LIGHT INFANTRY SCOUTS

Sergeant First Class John E. Foley

Light infantry scout platoons are invaluable to their units. During more than a year as platoon sergeant of one of these platoons in the 25th Infantry Division, however, I found that there is little in the way of doctrine to guide their training or employment, even in field manuals and training circulars. FC 7-15 dismisses scouts with little more than a paragraph and offers little guidance on how they are to accomplish their missions. In fact, the missions it assigns the scouts--area reconnaissance, zone reconnaissance, screen a stationary force, and screen a moving force--are themselves vague and incomplete as to what scouts can and cannot do, and how they are supposed to do it.

Reconnaissance is, of course, a scout platoon's primary mission, and its training must emphasize moving first, communicating second, and shooting last. In our platoon, for example, our battle drills were geared toward breaking contact in the event of a chance encounter with an enemy force. A five-man scout squad with only M16s for weapons lacks the firepower and the manpower to engage a squad size or larger element successfully in a protracted fire fight.

There are several profitable ways of employing scouts:

Area Reconnaissance. In an area reconnaissance (formerly called "Point Reconnaissance"), the scouts infiltrate an area to look at a specific point, such as a supply dump, a missile or artillery battery, a bridge, or a headquarters. By breaking up into two-man or three-man reconnaissance teams, a scout squad can infiltrate an area, find the information, and get out undetected. Larger teams would increase the chances of their being detected, and they would still lack the firepower to fight successfully and win against a superior force. Two or three men can also move more quickly and quietly than a full squad or platoon.

Zone Reconnaissance. A zone reconnaissance (called an "Area Reconnaissance" when I was in Ranger School) is an operation in which scouts search a large area to find out what is in it, but are not concerned with any specific point, at least not until they find something. A zone reconnaissance is just as demanding as an area reconnaissance, but the scout squads must also be able to give accurate reports on the terrain, roads, bridges, vegetation, towns, important man-made structures, and enemy activity in their zone. Is the terrain passable to wheeled or tracked vehicles? Even if our own forces do not have such vehicles, the enemy may have them, and scouts need to deal with all the facts concerning the terrain. (Important references to support these

first two missions are FM 21-26, Map Reading; FM 21-33, Terrain Analysis; FM 5-36, Route Reconnaissance and Classification; and FM 5-34, Engineer Field Data.)

Moving Screens. A scout platoon is not well suited for performing a moving screen mission. With only 18 M16s in the entire platoon, and on foot, it lacks the firepower and speed to be effective in delaying or stopping the enemy. In my unit's training, we found that our screens were too coarse. It was easy for our opponents to move through the gaps in them, and we did not have the manpower to cover much more than 600 meters at any one time.

What we did find though was that instead of conducting a fighting screen, we did better by concentrating on likely avenues of approach and carrying as little as possible so we could move more rapidly. We did not try to keep the whole platoon together in these cases, but operated as squads under platoon control to screen a sector and used bounding overwatch techniques as the terrain permitted. Instead of engaging a force with our organic weapons, we trained constantly with the call-for-fire simulator and our fire support teams so that we could call mortar or artillery fire onto an enemy force. In case we had to do so, we also trained to use accurate long-range rifle fire (400 meters) with our M16s to place harassing fire on the enemy to force him to deploy and slow down, then rapidly maneuvered to the flanks or rear to keep the enemy under observation and avoid his retaliatory fires.

Another effective way to employ the scouts in a moving screen is to attach a squad directly to a rifle company and use it to reconnoiter and mark a route to an objective for the company. This works very well, especially if guides are used and men are left spaced along the route to keep what surveillance they can and to reduce the chance that a rifle company will be surprised. This also conserves a company's strength.

Stationary Screens. As with a moving screen, a stationary screen is coarse. Over a 2,000-meter flank with observation posts and patrols, we could not effectively screen that flank with 18 men, especially at night. It helps for the scouts to be augmented with ground surveillance radar (GSR), but the radar is severely limited by the terrain and by its range. A single rifle platoon is more effective, in terms of both firepower and manpower, in conducting this mission. Instead of ineffectively manning a stationary screen line, scouts have been better employed continuing to patrol likely avenues of approach so they can give early warning of an enemy approach.

Sniper Guides and Security. TC 23-14, Sniper Training and Employment, has many excellent and practical tips for scouts, and many of the sniper missions mirror the scout missions. The major difference between the two is that a scout is out to find and report the enemy without being detected, while a sniper is out to find the enemy undetected, selectively kill one or more of the enemy, and then withdraw.

Experimenting with a simple 4-power scope mounted on an M16, and at modest ranges of 400 to 600 meters, our platoon found it possible to put company commanders, radio operators, and machinegunners into the reticle pattern of the scope when they were invisible to the naked eye. This is not surprising. Employed correctly, a sniper platoon or section can kill almost as many enemy soldiers as an entire infantry battalion. The scouts' role is to provide security to a two-man or three-man sniper team moving into an area. Or, by studying the terrain, they can recommend likely sniper positions, for either sniper or counter-sniper work, and then link up with the snipers to escort them back in at the end of a mission, which is when they are most vulnerable. This scout-sniper partnership can be a profitable one and a true combat multiplier.

Guerrilla Hunter-Killer Teams. In a low-intensity conflict, operating against elusive terrorists or guerrillas, the scouts can be used offensively, forgoing their traditional rule against engaging the enemy except in self-defense. Trained to operate in small teams and infiltrate areas, the scouts can aggressively seek out and kill guerrillas where they find them, with ambushes or meeting engagements. Most guerrilla or terrorist groups are small and have limited arms and ammunition. In addition, they are not likely to be trained or disciplined scout squads. Here, any firepower disadvantage is nullified.

The addition of a SAW to each squad would better enable it to engage these enemies, and in an actual situation, the scouts will probably borrow SAWs for such missions if they do not have their own.

(The Philippine Army discovered this while fighting the HUKs in the 1950s. Saturating an area with two-man or three-man teams, and engaging the guerrillas where they found them, the Philippine Army successfully kept the pressure on and destroyed the insurrection.)

Using aggressive tactics along with common sense--if there are too many, call for help--a scout platoon can infiltrate, surprise, and demoralize an enemy in what he normally would consider "safe" territory. Extra training would be needed for scouts to identify the enemy before engaging him, and to take him prisoner, but this would be an economical means of hurting the enemy, especially if used in conjunction with snipers.

Engineer Reconnaissance. Taking advantage of the secondary MOS of combat engineer held by one of the squad leaders, our platoon learned the basics of engineer reconnaissance. FM 5-25, Explosives and Demolitions, and FM 5-34, Engineer Field Data, were our primary guides. Out in the field, we looked at how much explosives would be needed to crater a road or blow a bridge, not so that we could do the dirty work ourselves but so that we could give the engineers an accurate working estimate of what they would need to do it. Scouts can also look at the condition and width of roads, railroads, gradients of curves, steepness of slopes, availability and suitability of lumber in a given area for construction purposes, and the soundness, type, and number of buildings in a town or village. Sewer systems are another area of interest, both for engineering purposes and for general reconnaissance work, and tunnels or culverts also need to be accurately recorded.

Motorcycle Scouts. The 7th Infantry Division (Light) and the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) have been experimenting and working with motorcycle scouts for some time now. Hearing that we were due to get motorcycles in the scout platoon was a cause for concern on my part, rejoicing on the part of the scouts, and nightmares on the part of my commander. (He had a hellish vision of scouts in BDU leathers, with cow horns glued to their Kevlar helmets, roaring out of the motorpool doing wheelies while 5,000-amp speakers blared the tune "Born to be Wild.")

Looking at historical examples, our platoon organization, and the terrain we operated in, I envisioned the motorcycles being used to get into and out of an area quickly. At the same time, though, I knew we would be more vulnerable because we would be forced to use terrain that the motorcycles could traverse.

In the old horse cavalry, one in five troopers would stay with the horses while the rest dismounted and crept forward to scout or skirmish. Scouts could follow their lead and leave one man with the motorcycles in an objective rallying point while the rest went forward to scout. If the ORP was compromised, however, while the rest of the squad was away, the "horse-holder" could not ride away with the other motorcycles in tow as he could have with horses. But he could give warning to the rest of the squad or, if it was a small enemy element, fight them off until the rest of the squad could link up.

Since we had several men in the platoon who were experienced dirt bikers, we discussed other ways of using the motorcycles. On roads or passable terrain, they would allow us to conduct an effective reconnaissance screen by giving us superior mobility even though our fighting power would still be low. Scouts on motorcycles should therefore be expected to do little more than give reports; a five-man scout squad, even on motorcycles, should not be expected to seriously delay an enemy company.

To ensure communications as well as operational security, motorcycle scouts can also be used to carry messages. Even if secure radio is used, the fact that there is traffic at all can be of intelligence value. Or if radio contact cannot be made, the scouts can be sent out to gain contact and perhaps set up radio relays.

The greatest advantage motorcycles give scouts is the ability to move rapidly to the flanks of an area or objective, saving valuable time in moving in secure areas and, at the same time, conserving the strength of the scouts. If scouts could make long flanking movements of 10 to 50 kilometers, they could infiltrate an area from an unlikely direction, cache their bikes and move in on foot, and then have a rapid means of withdrawing from the area. They could outrun most types of pursuit, increasing the chances that at least one member of the squad would get back with critical information.

Helicopter Landing Site (HLS) Support. The 25th Infantry Division has an excellent scout pathfinder course, which my platoon took advantage of. Such training enabled the scouts to infiltrate an area, reconnoiter, and set up an HLS, and this proved invaluable to the battalion. While scouts cannot hope to secure an entire HLS, they can pick one that is free of enemy troops and control it day or night, either to bring friendly troops in or to take them out.

Our platoon's main training emphasis was on infiltrating an area and selecting and setting up an HLS to bring airmobile troops into an area rapidly. (Ground guides can also be used to lead units into assembly areas, lessening the confusion on the ground, especially at night.)

TRANSPORTATION

While motorcycles still lie in the future, light infantry scouts must continue to rely on their most reliable means of transportation, their feet. This method is slow but steady, and foot-mobile scouts can traverse the roughest of terrain, terrain that is impassable to other types of transportation, in any light or any weather.

To toughen themselves for their mission, scouts need to walk constantly over all types of terrain. Just walking is not enough, however. The men need to learn how to walk quietly. It will do scouts no good to infiltrate an area and then stomp around like drunken elephants.

This kind of training might consist of rousing the men at midnight to infiltrate areas while keeping one squad on watch, or into a perimeter of a unit that is in training, teaching the men to walk quietly and feel with their feet before putting pressure down. The scouts might use the high and low crawl to move unheard and unseen out of an area, or be aware at all times of where there is cover and how to disappear quickly and quietly. This type of training takes time,

though; for example, soldiers are often surprised to find it takes hours to cover 200 meters.

There are some good references to use in teaching the men to make the most of foot movement: LTC Rex Applegate's book *Scouting and Patrolling*—(based on what worked in World War II)—contains many excellent training ideas on moving quietly and unseen; TC 23-14, Sniper Training and Employment; and FM 21-75, Combat Training of the Individual Soldier and Patrolling.

Trucks

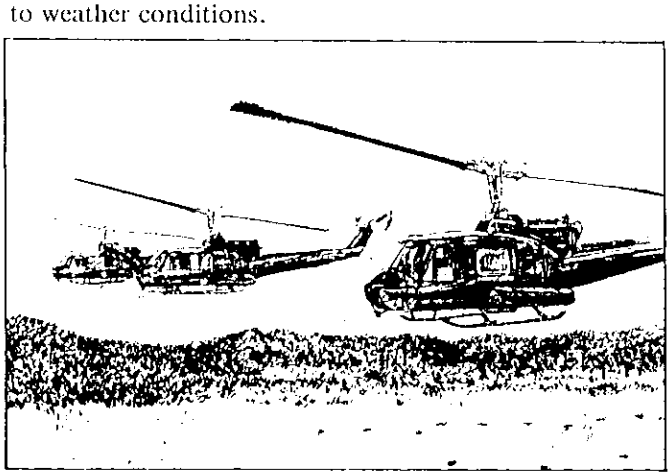
If they are available, trucks can be used to move scouts forward, but not up to an objective! This speeds things up and increases the distance that can be reconnoitered in a given time, but all hills, culverts, bridges, tunnels, and likely ambush positions must be checked out on foot. Scouts cannot afford to get lazy and simply motor along. They must be suspicious of and investigate everything if they are to conduct an effective route reconnaissance. Using two vehicles is best, and they should use standard bounding overwatch techniques.

If a machinegun for each vehicle can be borrowed, either a SAW or an M60, it will increase the patrol's security and firepower. And if a vehicle is available to carry extra weapons and ammunition, the scouts should make use of it.

Helicopters

Helicopters are also a favored means of moving a scout platoon long distances rapidly, but this depends on the availability of aircraft and the enemy's air defense artillery posture. An armed escort is also needed.

If helicopters are available, a good bump plan, usually controlled by the platoon sergeant, is a must, because sometimes the helicopters cannot carry their planned loads due to weather conditions.



At the aircraft commanders briefing, routes, false insertion points, the primary and alternate landing sites, and the pickup sites should be coordinated. Once on the ground after an airmobile insertion, scouts must assume that the enemy has been alerted that someone is in the area and should get off the landing zone fast. It is preferable to land as close to a treeline as possible, have everyone leave the helicopter by the side closest to cover, and then move rapidly away from the LZ. Since scout squads are small, this has proved to be a workable method, and the time on the LZ is short, which helps security.

On pickup zones (PZs) a scout squad reconnoiters the area, or the entire platoon links up and reconnoiters the PZ, marks it, and prepares for the helicopters to come in. The scouts can then either guide companies or platoons into assembly areas for extraction or set them up to be extracted. For security, it is preferable for the entire scout unit, if operating alone, to be extracted on one lift.

Fixed-Wing Aircraft

Fixed-wing aircraft can also be used. A five-man scout squad can fit in almost anywhere and with a short take-off and landing (STOL) aircraft such as an OV-10 the long range and higher speeds can be capitalized on to insert scouts, provided suitable landing sites are available. Once on the ground after an airborne movement, whether in training or in combat, the scouts should immediately start reconning the area and preparing reconnaissance reports, making map corrections, and getting a feel for the new area of operations. (We did this in Thailand on operation COBRA GOLD, and it proved a valuable training experience to do actual reconnaissance missions—without someone shooting at us—in a totally foreign environment, and shortly after a long flight.)

LOGISTICS

Logistical planning is also an important part of scout operations. Scouts can carry only so much and their endurance is limited, which means they should start out planning on only one or two MREs a day, and no T-rations or A-rations, plus carrying up to two gallons of water per man.

Survival techniques can help, but even with water purification tablets and straining water out of mud puddles for emergency resupply, our platoon ran into the problem of finding no water at all in some areas. Scouts can do without food, or go on short rations and still function, but water is a must.

We would have the entire platoon link up in a patrol base and then be consolidated for an aerial resupply, either by helicopter or fixed-wing aircraft. This needs to be coordinated before a mission, and once resupply has been received (water, food, ammunition, batteries), scouts must immediately move out of the area. The price for survival is to be eternally vigilant, and while scouts must have supplies, they cannot afford to get lax in receiving them.

Another workable method of getting supplies is to link up with a patrol from a rifle company; the company carries extra supplies and either conducts a link-up or caches the supplies at a pre-designated point for the scouts' later use. If scouts move out with an infantry company, the com-

pany can cache supplies for the scouts and move back while the scouts stay in the area and conduct their own mission. This is the old "stayback" technique. If the scouts have the supplies they need to stay, without exposing their position, they can conduct a long recon of the area.

Linking up with a convoy at a pre-coordinated rest stop is another way a scout squad or platoon can be resupplied covertly. Sticking to the old Ranger adage of "Travel light, freeze at night," scouts can also take into consideration the minimum amount of supplies they need to survive and plan their missions for 12 to 48 hours in duration. Living off the land is sometimes possible, but it means spending a lot of time foraging or shopping with the people of an area, both of which can expose a scout squad and make it less effective, and also set it up for ambush.

But it is not always possible to live off the land. The British in Malaysia, for example, started to gain the upper hand over the communist guerrillas when they controlled the food supply and starved the guerrillas out. In Vietnam, capturing food caches also made the Viet Cong less effective, because they, too, were kept busy trying to find something to eat instead of fighting. With the few assets available to light infantry units, and the fact that the enemy situation may make it impossible for the company XO or support platoon to truck out and resupply the scouts, they must plan long and well before a mission as to how and when they are to be resupplied.

SCOUT COMMUNICATIONS

Because their mission requires communicating what they have learned, all scouts need to be trained to be competent radio telephone operators (RTOs) and to master the use of field expedient antennas. Since the only radios in our platoon were PRC-68s and PRC-77s, we had to extend their range to maintain communications. For security and counter-jamming, we preferred to use directional field expedient antennas with resistors so that we could transmit in one direction only. This reduced our chances of having a radio direction-finder pinpoint us and also increased the range of our radios. Transmission and reception over 25 kilometers were successful with the field expedient antennas and our PRC-77 radios. When used with secure radio devices, our communications were still more secure.

Depending on the situation, if scouts are out of radio range with their higher headquarters, aircraft with radios compatible with theirs can be coordinated to make communication "windows" and serve as radio relays or simply to take in reports of what the scouts have found, or to call in close air support when the scouts are out of range of artillery. While scouts prefer to stay within the range of supporting fires from friendly mortars and artillery, this is not always possible, and in light infantry units artillery support may not be initially available.

Wire can also be used when scouts man observation posts and if the distance is short. One technique is to run the wire from a static OP to a radio site, where a directional antenna is set up; then continuous reports can be made without breaching communications security.

If all else fails, scouts can go back to their ultimate contingency, the foot messenger. This is why all the scouts need to know what is going on all the time, where they are, and how to use a map and compass to return to friendly lines. All scouts need to be intensively trained in land navigation and escape and evasion techniques. If the radios fail, two scouts can be dispatched to carry vital information back to friendly forces (while the information is still vital). Or in the event a patrol is ambushed, the rear men can break contact and get back with the information. We stressed in our platoon not to be heroes—that getting back with the information was the primary responsibility.

During the Korean War at the time of the Chinese intervention, entire reconnaissance patrols of 10 to 15 men would disappear without a trace. As a result, the large massed attacks of the Chinese came largely as a surprise. Communist doctrine still places great emphasis on counter-reconnaissance and if an entire reconnaissance team is captured or killed no information will get back.

To counter this, scouts must train to keep good dispersion, and if they are hit hard the rear men must not stop but must move immediately back to the last designated rally point and wait a set period of time. If the rest of the patrol cannot or does not link up, the remaining men must continue the mission by bringing back the information obtained. One way or another, scouts must communicate.

In summary, scouts must be highly trained and highly motivated. With the high leader-to-led radio (two NCOs for every three enlisted soldiers), much time can be devoted to the individual soldier, much more so than in a rifle platoon, to bring him to a high standard.

Scouts should be employed in accordance with their capabilities, and also with an understanding of their limitations. Unless they are provided with aircraft or vehicles, scouts move slowly, have little firepower, and carry a limited amount of supplies and equipment. Yet by using survival techniques and an intelligent resupply plan, they can stay in an area for a fairly long time; they are hard to spot; and they make it a point to be harder to catch.

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