

Ideas on Cavalry

by CPT Joshua T. Suthoff and CPT Michael J. Culler

The April-June 2013 edition of the *Cavalry and Armor Journal*, although nostalgic, points out glaring issues that continue to cripple the branch as a whole. The articles debating the use of saber over pistol and the benefits of having troopers able to fight mounted or dismounted are troubling. Troubling because even today the branches (Cavalry and Armor) struggle to justify their existence, stay relevant or completely explain or execute the reconnaissance mission. The need for a main battle tank will never go away, but the validity of the Cavalry will if the branch does not adapt and prove its necessity.

The sheer brute force of an Abrams tank requires a different mentality

than a Cavalry scout who must weigh compromise vs. the possibility of intelligence gained. A Cavalry scout must be prepared for both the heavy kinetic fight like his 19K brother or be able to transition to the skills required to conduct reconnaissance on an asymmetric enemy.

Identity crisis

The promotion results from the 2013 majors board point out obvious issues with supporting and recognizing both Cavalry and Armor officers (Figure 1). In the below-the-zone (BZ) category, 90 percent of the officers picked for BZ promotion were in the

armored brigade combat teams (ABCTs), where only 40 percent of that year's officer population resides. Only one officer was selected for promotion from both infantry brigade combat teams (IBCTs) and Stryker brigade combat teams (SBCTs), where there are at least 21 Cavalry units with an Armor population. No officers were selected within the battlefield surveillance brigades (BfSBs), the newest Armor Branch formation.

Some of this can be attributed to performance, but it seems unlikely that all the branch's best performers are within the ABCTs. Is this based on performance or an outdated career path set before Armor officers were incorporated into every brigade combat team?



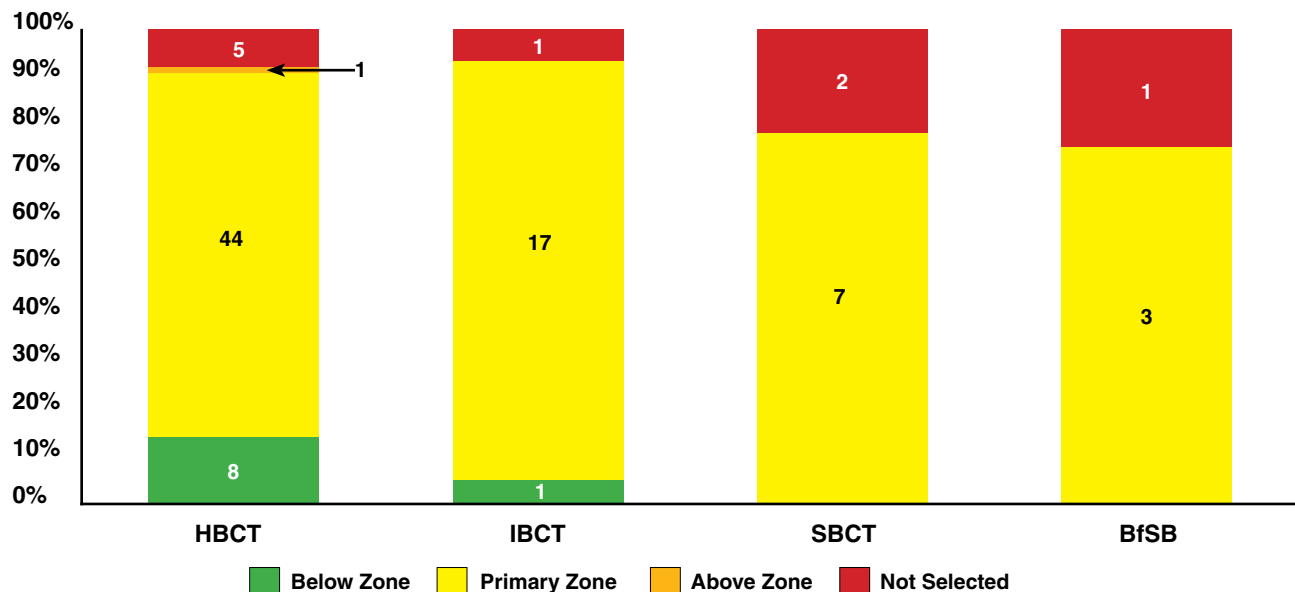


Figure 1. Armor Branch majors board analysis FY13.

Is an officer incorrect for not serving in an ABCT when it only makes up a third of the Army's force? After the upcoming brigade organization plan is executed, there will only be 12 ABCTs to 24 SBCT, IBCT and BfSB brigades. The namesakes of the former armored cavalry regiments (ACRs), 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment (SCR) and 3rd SCR, are not even task-organized according to the ABCT design.

The reality is that these officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) should be managed separately. The officers and NCOs of a tank company have a specialized skill that needs to be managed accordingly. Also, the last 12 years of the war on terrorism, especially ABCT deployments to Afghanistan, have shown that sometimes you have to dismount. IBCT, SBCT and BfSB 19Ds have a greater requirement to train for that skillset. It does the Army no good to train officers who are "jacks of all trades" in regard to both tank and reconnaissance but a master of none. A lieutenant who has mastered

M1A2SEPV2 and then assumes command of a Cavalry troop is at a great disadvantage to a lieutenant who was "raised" in the Cavalry world of SBCTs or IBCTs.

This can be applied as well to the ability of a 19Z, who in reality was a 19K his entire career but is allowed to assume the mantle of first sergeant in a Cavalry troop/squadron. It can be done, of course, but why?

The branch could and should split into Armor and Cavalry officer-control fields. Armor officers would stay within the ABCT realm, and Cavalry officers would move among SBCT, IBCT and BfSBs as they learn the specialized art of reconnaissance with mounted, dismounted, air-assault and airborne assets.

Troopers deserve officers who understand the fundamentals of reconnaissance before they assume leadership roles within Cavalry units. Reconnaissance is an art that must be mastered just the same as mounted gunnery. However, reconnaissance is currently a task shared by Infantry, Armor

and Special Operations Forces (SOF). It could be argued, based on authorized vehicles, lack of variation in insertion/exfiltration methods and level of training that Armor is at a significant disadvantage.

Schools and scouts

Infantry and SOF reconnaissance personnel attend a myriad of schools before they are considered proficient at recce operations and usually have to attend a selection board to be considered for reconnaissance units. Currently 19Ds only need to attend basic training and perhaps Army Reconnaissance Course (ARC) or Cavalry Leader Course (CLC) as their career progresses. Military-occupation specialty (MOS) 19Ds should attend, at a minimum, ARC, Reconnaissance and Surveillance Leaders Course (RSLC) and Ranger School to be competitive with other reconnaissance forces.

It's not necessarily the schools that make scouts better, but the desire to learn and be the best scout.

As the Army downsizes and elements justify their existence, Cavalry needs to do the same and show the level of scout/Soldier they can produce and the reconnaissance capability they provide. Cavalry needs to justify its reconnaissance role and show we are more than just a skirmishing unit sent to screen ahead in the event of the next full-scale conflict. What makes a Cavalry squadron different from its fellow infantry battalion within an IBCT or SBCT besides an anemic modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE)?

Cavalry Branch and unit leadership need to push all specialized courses (Ranger, RSLC, ARC, Pathfinder, Airborne, Air Assault) to create scouts who have the ability to conduct reconnaissance using any available means necessary. Leadership positions throughout Cavalry units need to be coded, at a minimum, as ARC and Ranger-qualified, and this needs to be enforced. Branch needs to use the Army's downsizing to raise its standards and keep only the best scouts. The command of a Cavalry troop needs to be a privilege and not a right for Cavalry captains.

Capabilities like Joint fires observer are now as important as the Skill Level 1 task of call for fire. Scouts need to be physically capable of fighting and conducting reconnaissance, both mounted and dismounted, with the corresponding skillsets. Just like in other branches, achieving the mantle of scout should be desired and fought for, not just given upon graduation from 19D

one-station unit training (OSUT) at Fort Benning, GA.

If the branch wants to continue in the realm of reconnaissance, we need to take the lead on developing the new equipment, vehicles and tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) required to make us effective. Case in point is the development and use of a smaller all-terrain-vehicle (ATV)-like reconnaissance vehicle. Other reconnaissance forces like SOF have used them throughout the war on terrorism and continue to push their development through defense companies. A great example of using small recon vehicles was in Operation Anaconda, where small recon teams were able to cover rough terrain quickly with their ATVs and provide valuable feedback to the higher command.

A vehicle like this could be extremely effective as the lead section, screening terrain ahead of humvees, Strykers or Bradley Fighting Vehicles (BFVs). Small vehicles like this can recon better routes and disrupt enemy direct fire and improvised-explosive-device (IED) ambush ahead of the heavier humvees, mine-resistant, ambush-protected (MRAP) ATVs (MATVs) or even BFVs. A couple of scouts using current and developing communications technology on an ATV platform could keep a brigade in near-real-time intelligence as they push back visual and sensor information.

Our branch must become both the proponent for an ATV scout vehicle and the subject-matter expert (SME) on reconnaissance vehicles.

We didn't build the Abrams battle tank from a vehicle concept the Infantry Branch decided on – i.e., the Stryker or Bradley. The Armor Branch built the Abrams for a specific purpose: to be the best main battle tank. Why do our scouts not have the same luxury? How effective could a Cavalry or BfSB troop be with an ATV scout vehicle that can be slung or carried internally by rotary and fixed-wing aircraft? Why is the mounted branch of the U.S. Army not interested in a vehicle that provides mounted reconnaissance that can be air-dropped or -inserted?

Part of it could be that our current vehicle set is moving in the opposite direction by adding more armor at the cost of stealth and mobility, all in the name of risk mitigation. MRAP vehicles, MATVs and Strykers are by no means the cutting edge in reconnaissance vehicles. Changing seating configurations around and adding a 130-pounds-plus Long-Range Advanced Scout Surveillance System (LRAS3) to a vehicle does not make it a proper reconnaissance vehicle. Cavalry needs to develop our own reconnaissance platforms and stop trying to modify platforms designed for infantry missions.

This also includes developing sensors like unmanned aerial vehicles and ground-based sensors to greatly increase the range a 19D scout platoon can screen, recon and guard. When employed properly, sensors can help determine when and where manned reconnaissance needs to be employed. With

this equipment, we must develop junior leaders who can manage the information collected and provide valuable, relevant and timely feedback to higher headquarters. The need for manned reconnaissance will never go away, but its use has to be refined as technology increases. Cavalry needs to be the one writing, developing and testing the doctrine.

The Armor School recently assumed control of RSLC, and this is a step in the right direction. This school, combined with ARC, has to be the premier reconnaissance course offered, and graduates should be masters in the reconnaissance field. The branch needs to absorb the mentality behind the insertion/extraction methods taught there (Special-Purpose Insertion Extraction System (SPIES), Fast Rope Insertion Extraction System (FRIES), free-fall).

Cavalry Branch must establish itself as the SME on all things reconnaissance, including communications equipment, weapons and TTPs. Branch has to embed in other reconnaissance elements like Ranger Reconnaissance Detachment and SOF teams to gather good TTPs and make necessary connections.

All vehicles and insertion methods are only a method of accomplishing a reconnaissance mission. Again, 12 years of the war on terrorism shows that scouts must be adaptable and capable for a wide range of reconnaissance mission sets. When was the last time a scout platoon from an airborne IBCT parachuted in for a

reconnaissance mission? Critics say it costs money and adds undue risk, but chutes can be retrieved.

A Cavalry trooper is supposed to be by nature cunning and clever, so why are we not making leaders like this? Cavalry reconnaissance units are not tasked with tough reconnaissance missions because we lack the capabilities and skillset to do much more reconnaissance than act as skirmishers during the next major conflict. An asymmetric enemy requires scouts capable of conducting reconnaissance dismounted in small teams to be effective. Even the most high-intensity conflicts slowly degrade to low intensity, and each requires its own level and skill of reconnaissance.

If as a branch we don't want to do reconnaissance right and train accordingly, we need to not do it at all.

Specialized unit

CPT Ken Segelhorst points out in his article, "Keeping the Sabers Sharp: Maintaining Relevance in the Modern Era," (*ARMOR*, November-December 2012) the need for scouts to attend specialized schools, but most especially a need for an elite Cavalry organization. This is completely right. This was the ACR of the past, but now as a branch, neither Armor nor Cavalry have an elite organization to look to.

As the Army downsizes and consolidates brigades, it should take the "deleted" brigade footprint on those posts and consolidate the three remaining Cavalry squadrons under one Cavalry

regiment. This "post cavalry regiment" can plan reconnaissance training, manage assets and, most importantly, maintain some type of lineage to the Cavalry regiments under one roof. As infantry brigades deploy, they can pull troops or squadrons as required from their post Cavalry regiment to answer their reconnaissance needs.

This type of reorganization could be possible at a number of Army installations, where one of four BCTs is casing its colors.

We can also apply this specialized unit mentality to the BfSBs located with 1st, 5th and 18th Corps. These units have great possibilities as discussed in my previous article, "Validating the [Reconnaissance and Surveillance] Squadron and the Future of Reconnaissance" (*ARMOR*, April-June 2012). As corps assets, these Cavalry squadrons need to be fully supported by our branch and manned with our most capable scouts and best equipment. Scouts and officers alike can refine their reconnaissance art within the BCTs and assess to serve in the BfSBs.

Every other MOS and branch in the Army has the ability for its Soldiers to apply for an elite unit in SOF. It is hard to retain some of our best junior leaders if we offer no promise of upward mobility and better mission sets. A great example of this is the 75th Ranger Regiment and an infantry Soldier's ability to compete and join that organization. If an Armor officer, 19D or even a 19K wants to join an elite organization, he must go to

a SOF selection board and ultimately change his MOS – and the Armor Branch loses a quality Soldier.

As U.S. operations in Afghanistan close down, Armor Branch needs to fight hard for the newest radios and weapons being distributed throughout the Cavalry formation. Scouts need the most advanced communications equipment available because, by doctrine, they will fight ahead of the formation.

If Cavalry is to be maintained, ideas to keep the branch relevant cannot be scoffed off as dangerous or outside our capabilities. U.S. Cavalry officers must be prepared to act in both full-scale war and counterinsurgency, just as they did in the American Civil War and Indian Wars. We've fought effectively during the war on terrorism, but we are not equipped to be masters of reconnaissance. The current MTOE makes Cavalry squadrons less capable than their larger infantry/combined-arms battalion counterparts to the BCT commander, yet they aren't used effectively as reconnaissance assets.

As the Army downsizes and re-equips, we must establish our Cavalry as the premier expert in reconnaissance and security operations. Our scouts and their leaders must be able to plan and

fight mounted or dismounted using whatever assets are available to find and disrupt the enemy.



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ACRONYM QUICK-SCAN

- ABCT** – armored brigade combat team
- ACR** – armored cavalry regiment
- ARC** – Army Reconnaissance Course
- ATV** – all-terrain vehicle
- BCT** – brigade combat team
- BfSB** – battlefield surveillance brigade
- BFV** – Bradley Fighting Vehicle
- BZ** – below-the-zone
- IBCT** – infantry brigade combat team
- MATV** – MRAP ATV
- MOS** – military-occupation specialty
- MRAP** – mine-resistant ambush-protected
- MTOE** – modified table of organization and equipment
- OSUT** – one-station unit training
- RTB** – Ranger training battalion
- SBCT** – Stryker brigade combat team
- SCR** – Stryker cavalry regiment
- SME** – subject-matter expert
- SOF** – Special Operations Forces
- TTP** – tactics, techniques and procedures