

Reconnaissance and Security Tasks:

How Commanders Control the Battlefield with Scouts and Snipers

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The Role of Scouts and Snipers during Reconnaissance and Security Tasks

Executing reconnaissance and security tasks are essential to success during combat operations. These tasks provide the supported unit information, time, and space to adjust to the ever-changing situation. Supported units can react to opportunities and danger or enable commanders to transition to future operations. The timely and accurate reporting of information during reconnaissance and security tasks allows the commander to build situational awareness of the operational environment progressively.¹ Scout platoons are the primary reconnaissance asset in the cavalry troop and the organic reconnaissance unit available to infantry and combined arms battalions.² Scout platoons can provide commanders with reaction time and maneuver space, allowing them to understand the situation more clearly. Lastly, scout platoons can execute missions with organic and external reconnaissance assets to identify and target enemy forces and capabilities.³

In conjunction with scout platoons, sniper teams are a critical reconnaissance and security asset because of their ability to observe and report enemy activities while remaining undetected.⁴ Once enemy contact has been established, sniper teams can be utilized to deny enemy access to key terrain through the application of controlled precision fires, denying the enemy the ability to maneuver. In addition to precise, long-range, direct fire on targets, sniper teams can observe, collect, and provide detailed information on the enemy to allow commanders to make well-informed decisions. Scouts and snipers conducting reconnaissance and security tasks can collectively aid commanders in decision-making and their direction for future operations.



A scout assigned to 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, scans his designated sector for enemy targets during training at Pohakuloa Training Area, HI, on 22 April 2021. (Photo by SSG Alan Brutus)

Mutual Support during Reconnaissance and Security Tasks

The primary mission of the reconnaissance platoon is to gain information and survey enemy territory by reconnoitering terrain to determine movement and maneuver conditions relevant to friendly and enemy forces.⁵ The platoon can evaluate the enemy's composition, disposition, strengths, and weaknesses in detail once the enemy is located. This can be conducted and performed mounted or dismounted as part of security, stability, or in support of other tactical missions.⁶ Employing both mounted and dismounted reconnaissance maximizes the vehicle's optics, firepower, communications, and protection. This allows platoons to gather detailed information, enhance security, and move with tempo and stealth in various terrain. Sniper sections can augment their effectiveness by working with a Long-Range Advanced Scout Surveillance System (LRAS3) crew.⁷ The LRAS3 enhances the platoon's effectiveness as snipers are institutionally trained to observe what is known as "patterns of life." The advanced situational awareness that snipers bring to the battlefield provides a better operating picture for everyone.

Additionally, sniper teams can be valuable in support of mounted and dismounted reconnaissance due to their ability to observe and report enemy activities from extended distances while remaining undetected. If needed, direct fire from snipers can affect enemy morale, maneuverability, and overall mission accomplishment. Combining a powerful optic such as the LRAS3 with a sniper team can provide the reconnaissance platoon leader and commander with highly accurate long-range small arms fire.⁸ The timely reporting of enemy composition and disposition by scouts and the sniper's ability to produce accurate long-range fire can be critical in facilitating command decision-making. In addition to enhanced observation, both assets are highly skilled in controlling indirect mortar and artillery fire. These skills make scouts and snipers the deadliest Soldiers on the battlefield.

Reconnaissance and Security Tasks to Answer Commander's Critical Information Requirements (CCIRs)

Reconnaissance platoons and sniper squads are fundamental components of all brigade combat teams. Collectively, they serve as mission-essential support to reconnaissance and surveillance within a specific area of operation (AO).⁹ The primary role of the reconnaissance platoon is to conduct aggressive and stealthy missions that satisfy CCIRs.¹⁰ The critical information provided by the scout platoon enables the commander to develop situational understanding, make comprehensive plans and decisions, and direct follow-on or future operations. The commander employs combat power augmentation to enhance the effectiveness of reconnaissance platoon missions.¹¹

The integration of enablers, such as snipers, provides the scout platoon leader with the right assets to accomplish the mission. The sniper's core competency enhances unit firepower and augments the various means for destruction or harassment of the enemy.¹² Whether snipers are organic or attached, they provide the commander with direct fire support and the ability to gather information in assigned areas. The information provided can be from the ground level or through aerial reconnaissance. Additionally, the sniper's ability to engage point targets with accuracy at a long range with minimal risk of collateral damage makes them useful in all levels of conflict. When scouts and snipers are employed simultaneously, their enhanced observational training with high-powered optics and communication skills make them invaluable tools for information collection activities to answer CCIRs in support of offensive and defensive operations.

Reconnaissance and Security Tasks through Joint Operations

During the seize initiative phase of large-scale combat operations, joint force commanders take the initiative through the decisive use of joint force capabilities.¹³ In combat, this involves conducting reconnaissance, maintaining security, and performing defensive and offensive tasks at the earliest possible time. Doing so forces the enemy to culminate offensively and sets the conditions for decisive operations. Large-scale combat operations require continuous generation and application of combat power.¹⁴ The employment of forces in the operational area through movement and maneuver in combination with fires can achieve a relative advantage over the enemy to accomplish the mission and consolidate gains.¹⁵ In addition, commanders can use movement and maneuver to mass the effects of combat power to achieve surprise, shock, and momentum. This includes conducting reconnaissance and surveillance to delay, impede, or halt an enemy's initial aggression and to deny an enemy its initial objectives.¹⁶

The Army has identified that its most important readiness requirement is to prepare for large-scale combat. The ability to fight for information through reconnaissance, surveillance, and security operations through the employment of scout platoons and sniper teams is critical to achieving mission success. Commanders can control the

battlefield at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels when they understand the capabilities and limitations of scouts and snipers. Commanders can leverage the battlefield, seize terrain, and consolidate gains by incorporating snipers and employing scouts to their fullest potential during training in preparation for combat.

Notes

¹ Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 3-90.5, *Combined Arms Battalion*, July 2021.

² ATP 3-20.98, *Scout Platoon*, December 2019.

³ ATP 3-90.5.

⁴ Training Circular (TC) 3-22.10, *Sniper*, December 2017.

⁵ ATP 3-20.98.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² TC 3-22.10.

¹³ Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations*, October 2017.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

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