This can be overcome with training and education. Attendance in established courses such as the Joint Firepower Course, which requires integration of multiple friendly capabilities, offers an established model to Cavalry leaders. In a peer-threat LSCO scenario, it will likely take place with limited notice, with attachments being allocated almost certainly at the eleventh hour.

To overcome the inevitable friction, chaos and uncertainty of changes or additions to task-organization, familiarization briefs and training events such as leader professional-development sessions should occur in advance to mentally prepare the unit. Cavalry leaders should, at a minimum, understand and be able to explain employment of all assets that can assist with R&S across their brigade. However, it must not be overlooked that LSCO are extensive joint combat operations and during ground combat typically involve operations by multiple corps and divisions.¹² Familiarity with and understanding this larger pool of available assets will engender confidence and improve morale, and is fundamental to generating a culture of excellence in Cavalry units.

Planning and training under tough, realistic conditions

Planning under tough, realistic conditions. Consistency of tough, realistic planning sessions, combined with training under combat conditions, is key to developing a culture of excellence. During peacetime training, the fear and danger elicited by executing operations against a live, thinking enemy intent on killing you is difficult to replicate.

J.F.C. Fuller wrote, "Tactical success in war is generally gained by pitting an organized force against a disorganized one."¹³ Organization can only be achieved through planning and training. Officers generally bear the burden of planning. Noncommissioned officers (NCOs) should therefore be focused on providing advice and verifying that Soldiers are able to execute routine tasks that enable success and survivability on the battlefield.

Maintenance and fitness must be key events that are never missed. NCOs enforce standards and discipline that give commanders confidence and create true morale among Cavalry Soldiers. It is not enough to plan for major exercises and CTC rotations – this creates an incorrect mindset of planning for the exercise. Units train for war and must plan accordingly under tough, realistic conditions.

There are several other mechanisms that can be employed to make planning tough and realistic for Cavalry units. There is no monopoly on ideas. For example, normalize removal of personal electronic devices at all levels, including commanders, except for designated safety staff. Ban tents for planning staff if appropriate. Plan to execute a deception operation as GEN George S. Patton did in August 1944 that inflicts multiple dilemmas on an enemy and achieves economy-of-force.^{14 15}

Commanders should force planning staff to follow processes in doctrine rather than unit standing operating procedures or abbreviated guides formulated during career courses. Planning should incorporate, at a minimum, both a most likely and most dangerous enemy-force CoA with several branches and sequels.

Plan for R&S operations to take place in contested airspace on terrain that is unfavorable or challenging to force doctrinally correct employment of ground-reconnaissance assets as a priority, with enablers used to enhance collection. Focus evaluation of commanders and planning staff in R&S operations using 360-degree feedback against intent statements, commander's reconnaissance guidance and commander's security guidance. If those vital areas are in any way unclear to subordinates, retraining must occur. These planning mechanisms are strengthened when coupled with R&S training under tough, realistic conditions.

Training under tough, realistic conditions. There are countless mechanisms that may be employed during R&S field-training opportunities created for Cavalry units. Two stand out as highly effective in quickly developing a culture of excellence. First, R&S training should take place with limited notice and replicate a rapid-deployment scenario. Second, using David Kolb's experiential-learning model,¹⁶ an effective tool would be to modify unit collective-training methodology to "run" (with close evaluation) in the crawl-walk-run pattern. This close evaluation should occur before the Cavalry unit is given time to train and conduct its own internal field training. Lessons-learned from the initial "run" phase will focus subsequent training and will show leaders the pathway to excellence at multiple levels.

There are many other mechanisms that may be employed to simulate tough, realistic conditions during R&S training. Cavalry leaders should plan to deliberately "kill off" subordinate leaders and force the one-up drill at appropriate points in the exercise design using a conditions-based trigger. Train using the eight-step training model¹⁷ that incorporates combined arms and mission command, using junior NCOs to maximum effect to minimize the burden on senior leaders.

Aim to reach a sufficiently challenging level of training safely. This may look like R&S operations being conducted at night, avoiding roads, in poor weather conditions and using Mission-Oriented Protective Posture-4 equipment.

Train gunnery using the standardized Armor base of training created using the new readiness-level progression¹⁸ model with experienced master gunners. Test the transitions between operations and logistics resupply and seek to exploit gaps created. Verify that Cavalry elements at echelon understand the defeat mechanisms that exist in doctrine and are training to enact them using innovative approaches. Rehearse endlessly routine but important tasks such as establishing observation posts, engagement-area development and passage of lines.

Repetition in a variety of environments is vital to train Cavalry units to failure to ensure that task mastery is achieved.¹⁹ Execute training scenarios against a live enemy repeatedly until it becomes legitimately effortless and not falsely represented to senior commanders. Test every element in the organization at the "threshold of failure."²⁰

These mechanisms, if employed appropriately during training, will assist in leveraging a culture of excellence in a traditional sense, but what of multidomain operations (MDO)?

MDO. In 2023 and beyond, U.S. Army tough, realistic training must include a focus on MDO. It is clear the U.S. Army and allies are still coming to terms with MDO, including within R&S operations. The new FM 3-0 provides an excellent and timely starting point based in doctrine for Cavalry forces at all echelons. FM 3-0 demonstrates the first principles of speed, range and convergence of the cutting-edge technologies needed to achieve future decision dominance and overmatch against our adversaries.²¹

An additional mechanism given recent global events would be to seek to integrate members of the armed forces of Ukraine to instruct U.S. Army and allies on key lessons-learned from combat against Russian forces in a multidomain context.

Ensuring Cavalry forces at echelon are allocated the correct assets to collect information to answer PIR across domains is vital. Training with those enabling assets in advance of real conflict is even more crucial. Modular construction of Cavalry forces also offers a solution to the problem of training for multiple potential adversaries with varying capabilities, but such a construct inadvertently weakens personal relationships and the human capital essential in military operations.²² Training together will set conditions for teams to overcome the unknowns.²³

There are further mechanisms to develop a culture of excellence in R&S operations using MDO. Train to gain and maintain enemy contact using all currently known forms of contact, particularly those rarely used. Train all elements of the primary-alternate-contingency-emergency plan, including a period of complete communications blackout.

Another recommended method of training to fight across domains is through tactical checklists, nested with doctrine and training circulars. However, importantly, checklists tie proficiency to procedure rather than mission success. Cavalry professionals who rely solely on checklists in training are at risk of formulaic mission preparation and execution, risking less room for initiative, imagination and adaptation against a thinking enemy. To ensure training is worthwhile, MDO should be externally evaluated and immediately subject to an after-action review (AAR) that emphasizes points to improve and highlights areas to sustain.

Cavalry command posts at each echelon, including division, must be small and agile, able to rapidly establish and displace, be redundant (to a degree), with a deceptively small electromagnetic footprint. Ensure all unit personnel

understand that both encrypted and unencrypted communications emit a signature that can be detected. As mentioned, use of non-secure means of communication should be banned unless tied to deception. Accordingly, rehearse active deception operations that include a focus on enemy information denial and active counterreconnaissance and measure the effectiveness during the AAR. Conversely, passive deception and camouflage techniques should also be heavily emphasized theoretically and applied practically in training environments.

Masking should occur in the full spectrum, multidomain effort to deceive enemy sensors and disrupt enemy targeting. Create competitions in units to determine the most cunning elements (including headquarters, sustainment and fighting elements) that employ deception and camouflage across MDO using masking or obscurity via passive and active countermeasures. It is vital to include MDO as a focus when leveraging excellence in R&S operations to win during LSCO.

Reward and recognition

Basic application. Effective reward and recognition enable a culture of excellence within Cavalry units. Reward and recognition should be public and inspire others to achieve excellence in R&S operations. To guide thinking, principles of reward and recognition used by the Australian Defence Force are *personalized, immediate, aligned* and *fair*. If done effectively, reward and recognition will tap into the discretionary effort that exists within a Cavalry unit and within each individual officer and Soldier. For those who would argue that the U.S. Army already recognizes its personnel too much, consider that if there is indeed no quota on discipline, perhaps there should be no quota on recognition – if correctly focused to aid in leveraging cultural excellence.

The U.S. Army already uses several formal and informal mechanisms across units to recognize and reward, but how can this be applied to R&S operations?

To identify what to recognize in R&S operations, the AAR remains one of the most useful mechanisms for units to identify points to improve and sustain into the future. However, post-AAR, rewarding effort, not just success, is key.²⁴ The previous sections on understanding enemy and friendly forces as well as planning and training under tough, realistic conditions may be useful in guiding what commanders choose to recognize.

In addition, go out of your way to recognize leaders who display brilliant examples of tactical foresight and adaptation. Reward those who read widely, use doctrine and incorporate lessons from the past into training. Recognize those individuals within the staff who consistently develop three CoAs for the commander with a clear recommendation. Reward leaders who invest time with their Soldiers rather than cower in their offices. Clearly, reward and recognition are essential to establish, sustain and leverage a culture of excellence.

Future opportunity. Another proposed method to leverage reward and recognition to generate a culture of excellence for R&S specifically is the introduction of a “reconnaissance and security” badge / tab for Soldiers to wear on their uniforms. This proposal is a skill identifier like an Airborne badge or a Ranger tab. To obtain the badge / tab, officers and Soldiers must complete training at the U.S. Army Armor School at Fort Moore, GA, graduating from both CLC and the Scout Leader’s Course. A separate pathway would exist for officers and Soldiers as depicted in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Pathways to attain an R&S badge / tab.

Conclusion

The potential for excellence exists within each individual officer and Soldier. It is evident that many of the mechanisms proposed in this article are applicable to the wider force and not simply Cavalry units conducting R&S. However, R&S operations are essential to all successful LSCO²⁵ and must always be a primary focus of Cavalry units.

Developing and leveraging a culture of excellence in Cavalry units in R&S operations is vital to the future success of the U.S. Army and allies. This article has demonstrated that leveraging a culture of excellence can be achieved through multiple mechanisms within three frameworks:

- First, through a better understanding of enemy and friendly forces.
- Second, through consistency of planning and training under tough, realistic combat conditions.
- Finally, through correct employment of reward and recognition that reinforces lessons-learned and effort displayed during R&S training.

If these mechanisms are successfully employed by Cavalry leaders at every echelon, winning is not in question. Raise the guidon!

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Notes

¹ “The more intense and difficult the battle becomes because of numbers, weapons ranges, all the lessons cited a moment ago regarding the Yom Kippur War, the more Soldiers and their leaders become the critical and deciding element. Which is the better tank? The one with the better crew, of course! And so it is and ever shall be that battles are won by the courage of Soldiers, the excellence of the leaders and the effectiveness of the training in their units before the battle begins. Technical developments in new weapons systems increase range, lethality and precision. Increased also is the intensity of the battle, the effects of fatigue, the destruction of battle, the presence and pervasiveness of fear. No amount of technology can be invoked to solve these problems. And so we're back to the Soldiers, their leaders and the excellence of the training of these units in which they fight.” —GEN Donn A. Starry; ***American Military Thought: A Perspective***; U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command historians conference, Fort Monroe, VA; Jan. 17, 1989.

² Department of the Army FM 3-0, ***Operations***, 2022.

³ Army Chief of Staff GEN James McConville first outlined “People First, Winning Matters” in the 2019 Army People Strategy.

⁴ Department of the Army FM 3-98, ***Reconnaissance and Security Operations***; 2023.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Department of the Army FM 6-0, ***Commander and Staff Organization and Operations***; 2012.

⁷ Updated terminology used to describe China as the pacing challenge and Russia as an acute threat at the 2022 Maneuver Warfighting Conference at Fort Moore, GA.

⁸ FM 3-0, foreword by GEN McConville.

⁹ A.S. Bowen; ***Russia's War in Ukraine: Military and Intelligence Aspects***; Congressional Research Service report, R47068; 2022.

¹⁰ T. Ripley; ***Russian Military Adapts Command and Control for Ukraine Operations***; Janes IHS; 2022.

¹¹ Robert Eisenberger and Justin Aselage; “Incremental effects of reward on experienced performance pressure: positive outcomes for intrinsic interest and creativity”; ***Journal of Organizational Behavior***, 30(1); 2009.

¹² FM 3-0.

¹³ J.F.C. Fuller; Fuller's plan 1919; first edition May 24, 1918, in ***Autobiography: Memoirs of an Unconventional Soldier***; London: Nicholson and Watson; 1938.

¹⁴ S.L. French; “Gaining the advantage: how Patton's unique information forces and competitive approach to information enabled operational-level success in August 1944”; ***Military Review*** March-April 2022.

¹⁵ FM 3-98, ***Reconnaissance and Security Operations***; 2023.

¹⁶ D.A. Kolb; ***Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*** (second edition); Pearson Education Inc.; 2015.

¹⁷ FM 7-0, ***Training***; 2021.

¹⁸ LTC Daniel Cannon and LTC John Nimmons; “Readiness-Level Progression: Certifying Expertise in Lethality as a Subset of the Armor Standardization and Training Strategy 2030”; **ARMOR** Summer 2022 edition.

¹⁹ FM 7-0.

²⁰ Terminology used by MG Curtis A. Buzzard at the 2022 Maneuver Warfighter Conference, Fort Moore, GA.

²¹ FM 3-0, foreword by McConville.

²² C. Boon, R. Eckardt, D.P. Lepak and P. Boselie; “Integrating strategic human capital and strategic human-resource management”; **The International Journal of Human Resource Management**, 29(1); 2018.

²³ Donald Rumsfeld; U.S. Secretary of Defense news briefing; Feb. 12, 2002.

²⁴ Useful discussion and analysis regarding both valence and expectancy theory for rewarding effort can be found in A.S. DeNisi and R.D. Pritchard; “Performance Appraisal, Performance Management and Improving Individual Performance: A Motivational Framework”; **Management and Organization Review**; 2(2); 2006.

²⁵ FM 3-98.

Acronym Quick-Scan

AAR – after-action review

CLC – Cavalry Leader’s Course

CoA – course of action

CTC – combat-training center

FM – field manual

LSCO – large-scale combat operations

MDMP – military decision-making process

MDO – multidomain operations

NCO – noncommissioned officer

OPFOR – opposing forces

PIR – priority intelligence requirement

R&S – reconnaissance and security