



Captain Robert R. Leonhard

COUNTER - RECONNAISSANCE COMPANY

The value of reconnaissance during operations has been recognized since antiquity. Although some great captains have been obliged to fight without it from time to time (Frederick the Great comes to mind, for example), none has ever done so happily. With the emergence of greater tactical mobility and the increasingly destructive power of today's weapons, thorough and systematic reconnaissance is of even greater importance. But only fairly recently have we begun to apply ourselves to the logistical converse of reconnaissance--counter-reconnaissance.

Counter-reconnaissance must be treated as a separate doctrine, not simply an extension of screening or fighting a covering force battle. From counter-reconnaissance operations, certain principles have evolved that set these missions apart from other tactical missions and provide the key to successfully blinding the enemy. A counter-reconnaissance effort requires special considerations that touch on deployment, use of time, task organization, and logistical priorities.

In trying to meet the challenge of the "fight before the fight," our battalion developed a new concept--a counter-recon company team. This idea evolved as we renewed the

emphasis on specialization and mission stability. Thus, each of the company teams was given a handful of standard missions so that the leaders and soldiers would have an opportunity to perfect a small number of drills. Our particular task force organization (see box) led the commander to designate Team C as our counter-reconnaissance force.

TEAM A A/1-6 IN (-) 1/B/1-37 AR	TEAM B B/1-13 AR (-) 2/C/1-6 IN	TEAM C C/1-6 IN (-) 1/B/1-13 AR	TEAM D B/1-37 AR (-) 2/A/1-6 IN
CO E (ITV) E/1-6 IN	TF CON Scout Plt Hvy Mortar Plt	Engineer Plt Stingers/Vulcans	

This team included two mechanized platoons, an organic ITV section, a tank platoon of four tanks, a fire support team (FIST) with a FISTV (fire support team vehicle) and, depending upon the situation, a Stinger or Vulcan team (or both), an engineer platoon or squad, and sometimes operational control of the scout platoon. One section of heavy mortars was usually in direct support of the team.

Of primary consideration in our development of counter-reconnaissance techniques was the nature of the threat. Soviet doctrine and feedback from the National Training Center (NTC) indicate that the time of intense reconnoitering is the night and early morning before an attack. The Soviets' most common reconnaissance plan provides first for several small groups of dismounted infantrymen or scouts to attempt stealthy penetration into the defender's main positions and beyond. Secondly, just before they attack, and often in daylight, the Soviets attempt to rush several reconnaissance vehicles past the defender's screen and into the main positions. Both of these efforts are directed at pinpointing the defender's dispositions, reconnoitering routes to the objective, and finding and reducing obstacles. Total Soviet forces during these reconnaissance operations usually do not exceed a reinforced company.

“And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said, ‘Get you up. . . and see the land. . . and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many.’” (Numbers 13:17-18)

Counter-reconnaissance depends upon the application of several principles, the first of which is *dispersion*. In a reconnaissance battle, the counter-recon force not only *can* disperse, it *must* disperse. Because of the nature of the threat (small, independent groups of vehicles), the counter-recon force can afford to disperse much more than it normally would. My battalion commander therefore directed that the company cover from five to seven kilometers of terrain, compared to the norm of about one kilometer of frontage on a standard defense mission. In brief, the counter-recon company must disperse if the commander wants to win the reconnaissance fight without committing additional forces. Thus, dispersion is one of the chief characteristics of a counter-reconnaissance fight, and it also influences several other considerations.

The second principle is the need to *concentrate on the kill*. That is, the counter-recon mission is only the means to an end; the end itself is the destruction or neutralization of the enemy's reconnaissance elements. This factor transforms the counter-recon mission into an active, mobile, and violent experience rather than a static occupation of outposts. It also affects deployment and command and control considerations.

The third principle is directed at the battalion commanders and S-3s who plan the use of counter-recon forces—they must consider the *cost* of the mission when deciding whether it will pay off. Since virtually the entire force must stay awake, alert, and moving during operations, and since operations typically last from the afternoon of one day until mid-morning of the next, time for rest and recuperation must be planned. The risk level is also germane to the decision, because dispersion makes the counter-recon mission a dangerous one, even under the best circumstances (an accurate intelligence picture, good

communications, and the like). But the most “expensive” part of the mission is *time*. Leaders' recons, re-assembly, and withdrawal all take a good deal of time, even with a well-trained force.

The fourth principle is *reinforcement*. Because of dispersion and the short duration of skirmishes between reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance elements, the highest level at which units can expect to fight together is platoon. When enemy reconnaissance elements are contacted, often the fire teams and squads of the counter-recon force will find themselves on their own. It is important, therefore, to plan for and rehearse both fire support and reinforcement at squad and platoon level and not to waste time trying to reinforce at company team level.

Command and control during counter-recon operations is much more difficult than it is under normal circumstances. Obviously, communications are vital—indispensable, in fact. The task force command net is needed for intelligence updates (which are critical for timing the withdrawal), coordination with the scout platoon, and, to avoid fratricide, lateral coordination with other friendly forces during the withdrawal. The team command net is the fire support net for platoons and squads, and it is the *only* way to coordinate a safe, effective withdrawal. Thus, if communications are disrupted, the counter-recon company mission cannot be accomplished and should not be attempted.

**“There is no great art to devising a good plan of operations. The entire difficulty lies in this: to remain faithful in action to the principles we have laid down for ourselves.”
(Clausewitz, On War)**

To facilitate command and control, we decided on the split-command approach. That is, the executive officer commanded one half of the battlefield (under the team commander's overall control) while the team commander directly controlled the other. We found that small mistakes had a tendency to snowball because of the dispersion factor. During one counter-recon mission, the ITV section received a copy of an overlay on which one of the grid designators was off by one number. That section ended up ten kilometers away from its assigned spot and took the rest of the night to rejoin the team.

Finally, there is the *principle of the withdrawal*. This is at once the most dangerous aspect of the mission, the most crucial to the overall success, and the most difficult to plan and control. A word of explanation is needed: The withdrawal is the decisive part of the mission, because if it does not succeed the counter-recon mission is degraded from an effective economy of force measure into a waste (in our particular case) of one-fifth of the maneuver strength of the task force. Multiple routes must be planned, reconnoitered, and understood by all, including the forces on the forward edge of the battle area.

There are several techniques for actually conducting coun-



ter-reconnaissance operations, some of which are applicable to any counter-reconnaissance operation (company team level or lower).

First, the use of daylight for leaders' recons is indispensable: A leader who can't afford the time shouldn't attempt the mission. I have found that the leader's recon must be well-planned as an integral part of the whole operation. Typically, I leave the first sergeant or a platoon sergeant to conduct assembly area procedures (having already issued a warning order), and I depart with the XO, the platoon leaders, the ITV section leader, the FIST, other attachments, and as many squad leaders as we can fit in the tracks. We generally take at least three vehicles, sometimes as many as five—the commander's and mechanized platoon leaders' tracks and sometimes the FISTV and the XO's track.

The recon team proceeds to the counter-recon release point, where the commander and the leaders dismount and conduct a map reconnaissance. The mechanized platoon leaders and the XO then go to their areas to plan for their squad deployments, fire support, platoon release points, and platoon command posts. In addition, the radio-telephone operators establish wire communication to the squad leaders' positions.

Meanwhile, the commander and the tank platoon leader recon the tank positions, and the fire support officer (FSO) and the commander plan for fires. The company communications sergeant works on establishing wire communications to the platoon command posts if possible (it often isn't because of distance, the nature of the terrain, and time). When the platoon leaders are finished (or when their time runs out), they return to the company CP and brief the commander and the FSO on their plan. They then go to the release point where they await their platoons.

The company team commander's most important role in the counter-recon mission is determining the initial deployment of the team. He will find that the battle is largely in the hands of team, squad, and platoon leaders when the shooting starts, but his deployment of the subordinate units, usually based mainly on a map reconnaissance, will decide the success of the mission. He must strive to counter the effects of dispersal so the squads have a reasonable area of terrain with which to work (that is, not too large). This usually translates into conducting a good intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB), determining the most likely dismounted avenues of approach, concentrating infantry killer teams there, and covering the rest of the unoccupied terrain by observation and patrols.

We initially tried to use platoon early warning systems (PEWS) to cover the gaps *between* units, but this deployment was ineffective; although we could detect any enemy troops who penetrated there, we could not kill them. A better technique is to place PEWS forward of friendly killer teams in order to alert friendly troops.

Good fire support plans are critical to the success of the mission. Since the squad leaders fighting the skirmishes can expect little or no reinforcement during the fight, they must compensate with effective fires from the 4.2-inch mortars or artillery if it is available. One technique that will facilitate such fires is to include the frequency and call sign of the mortars in paragraph five of the operations order to ensure that the squad leaders have the right information. Also, if the battalion commander approves, it is helpful to have the mortars operate on the company team net. It is important that the squad leaders have access to extra PRC-77 radio batteries since the duration of the mission may deplete even a fresh battery.

Tanks are an important part of the counter-recon team, and they require special consideration on the part of the team commander. The use of the TTS thermal sights on our M60A3s provided a mixed blessing. While the increased vision at night helped cover the gaps between the infantry platoons, the need to start the tanks to keep the batteries alive had obvious drawbacks. One of our more successful aggressor teams heard a tank start its engine 1,500 meters away and vectored in on it with ease.

As we groped about for a solution, we tried several approaches. First, the noise of the tanks can be used to deliberately draw the enemy into an ambush, executed by either the infantry or the tank platoon itself. This is a highly risky approach, however, because a smart enemy can use this technique against the counter-reconnaissance force. His dismounted teams, for example, can by-pass known locations easily and penetrate beyond your counter-recon positions.

Another solution is to rely on "tank watches tank" techniques in which two tanks search the gaps while the other two passively provide security for the active ones. This cuts the commander's tank strength in half, but we found that it was the preferred method of overcoming noise problems.

As we trained for the counter-recon fight against aggressors, the most common reason for failing to win occurred at squad level—the failure to "own the battlefield." It is critical for the squad members of the infantry platoons to aggressively deny the battlefield to the enemy. Every noise, every hint of the enemy's dismounted reconnaissance elements must be investigated and hunted down. Night observation devices must be in constant operation, and the paranoia level among soldiers must be high. Although this puts a drain on the troops, there is no other way to win the counter-recon fight.

The withdrawal, the decisive part of the counter-reconnaissance fight, must be planned as the critical phase of the battle. The use of readiness conditions (REDCONs) helps a lot. As the team commander receives the intelligence picture from the S-2 (or infers it from the platoon leaders' reports), he should selectively increase the REDCON of the units from 30

minutes (in which the platoons recover camouflage nets and the like) to five minutes (in which the patrols are recalled). When enemy casualties indicate the withdrawal, destruction, or neutralization of the enemy's reconnaissance company, the withdrawal must begin.

Since the worst thing that can happen at this point is a total loss of command and control, the counter-recon force should have rehearsed the withdrawal sequence ahead of time, and each platoon should now be able to execute its part independently. It is also important that the mortar section in support of the force be available to fire immediate smoke missions as necessary.

As the withdrawal begins, to avoid fratricide the team commander must notify units on the FIBFA and if possible these units should be included in any rehearsals that can be conducted. Counter-recon elements should rally at a pre-designated point and reorganize as necessary. From there, they should deploy to a refit, re-arm, refuel point and finally into a battle position behind the forward units, where the force can prepare for the defense—and then rest. This scenario assumes, of course, a counter-reconnaissance fight as part of a task force defense.

Some people may think that committing an entire company team to a counter-reconnaissance mission is a heavy-handed approach. To reply that "it depends on the situation" will not suffice. Rather, our battalion has concluded that employing a properly trained team judiciously in the "fight before the fight" will indeed yield good results. Assuming an aggressive fight by the squad leaders, effective positioning by the team commander and platoon leaders, and a timely and fast withdrawal, the use of a counter-reconnaissance company is an excellent economy of force tool.

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