

Overcoming Semantics: How to Deconflict Reconnaissance Fundamentals at Platoon Level

by CPT Patrick M. Zang

Leaders on both sides during the American Civil War relied on their cavalry scouts to get accurate information so they could get to the battlefield first with the most Soldiers and firepower. Providing crucial information to their parent unit remains the overarching mission of modern-day scout platoons just as it was for their Civil War predecessors.

To ensure mission success and provide a relative advantage to the maneuver commander it supports, today's scout platoon must understand the nuances and seeming struggle between the reconnaissance fundamentals of "retain freedom of maneuver" and "gain and maintain enemy contact." On the surface, these two fundamentals appear mutually exclusive. For example, to collect indicators to answer the commander's priority intelligence requirements (PIR) to support timely decision-making, scouts must report all information about the disposition and composition of threat forces rapidly and accurately. The challenge is that scouts must do this while ensuring they don't become decisively engaged because their primary mission to provide reconnaissance would likely stop.

A decisive engagement is when a unit is considered fully committed and cannot maneuver or extricate in the absence of outside assistance. The action must be fought to a conclusion and either won or lost with the forces at hand.

Therefore, the scout platoon, no matter what its attachments, must ensure "reconnaissance does not stop" because it has become "decisively engaged." According to Field Manual (FM) 3-98, **Reconnaissance and Security Operations**,¹ retaining freedom of maneuver means that "tactical mobility and maneuver fundamentally drive the success of reconnaissance tasks. Platoon leaders consider task-organization, their commander's reconnaissance guidance, movement techniques and scheme of maneuver to retain the unit's ability to maneuver."

Reconnaissance tasks are important because they confirm or deny assumptions about the terrain and enemy that were made during mission analysis and intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) to identify opportunities and maintain agile freedom of maneuver for the brigade.

Another way for a scout platoon to retain its freedom of maneuver is through effective counter-reconnaissance operations, which deny enemy collection efforts. This also helps identify opportunities for the command to seize, retain and exploit initiative. Therefore, commanders change movement techniques and employ multiple assets to make contact with the smallest element possible to avoid becoming decisively engaged. Commanders retain freedom of maneuver by avoiding decisive engagement with a superior force and develop the situation further – consistently balancing the requirement to maintain contact while retaining freedom of maneuver.

Conversely, to gain and maintain contact means "cavalry forces find and sustain contact with the enemy on terms and conditions of their choosing. Using at least one of the eight forms of contact, commanders and staffs plan for and integrate:

- Aerial and ground sensors;
- Manned platforms;
- Unmanned systems;
- Dismounted operations;
- Signals intelligence;
- Human Intelligence; and
- Visual observation."

These forms of contact allow scouts to gain contact with the enemy using the smallest element possible. Once units make contact, cavalry forces maintain contact until specific orders are given, a change of mission occurs, when disengagement or displacement criteria dictate or when the unit conducts a reconnaissance handover with another unit. According to FM 3-98,² "Maintaining contact with the enemy provides real-time information of the

enemy's composition, disposition, strength and actions that allow staffs to analyze and make recommendations to the commander based on current intelligence.”

While on the surface, the doctrinal definitions of the two fundamentals in question leave little room for interpretation, the difficulty lies in transforming the science in it to art. The issue lies in the manner cavalry operations are understood at present. Commanders routinely seek to unburden their staffs by mandating a directed course of action (CoA), thereby almost inherently removing the technique of reconnaissance pull from the lexicon. Also, risk-averse commanders tend to prohibit cavalry formations from deploying on Warning Order 2, especially when they couple their nature with an inability to execute the military decision-making process to standard and in accordance with the one-third/two-thirds rule (allow yourself up to one-third of available time to complete required actions and allow those you lead the remaining two-thirds).

This translates to having only one period of darkness, as opposed to two periods, to maneuver into position and answer the assigned questions. This “rush to failure” forces cavalry formations to “lead with their chin” and to unwittingly transform a zone reconnaissance into a movement-to-contact. The answer to the problem is glaringly simplistic: emphasize the basics and add substance to oft-used buzzwords.

With that in mind, there are six components a scout leader must inherently understand and execute to deconflict the aforementioned fundamentals.

- First, execute IPB to standard and in accordance with Army Technical Publication (ATP) 2-01.3, ***Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield/Battlespace***.³ The scout-platoon leader and platoon sergeant can't blindly accept the analysis of the squadron S-2 and troop commander. They, along with their subordinate noncommissioned officers, must analyze the terrain/enemy to seek positions of advantage and threat weaknesses. Also, IPB is a continuous process; it does not stop at the operations order (OPORD). Scout leaders must continue to refine understanding of the environment to generate options and make recommendations to their commanders.
- Second, the scout leader must understand where he/she fits in the higher concept of the operations. In effect, scout platoons all fall under the umbrella of the brigade's information-collection (IC) plan. Scout platoons need to think of themselves not as belonging to distinct battalions with differing missions but as part of a unified collection front. The scout platoon must understand that its missions are not discrete.
- Third, the scout leader must possess a “master's level” understanding of the doctrinal components of the commander's reconnaissance and/or security guidance (CRG/CSG), and when that's lacking, seek clarity from the commander. Also, the scout leader must ensure the CRG accounts for both mounted and dismounted elements as well as task-organization changes (two- vs. three-section concepts).
- Fourth, the correct implementation of reconnaissance-management techniques (cueing, mixing and redundancy) enable the scout leader to conduct limited economy-of-force missions and gain contact with the enemy while remaining below the detection threshold.
- Fifth, the scout leader must develop a primary, alternate, contingency and emergency (PACE) plan for all planned contact. To properly develop the PACE plan, the scout leader must understand the capabilities and limitations of all assigned, organic equipment. Unfortunately, the past two decades of conflict have bred a generation of leaders who rely on echelons-above-brigade assets and indirect fires to solve all problems. However, in a near-peer or peer-threat fight, these assets will not be at the direct control of platoon-level leaders. As such, it is up to the platoon and troop leadership to set conditions for success in the absence of said enablers.
- Sixth, the platoon must ensure rehearsals and standard operating procedures (SOP) equate to more than slides in a dusty old tactical SOP (TACSOP). The unit TACSOP must be practiced during every training event and updated accordingly during after-action reviews.

Following is an in-depth discussion on these six fundamentals.

IPB

It seems that all maneuver leaders recognize the intrinsic necessity of IPB and its connection to mission success. However, at the Armor Basic Officer Leader Course and Maneuver Captain's Career Course, students are required to regurgitate facts from the higher OPORD with little to no analysis. This trend is more than confounding; it is

This process is outlined in Figure 1.

The scout leader must possess an innate sense of the effects of terrain and weather on not only his/her mission, but their effects on the adversary's pending operations, too. As mentioned earlier, the point of IPB is to present relevant and life-saving data to one's subordinates, not fill up lines on an OPORD shell. By developing a graphic-terrain-analysis overlay (GTAO); taking into consideration the entirety of the military aspects of terrain (obstacles, avenues of approach, key terrain, observation and fields of fire, and cover and concealment, or OAKOC); and the military aspects of weather (wind, visibility, temperature, cloud cover and precipitation), the scout leader presents a "fighting product" to the platoon, enabling a disciplined approach to provide an opportunity to maneuver out of contact to a position of relative advantage. (Figure 2.⁶)

Also, the GTAO should inform and define the placement of operational graphics.

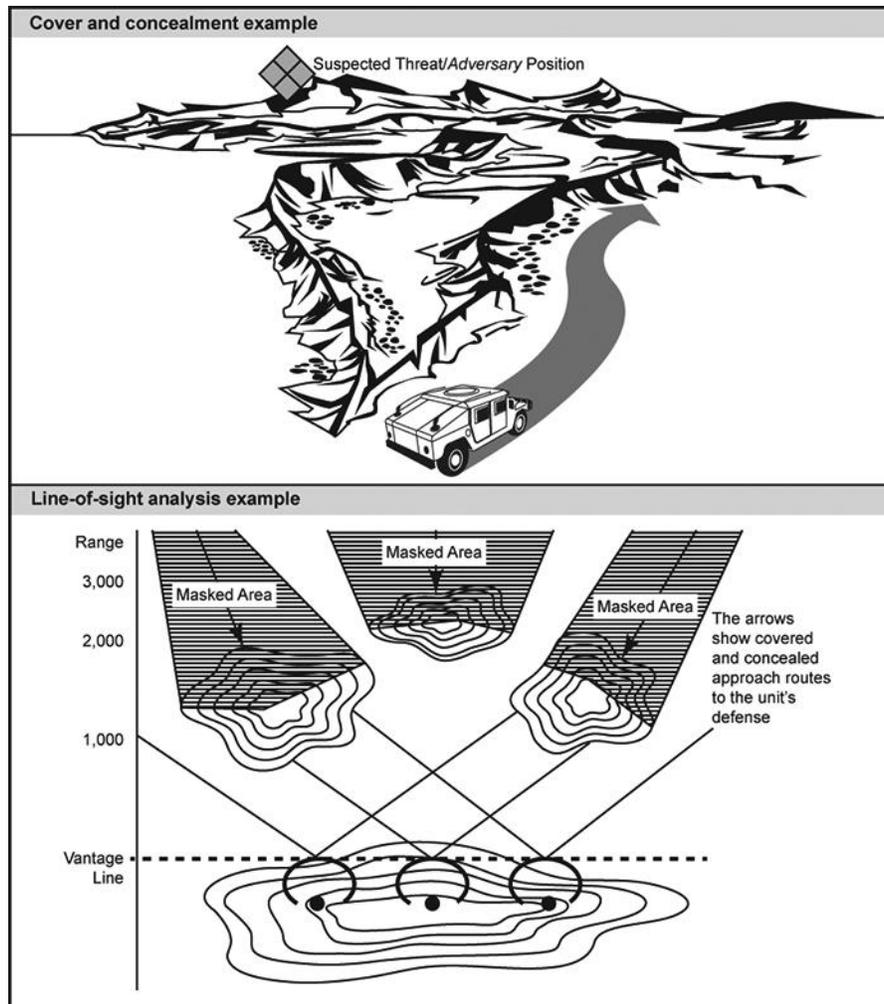


Figure 2. The scout uses terrain to maneuver out of contact with enemy forces to a position of relative advantage, thereby maintaining freedom of maneuver. (Adapted from Figure 4-12, ATP 2-01.3)

Unfortunately, light and weather analysis rarely moves beyond a regurgitation of numbers that one can easily acquire individually from open-source means. Troopers generally do not care about this and fall asleep when the platoon leader briefs the respective times associated with the sun and moon cycles. What is essential, and demonstrates the analysis needed to succeed in battle is, among other things, the direction of the wind so the platoon knows the direction sound and smell will travel. It also helps them determine the impact on battery life of both platoon and Soldier-borne unmanned aerial systems (UAS); the time the thermal crossover occurs so Soldiers can compensate for this phenomenon in allocating equipment during observation plans; and the times when it will

be dark to build a graphic-control measure into the plan that allows the platoon to execute a tactical pause and prepare accordingly for limited-visibility operations.

The light and weather-data portion of mission analysis and the OPORD must move beyond a regurgitation of the six-o'clock-news weather report; it must communicate only what is mission-essential to the platoon. This process will enable scouts to better use their surroundings to maintain freedom of maneuver and not risk compromise.

The third step of IPB is the initial analysis of the opponent, known as the evaluate-the-threat/adversary step. The outputs from this step are:

- Creating the threat order of battle;
- Developing the situation template;
- Creating threat capabilities by warfighting function;
- Determining the high-value-target list;
- Updating intelligence/running estimates; and
- Determining requests for Information.

Often leaders at platoon level accept the analysis of the squadron S-2 and their immediate commanders as sacrosanct. However, it is arguable that leaders at all levels must possess a shrewd intuition, capable of challenging their superiors' assumptions, to develop the best product possible. Battles can and will continue to be won prior to combatants squaring off against one another. Junior leaders must do their homework by seeking as much knowledge as possible, through open-source means if necessary, to truly understand how their opponent wants to fight. Only through this, a true and professional "red-hat" exercise, can the leader apply the military aspects of terrain and weather to determine a threat CoA (Step 4 of IPB).

Most of the IPB process occurs at echelons above the scope of the platoon-level leader. However, leaders must not fail to evaluate the threat and prepare accordingly. Moreover, they should never merely "hand-wave" critical components of the OPORD. A thorough analysis of the terrain and enemy dictates the forthcoming scheme of maneuver.

A depressing trend is developing among some junior leaders who develop their "blue" plan without taking into account Paragraph 1 of the OPORD. This backward, cookie-cutter approach can cause devastating consequences in a live environment. This is not to say that Paragraph 1 of the OPORD is the "be all, end all"; however, the situation information provided in the first paragraph sets the stage for developing the rest of the OPORD. Providing adequate time and resources to its development enables the scout to gain contact with the enemy on his/her terms while retaining the sought-after freedom of maneuver required to accomplish the mission according to the fundamentals.

Scout's role

Merely reading off the task and purpose of adjacent units and higher echelons of command is an academic disservice. The scout, the "jack of all trades" – who is executing within mission command, supporting at a minimum the brigade commander – must intrinsically understand how his/her organization fits into the larger picture. Devoid of this knowledge, the scout will miss fleeting opportunities and be unable to maintain freedom of maneuver.

The scout must understand how the brigade commander thinks and his/her endstate, information requirements and decision points. No disrespect to the Army's squadron commanders, but the cavalry squadrons and battalion scout platoons do not serve subordinate interests. Scout platoons exist to "answer the mail" for the brigade or division commander as part of the larger IC plan. Therefore, it is paramount for the scout to understand the operational environment through the brigade commander's eyes.

Scouts need to understand whether they are executing a reconnaissance push or a reconnaissance pull. This single-factor alone aids in the development of the friendly scheme of maneuver and the CRG.

The scout must still understand who the adjacent units are so that, when necessary, support may be requested from local units rather than relying on support from the parent organization. An integrated support architecture (Class I, III, V, maintenance, medical and fires) enables the scout to maintain freedom of maneuver rather than

have the scheme of support dictate the scheme of maneuver. To execute mission command as it's doctrinally intended to be, and as scouts claim they have done for generations, the conditions that determine the endstate must first be known. Knowledge of the endstate and knowing where the scout fits into the larger picture enables disciplined initiative to be taken by the scout leader, thereby enabling freedom of maneuver and orienting on the reconnaissance objective.

Understand CRG/CSG

Speaking at the Association of U.S. Army National Meeting in October 2016, Army Chief of Staff GEN Mark A. Milley said the necessity and "willingness to disobey specific orders" is crucial when battlefield realities change and there is no time or functioning channel to consult superiors. To follow the Army chief of staff's "controversial" guidance presented in his quote, the scout is owed detailed CRG and/or CSG. Without it, the scout cannot truly execute and achieve mission command or, just as importantly, the commander's intent. CRG and CSG are the bread and butter of cavalry operations.

Granted, there is no codified position in doctrine where the CRG is to be placed within the OPORD; however, it's my opinion that the CRG is an extension of the commander's intent and should be briefed immediately following the endstate in Paragraph 3. A second option is to brief the CRG after the concept of the operations and brief changes to the overarching CRG by phase during the scheme of maneuver.

Counterintuitive terms

No matter where it's briefed, the CRG is critically important and often misunderstood. A disproportionate amount of the problem stems from the use of counterintuitive terms (for example, "rapid," "disengage," "displacement" and "bypass"). Another problem is that the "go to" manual for a clear understanding of CRG is FM 3-98,⁷ which is viewed by junior leaders as a brigade-level manual.

As I wrote in a previous article entitled "Observations from the Army Reconnaissance Course," published in *ARMOR* magazine's Fall 2018 edition, one of the CRG's emphases is the *tempo* of reconnaissance, which refers to the level of detail and the level of covertness required by the scout platoon to best accomplish its mission. Tempo is described by four terms: rapid, deliberate, stealthy and forceful. *Rapid* and *deliberate* are levels of detail and are mutually exclusive, meaning a scout platoon cannot be rapid and deliberate at the same time. *Stealthy* and *forceful* are mutually exclusive levels of covertness, meaning a scout platoon cannot be stealthy and forceful at the same time. (*Editor's note: See <https://www.benning.army.mil/Armor/eARMOR/content/issues/2018/Fall/4Zang18.pdf> to read the article in its entirety.*)

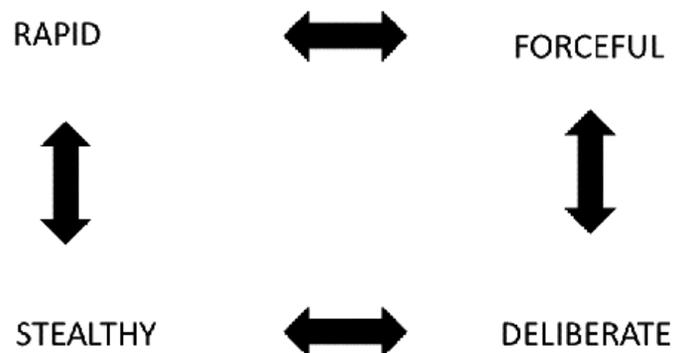


Figure 3. CRG-tempo.

Engagement criteria are protocols that specify the circumstances for initiating engagement with an enemy force. They can be either restrictive or permissive. Scout-platoon leaders must define the size and type of force they expect their subordinate units to engage and avoid. This enables planning the use of direct and indirect fires. Engagement criteria must be extremely precise to avoid confusion.

Disengagement criteria are protocols that specify when to avoid contact or when to disengage from a fight to avoid becoming decisively engaged while retaining freedom of maneuver. If a scout platoon does not understand

or violates its disengagement criteria, it will likely become decisively engaged and have to fight the battle to its conclusion.

Displacement criteria are triggers for a planned withdrawal, passage of lines or a reconnaissance handover between units. Displacement criteria are also conditions that are either event-driven (for example, associated PIR met), time-driven (for example, the latest-time-information-is-of-value trigger met) or threat-driven (for example, identification of enemy reserve).

Recon-management techniques

The scout must inculcate reconnaissance-management techniques, using aspects of all three to gain and maintain contact on his/her terms without becoming decisively engaged. FM 3-98⁸ defines **cueing** as the integration of one or more types of reconnaissance or surveillance systems to provide information that directs follow-on collection of more detailed information by another system. **Mixing** is the use of two or more different assets to collect against the same intelligence requirement. **Redundancy** is the use of two or more like assets to collect against the same intelligence requirement. The IC matrix is the “fighting product” that illustrates an organization’s usage of reconnaissance-management techniques.

It is best to consider use of the reconnaissance-management techniques along two lines of effort. First, focus on capabilities rather than assets. By this, the scout should determine what is necessary to observe assigned named areas of interest (NAIs) (thermal capability, aerial assets, etc.) as opposed to requesting specific pieces of equipment.

This ties directly into the second line of effort: work with what one organically possesses. Too often the IC plan relies on assets beyond the scout’s control (for example, echelons-above-brigade UAS assets). It is better to think of these assets as contingencies. Based on the weather, changing conditions on the battlefield and changes to prioritization by commanders at echelon, the odds of a platoon-level leader receiving some form of control over the assets such as the Shadow, Predator, etc., is minimal. Worse yet, it provides a false sense of reality.

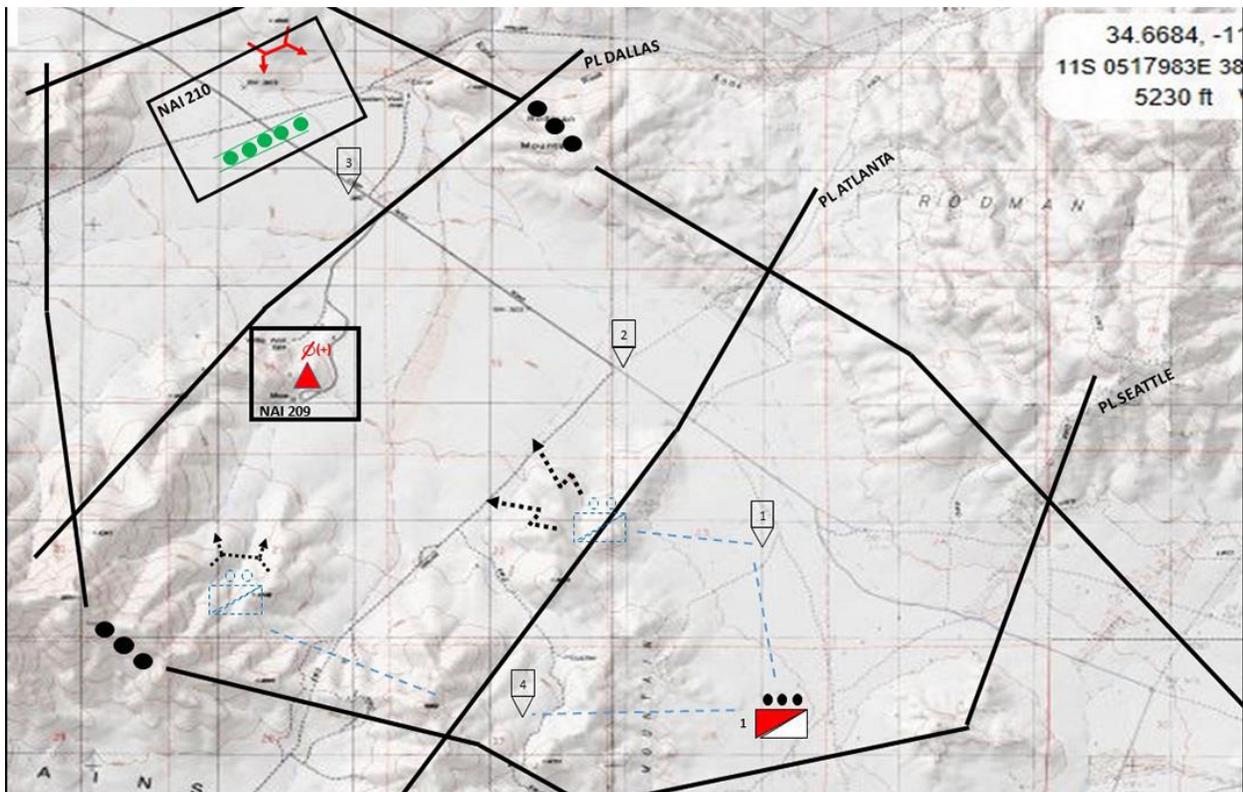


Figure 4.

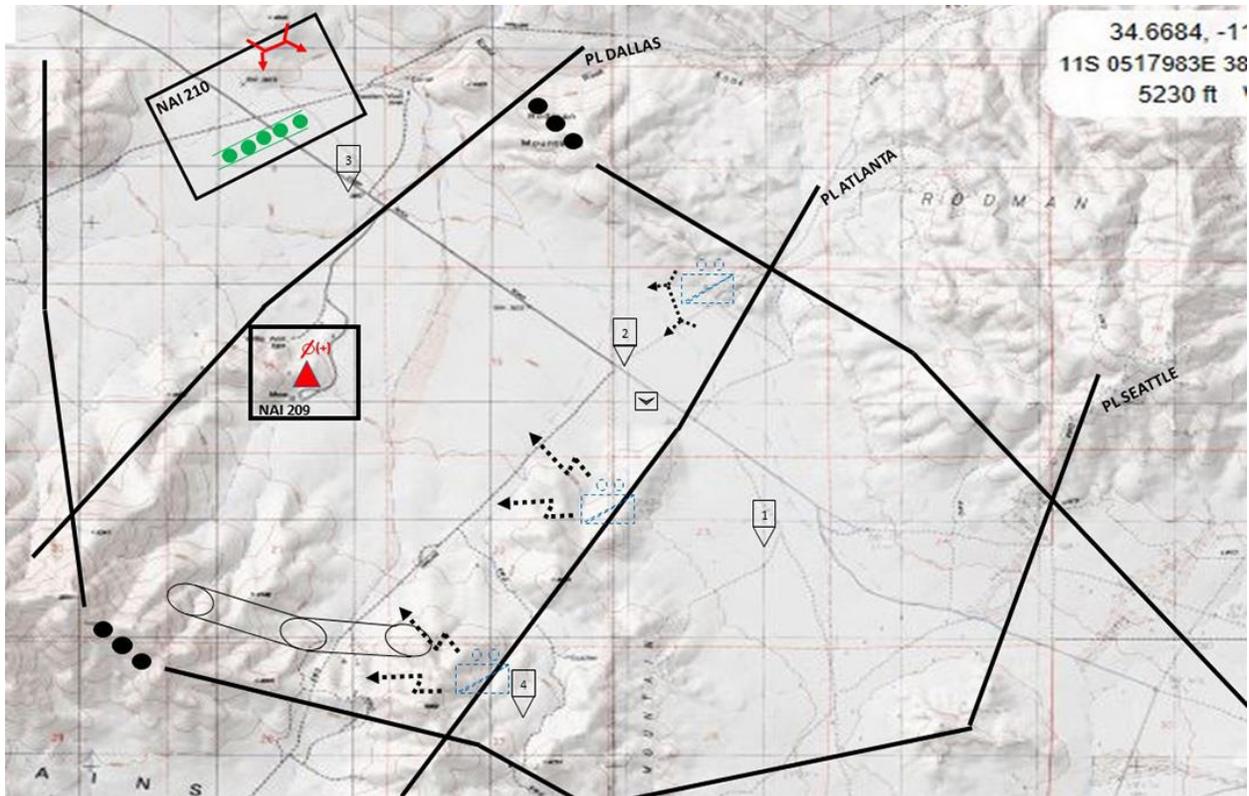


Figure 6.

PACE plan

The scout must be prepared to decisively fight and win a battle without becoming decisively engaged. To meet the commander's intent, the scout must integrate elements from throughout the organic platoon/troop as well as from across the brigade combat team. It is insufficient for a scout to solely rely on indirect fires to destroy enemy elements (particularly mounted elements). The scout must increase lethality with dismounted anti-tank capabilities (Javelin, AT-4 and Carl Gustav) and employ such assets to destroy and harass threat forces.

The scout leader must account for all enemy templated on the situational template during the scheme-of-maneuver-development portion of the OPORD process. Also, the scout needs to possess more than one means to account for said enemy. This is not to state there must be four proposed means to handle the enemy presented, but more than one CoA and plan must be present. For example, if the platoon is established in a screen with dismounted OPs to the front and flank against an armored threat, the plan could be:

- M777;
- Dismounted Javelins;
- 120mm mortars; and
- Mobile Gun System/Anti-Tank Guided Missile + Abrams/Bradleys.

The scout will not always possess the capability to harness the entirety of these weapons systems; however, it's critically important the scout move beyond the pedantic viewpoint of a PACE plan only relating to communications. A leader, particularly a reconnaissance and security leader, must be prepared to accomplish the commander's intent and establish conditions for the future success of the higher headquarters through many means. Also, the goal is to place the enemy into more forms of contact simultaneously than he/she can adequately handle.

Rehearsals

Rehearsals need to move beyond cliché as one of the first things to be cut due to time constraints in the troop-leading procedures (TLP). Also, units must move beyond using the cop-out "per unit SOP" during the TLP and

OPORD process. An SOP is only useful and possesses a chance to survive first contact if it is practiced. Merely putting an SOP together immediately before an NTC rotation to appease the observer/coach/trainer is academically lazy.

At a minimum, all organizations should rehearse actions on contact (mounted and dismounted, against direct, indirect, UAS and improvised explosive devices) and actions on the objective. Furthermore, how a rehearsal is conducted is just as important as merely conducting one.

Rehearsals need not be cumbersome at platoon level. The platoon must maximize its time and effectiveness to develop a shared understanding. A recommendation is for the platoon to conduct, at a minimum, two rehearsals. The first rehearsal should be conducted as if the “gods have favored you” and no friction arises. This allows platoon members to build confidence in the plan briefed.

Once the platoon knows the plan, a “dirty run” occurs through use of the platoon sergeant (or, if possible, the troop executive officer or first sergeant). During this iteration, a leader assumes the “red hat” and injects friction into the already established plan to work through contingencies and identify areas that require intellectual energy to defeat the enemy. I recommend that during this iteration the platoon come in contact from enemy forces, be assessed a casualty (so as to rehearse the casualty-evacuation plan), be presented a significant maintenance issue and be placed in varying degrees of chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and high-yield explosives threat.

While there will more than likely not be enough time to fully develop each scenario, the charge of the “red hat” is to focus on what is most probable (according to the IPB analysis) to prepare the platoon for that eventuality, thereby establishing an environment where the platoon can retain its freedom of maneuver.

Conclusion

The reconnaissance fundamentals of “gain and maintain enemy contact” and “retain freedom of maneuver” appear at first glance to be mutually exclusive and at odds with one another. However, through a disciplined approach and reliance on the fundamentals, platoon-level scout leaders can place their organizations in a position of relative advantage to achieve success and the commander’s intent while not violating the fundamentals. By conducting a to-standard IPB, understanding where their element fits into the higher concept of the operation, inculcating CRG/CSG, using reconnaissance-management techniques, developing a PACE plan for contact with the enemy and holding rehearsals, platoon-level leaders will find themselves well situated to win the first contact of the next war.

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Notes

¹ FM 3-98, *Reconnaissance and Security Operations*, July 1, 2015.

² Ibid.

³ ATP 2-01.3, *Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield*, November 2014.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ FM 3-98.

⁸ Ibid.

Acronym Quick-Scan

AO – area of operations

ASCOPE – areas, structures, capabilities, organizations, people, events

ATP – Army technical publication

CoA – course of action

CRG – commander’s reconnaissance guidance

CSG – commander’s security guidance

FM – field manual

GTAO – graphic-terrain-analysis overlay

IC – information collection

IPB – intelligence preparation of the battlefield

KOAO – key terrain, observation and fields of fire, cover and concealment, obstacles, avenues of approach

LLVI – low-level voice intercept

NAI – named area of interest

NTC – National Training Center

OAKOC – observation and fields of fire, avenues of approach, key terrain, obstacles, cover and concealment

OP – observation post

OPORD – operations order

PACE – primary, alternate, contingency and emergency

PIR – priority intelligence requirement

PL – phase line

PMESII – political, military, economic, social, information, infrastructure

PMESII-PT – political, military, economic, social, information, infrastructure, physical environment, time

SOP – standard operating procedures

TACSOP - tactical standard operating procedures

TLP – troop-leading procedures

UAS – unmanned aerial system