The Dismounted Recon Troop:
A Relevant Force for the IBCT

CPT GRAHAM WILLIAMS
1SG BRIAN BAUMGARTNER

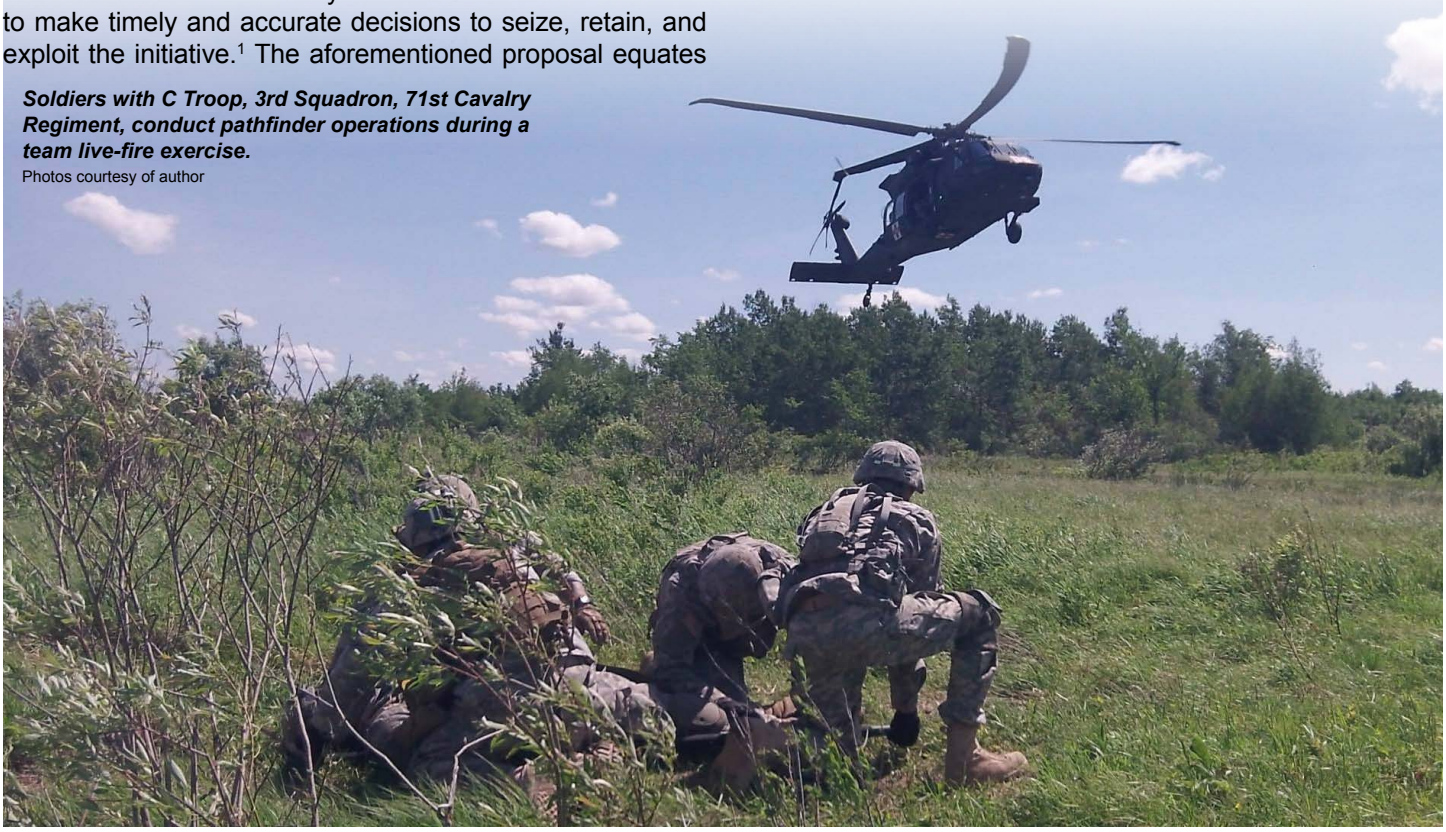
Over the past three years, there has been much debate concerning the relationship between Cavalry and Infantry organizations as it relates to reconnaissance and the cavalry squadron. The dismounted reconnaissance troop (DRT) is at the heart of this debate, and the troop's relevancy is in question. A recent proposed change to the Infantry brigade combat team's (IBCT's) task organization is the disbanding of the DRT and adding additional combat power to the mounted reconnaissance troops. This added combat power is the "3 x 36" concept whereby the mounted troop's three platoons are increased to 36 scouts with 128 personnel total in the troop. We believe that the DRT should remain in the IBCT formation as a force multiplier for the squadron and brigade, and the benefit to adding combat power to the mounted troop comes with a price. We will support our assessment by showing that the DRT has unique attributes to assist the IBCT by comparing the capabilities and limitations of the dismounted and mounted troops, relaying how mounted and dismounted elements work in conjunction with each other, and highlighting successful employment of a DRT at two culminating training exercises. When manned, trained, and employed properly, the DRT is well suited for reconnaissance and security tasks and allows commanders to make timely and accurate decisions to seize, retain, and exploit the initiative.[1] The aforementioned proposal equates to a degradation of these tasks for the squadron commander and ultimately the IBCT.

The DRT's task organization and capabilities allow for close, deliberate, and stealthy reconnaissance to satisfy reconnaissance requirements for the squadron and answer the brigade commander's critical information requirements (CCIR).[2] These two aspects are important to note for tactical employment of the DRT and to show that the troop performs different functions than its mounted brethren. A review of the DRT task organization shows how the troop assists the squadron and the IBCT with information collection:

* The troop has two dismounted reconnaissance platoons. Each platoon has three reconnaissance teams of eight personnel.

* Each reconnaissance team has a staff sergeant as team leader and a sergeant as assistant team leader. Each subset team had two scouts and a radio-telephone operator. Each team is designed to operate in two separate observation posts (OPs) depending on mission requirements.

* The DRT has a sniper section of seven with two teams of three snipers. The sniper teams can provide precision direct fire capabilities as well as prosecute call-for-fire missions.



Soldiers with C Troop, 3rd Squadron, 71st Cavalry Regiment, conduct pathfinder operations during a team live-fire exercise.
Photos courtesy of author

Each team can utilize the M107 Barrett .50 caliber rifle, the M24 sniper weapons system, and the XM 2010 enhanced sniper rifle. If needed, the sniper section can operate in three autonomous teams, but two teams are ideal. The sniper teams can be task organized under the platoons or work independently for the troop or squadron.

* The DRT has a six-man 60mm mortar section that can work in two sections. The mortar section can be attached to the two platoons or work under the troop headquarters co-located with the command post.
* The DRT should only have five vehicles total. Three for headquarters and two for each platoon.
* All total, minus habitual attachments, a fully manned DRT has around 80 personnel.
* The DRT has a Raven unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) that can provide coverage to support the two platoons or separate named areas of interests (NAIs). Recently, the troops have fielded soldier-borne sensors such as the Instant Eye (IE) SUAS and eventually nano-borne sensors.

The DRT's task organization leads into some of the critical capabilities the troop provides as stated below:[3]

* Provides all-weather, continuous, accurate, and timely reconnaissance and security in complex, close, and urban terrain.
* Employs small unmanned aircraft systems (SUAS) to enhance reconnaissance efforts.
* Conducts stealthy reconnaissance and security operations.
* Assists in answering the CCIR.
* Detects threat deception, decoys, and cover and concealment that otherwise would not be detected by single-capability surveillance means by employing integrated and synchronized reconnaissance.
* Assists in shaping the area of operations (AO) by providing information or directing fires to disrupt the threat.
* Conducts reconnaissance of one zone, two routes, or six areas.
* Conducts ground, water, and air insertion.
* Employs organic indirect fire support (60mm mortars) for the troop.
* Supports targeting and target acquisition through available ground and aerial assets such as the fire support team (FIST) and SUAS.
* Due to the numerous 'F7' coded Pathfinder slots and trained personnel, the DRT can be used as the squadron and brigade's pathfinder element.
* The DRT can conduct up to 12 short-duration OPs for a period of less than 12 hours, up to six long-duration OPs up to 24 hours, or up to six extended-duration OPs beyond 24 hours based on METT-TC (mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops and support available, time available, and civil considerations) variables.

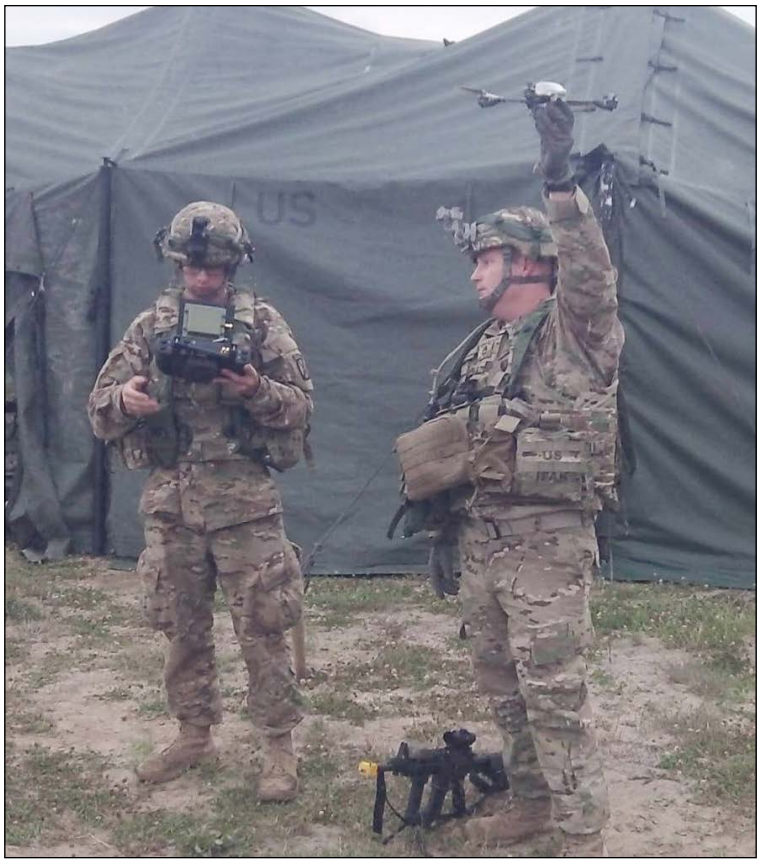
These capabilities are considerations when the brigade and squadron staffs begin the military decision-making process, review mission variables (METT-TC), and conduct intelligence preparation of the battlefield.[4] The troop is also one of the few formations in the IBCT that has the ability to conduct long-range high frequency (HF) and tactical satellite (TACSAT) communications to relay information to the troop command post (CP) or the squadron tactical operations center (TOC).

By eliminating the dismounted troop from the IBCT task organization, the squadron commander is limited in the effectiveness and area that the mounted troops can cover with both reconnaissance and security operations.

The DRT is able to successfully conduct zone, area, and route reconnaissance according to the seven reconnaissance fundamentals. While the DRT is better suited for area reconnaissance, the troop can also conduct zone and route reconnaissance in restricted and severely restricted terrain. In looking at the squadron commander's reconnaissance planning guidance, eliminating the DRT limits the commander with regards to focus, tempo, and engagement abilities. The persistent and clandestine surveillance that the DRT provides gives the commander flexibility to conduct stealthy and deliberate reconnaissance focused on any type of threat in any kind of terrain. If the commander desires to operate with liberal engagement criteria, the DRT is ideal for fire support missions and utilizing the sniper teams for precision direct-fire engagements. Without the DRT, the squadron and brigade limit their ability to conduct pathfinder operations for air insertions and large-scale landing zone operations. The battalion's reconnaissance platoons are the next lower-level element designed to conduct pathfinder operations; however, they are typically not as forward deployed and primarily operate in the battalion AO.

By eliminating the dismounted troop from the IBCT task organization, the squadron commander is limited in the effectiveness and area that the mounted troops can cover with both reconnaissance and security operations. All the troops have similar reconnaissance and security mission-essential tasks, but the DRT is used for operations that require deliberate and stealthy reconnaissance.[5] If tasked to perform a route reconnaissance, the mounted troops are limited to vehicular avenues of approach and adjacent areas. Because they rely on their vehicles, the mounted troops cannot effectively conduct route reconnaissance on cross-country mobility corridors like the DRT. While it is important for the mounted troops to conduct route recon on alternate and main supply routes (ASRs/MSRs), the infantry battalions most likely use restrictive terrain to move to their objectives. With its capabilities, the DRT platoons can operate autonomously in restrictive terrain and extend further with HF and TACSAT communication. The mounted troops do not operate in this capacity and their ability to extend is restricted due to the

range of FM communication. The mounted troops are also limited with the size of the OPs that they can afford to establish given crew manning. If the squadron requires information to be collected on an objective that is surrounded by severely restricted terrain and the objective does not have avenues of approach leading to it, the mounted troops could not effectively collect on this objective as well as the DRT. While it is widely known that the mounted troops are more than capable of conducting reconnaissance and security without their vehicles, there is an obvious degradation of mobility and firepower if tasked to operate purely dismounted. Mounted troops lack the density of long-range communication equipment, have limitations with task organization, and focus primarily on mounted training versus dismounted due to the lack of training time. One could argue that the UAS assets that the brigade and mounted troops have could cover the aforementioned objective. But unlike the DRT, the UAS is limited to two-dimensional collection, doesn't operate clandestinely, cannot maintain constant observation, and is susceptible to the effects of weather.



Soldiers with C Troop, 3rd Squadron, 71st Cavalry Regiment prepare to launch an Instant Eye SUAS during Mountain Peak 2014.

With security operations, the DRT assists the squadron commander in fulfilling the fundamentals of security oriented on specific terrain and threats in conjunction with mounted elements. The DRT is ideal for conducting a screen in restrictive terrain for early and accurate warning to allow the brigade commander to make timely and well-informed decisions. Once the DRT identifies the threat, it can easily gain and maintain contact using organic weapon systems. The troop can orient on the force requiring protection while conducting continuous reconnaissance from surveillance sites and report critical information. With clandestine surveillance OPs and security positions, the DRT is critical to defeating dismounted enemy reconnaissance elements. With area and local security, the DRT is unique in that it can provide stealthy protection of friendly forces before and after conducting zone reconnaissance and establishing a screen — all while working in conjunction with mounted elements. For instance, mounted and dismounted troops can conduct a mutually supporting zone reconnaissance focusing on severely restricted terrain and vehicular mobility corridors. The troops can then transition into a screen line in the same terrain and orient on mounted and dismounted threats. Since the DRT is an infantry element, the squadron commander also has the ability to conduct troop or platoon offensive operations (such as attacks and raids) and the ability to conduct combined arms operations with mounted and dismounted elements tailored to the threat. This combination of assets allows the commander to extend his level of protection to target enemy dismounted reconnaissance and infantry forces and allows the ability to transition from security to offensive operations.

This leads to the question as to which element is capable of replacing the DRT if the squadron requires additional external dismounted assets. The next lower level echelon that can provide similar capabilities would be the infantry battalion reconnaissance platoons. These platoons, which comprise three reconnaissance teams and a sniper section, can only partially fill the capability gap that the DRT provides since they are smaller and are under the infantry battalion's task organization. Tasking the reconnaissance platoons to support the cavalry squadron degrades the battalion's ability to conduct reconnaissance. Doctrinally, the DRT is employed during the brigade's initial planning process to shape preparation activities and execution.[6] As parallel planning develops within the IBCT, the battalion scouts are deployed to conduct a reconnaissance handover of objectives, or named areas of interest (NAIs), with the DRT platoons. There exists the possibility of supplementing the cavalry squadron with a dismounted element from a rifle platoon, but these platoons are not trained on reconnaissance and security tasks, lack long-range communication systems, and operate with different tactical standard operating procedures (TACSOPs).

During recent exercises, the DRT's performance reiterated the fact that the troop should remain in the IBCT task organization. Lessons learned from the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division's Mountain Peak 2014 exercise and follow-on Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) decisive action rotation highlighted the effectiveness of mounted and dismounted troops working in conjunction with each other for reconnaissance and security operations.

Mountain Peak, a division-run brigade-level decisive action exercise, included a culminating attack on an urban area. During the exercise, the DRT commander was tasked

by brigade to act as the "chief of scouts" by incorporating scouts from all dismounted elements in the brigade such as the infantry battalion's reconnaissance platoons. This "super DRT" was tasked to conduct area reconnaissance on numerous objectives leading to the village and establish reporting from numerous OPs oriented on the military operations on urban terrain (MOUT) site. The DRT deployed the mixed scout and sniper OPs through severely restricted terrain on avenues of approach that the enemy did not anticipate. Each OP successfully observed its objectives, reporting timely and accurate information to the mobile troop CP, which allowed the brigade to relay the information to the infantry battalions prior to their assault. These OPs remained on their NAIs and linked up with the infantry battalions to conduct a handover of the objectives. The result was a resounding success for the brigade due to the dismounted reconnaissance asset's ability to utilize severely restricted terrain and to use long range communications for situational understanding and awareness. Had the DRT not been a part of the operation, the brigade and squadron commander would only have the option of utilizing mounted reconnaissance assets. Again, the mounted scouts could have dismounted to establish the OPs, but they would have been limited as to how far they could have extended into the restrictive terrain given their inherent limitations.

A few months later, the reconnaissance squadron deployed to JRTC with the lessons learned from Mountain Peak fresh in everyone's minds. As the rotation progressed, the brigade continually pushed the mounted and dismounted scouts two steps ahead of the infantry battalions. Daily, DRT OPs linked up with battalion scouts to conduct reconnaissance handover. As the brigade neared the defense stage of the exercise, the opposing force (OPFOR) quickly became aware of the blue force's reliance on using mounted avenues of approach. Anyone who has operated in the JRTC training area knows that the OPFOR habitually uses the terrain to its advantage. In turn, the DRT stuck with its intended purpose, taking advantage of severely restricted terrain to not be decisively engaged by the enemy and to collect on numerous NAIs. The result was a success; the DRT was the most forward-deployed troop, was only decisively engaged once, and effectively conducted reconnaissance and targeting focused on key enemy positions.

Prior to the culminating attack on Sangari at JRTC, the DRT was tasked to conduct a widespread zone reconnaissance through restrictive cross-country mobility corridors in support of the infantry battalions on their approach march. In addition to the zone reconnaissance, a portion of a dismounted platoon was tasked to conduct pathfinder operations and secure a landing zone for an infantry battalion, and then establish a screen line for the maneuver battalions to pass through. The information from the zone reconnaissance proved invaluable for the brigade and infantry battalions which were able to conduct a forward passage of line and begin their attack. At that time, the mounted troops were tasked out for security operations in the large area the squadron had to cover. If the DRT had not been in the IBCT task organization, the squadron would have been relegated to mounted assets and SUAS for the zone reconnaissance. The OPFOR anticipated the propensity for units to use mounted assets so they emplaced numerous improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and ambushes along the avenue of approach thereby prohibiting these elements from approaching the village. The DRT facilitated the infantry battalion's attack by moving dismounted through restricted terrain that the OPFOR did not anticipate. If JRTC scenarios are designed to train for a hybrid threat and simulate the worst case scenario that an IBCT could face, the DRT proved it's an asset that should remain in the IBCT arsenal to exploit enemy vulnerabilities and operate decentralized in restrictive terrain.

The recent IBCT modernization proposal adds additional mounted combat power to the squadron and eliminates the DRT as an asset in its task organization. In doing so, the squadron and brigade lose a critical dismounted capability, leaving a gap in long-range dismounted collection assets. Adding additional combat power to the mounted platoons and retaining the DRT would be the ideal course of action. However, since the Army is downsizing, this is obviously not feasible. As it states in FM 3-98, *Reconnaissance and Security Operations*, reconnaissance and security units preserve the BCT's freedom of maneuver over the enemy, and successful reconnaissance allows the brigade commander to initiate combat under advantageous conditions to defeat this enemy. The DRT does this not only with its capabilities but with how well the mounted and dismounted troops work in conjunction with each other in any operating environment. By eliminating the DRT, the squadron commander is limited to mounted and SUAS assets for their intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) plan. Retaining the troop will allow for better opportunities to operate inside the enemy's decision-making cycle. If the DRT is disbanded, the IBCTs could pass a point of no return, and the capabilities which the troop provides might be needed for future operations against an unanticipated threat.

Notes

[1] FM 3-98, *Reconnaissance and Security Operations (*July 2015).

[2] ATTP 3-20.97, *Dismounted Reconnaissance Troop* (November 2010).

[3] Ibid.

[4] FM 3-98.

[5] ATTP 3-20.97.

[6] FM 3-98.

At the time this article was written, **CPT Graham Williams** was serving as the commander of Charlie Troop, 3rd Squadron, 71st Cavalry Regiment, 1st Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, Fort Drum, N.Y. He had previously served as commander of Alpha Company, 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry Battalion.

At the time this article was written, **1SG Brian Baumgartner** was serving as the first sergeant for Charlie Troop, 3-71 CAV. Prior to this assignment, 1SG Baumgartner was the first sergeant for the Reconnaissance and Surveillance Leaders Course (RSLC) at Fort Benning under 3-16 Cavalry Regiment.