

Reconnaissance at the NTC

Adapting Scout Procedures to the Terrain

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Terrain drives a unit's tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) as much as any other factor. This is no less true at the National Training Center (NTC) than anywhere else. But at the NTC the terrain is radically different from that at the home stations of most units.

In preparation for an NTC rotation, the scout platoon of the 4th Battalion, 6th Infantry, reworked its standing operating procedures (SOPs) and methods of scouting to take into account the effects of the desert terrain. This article concentrates on the TTPs the scouts found useful, especially those dealing with the deliberate attack.

While wargaming and training for the rotation, the scouts decided that the usual method of reconnaissance during the deliberate attack was unworkable. Most task force infantry scouts use their Bradley fighting vehicles or HMMWVs (high-mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles) to infiltrate the security zone. Besides being a difficult vehicle for infiltrating desert terrain, the Bradley was too big to hide during the day. Talks with scouts who had been through the NTC revealed that the opposing force (OPFOR) Hind-D helicopters regularly spotted and destroyed any vehicles that had infiltrated the OPFOR sector during the night. Our scouts therefore decided that infiltration during the deliberate attack would be done on foot.

The platoon did not cover the entire distance from the assembly area to the observation post (OP) positions on foot. Because of the scope of the battlefield, time considerations, and

physical wear and tear, the platoon used Bradleys to cross much of the security zone. The Bradleys inserted dismount teams of three or four men each at predetermined dismount points deep in the security zone. At these points, the teams dismounted and walked to their tentative OP locations.

While inserting the teams, the platoon moved in a line or wedge with no more than 50 meters between vehicles, making little effort to conceal its location. The platoon relied on the combat power of six Bradleys to overwhelm any OPFOR element it encountered in the security zone. Instead of bounding around OPFOR elements, the scouts initiated fires upon contact (see contact drill in Field Manual 17-98-1). Since the OPFOR uses teams of one or two BMP/BRDM vehicles in the security zone, the platoon had overwhelming firepower and invariably won, without casualties, in these encounters.

At the dismount points, the platoon halted briefly to release the dismount teams. The Bradleys stopped for two or three minutes to release one team, then maneuvered to the next dismount point and released another while the first team began its infiltration of four to 10 kilometers.

The platoon leader chose the dismount points and routes in advance. The dismount points had several features in common: First, they were concealed from the enemy, with either wadis or hills providing the concealment. Second, they were deep in the security zone but still out of direct fire

range of the FLOT (forward line of own troops), approximately 2.5 kilometers. Finally, they were close enough to the OP positions to permit the teams to reach and establish the OPs before BMNT (beginning, morning nautical twilight).

Actions at the dismount point were quick and were rehearsed before crossing the line of departure. The team members dismounted and immediately performed radio and sensitive item checks. Meanwhile, the team or patrol leader confirmed the team's location. Within two or three minutes, the teams and vehicles moved rapidly away from the dismount point. In this manner, the platoon avoided engagement by enemy indirect fires and any enemy reconnaissance assets that might move toward the dismount point.

The Bradleys may well have provided concealment for the dismount teams. On a mechanized battlefield, soldiers generally focus on vehicle movement, especially when a six-vehicle platoon moves rapidly through the security zone and engages any OPFOR blocking its route. In this environment, small teams of three or four men can move across the desert floor largely unnoticed, particularly when they infiltrate along terrain that is impassable to vehicles. Staying within the shadows of the hills also helps. Only a fraction of the OPFOR have passive sights, and the shadows inhibit the vision of those who do.

Each team member carried a 50-to-60-pound load. Every man had a sleeping bag (necessary during winter



rotations), cold weather gear, enough MREs for the mission, ammunition, and the rest of his equipment. Special equipment in the teams was as follows: a five-gallon water jug, a man-pack (used at the NTC to track dismounts), an AN/PVS-7, a single-channel ground and airborne radio subsystem (SINCGARS) radio, an AN/PRC-126, signal operating instructions, at least one set of graphics, and one global positioning system (GPS) receiver. The platoon leader accompanied one team carrying an additional SINCGARS. With this extra radio, the platoon leader's team could serve as the net control station (NCS) and maintain dual net capability at all times. Other teams may also wish to carry directional antenna equipment and a laser range finder, or take along a G/VLLD (ground/vehicle laser locator designator) team.

By the end of the night, the platoon had four or five OPs established throughout the depth of the enemy's sector. The OPs observed and reported during the day. At night, they cached much of the gear and conducted patrols. Reconnaissance on foot always

provides the most accurate and in-depth intelligence. The patrols near the FLOT focused on identifying bypasses or likely breach sites. Deeper in the OPFOR sector, the patrols used GPS to locate and target OPFOR vehicle fighting positions. The accuracy of this instrument made it worthwhile to fire for effect with DPICMs (dual purpose improved conventional munitions) on these positions during the task force attack. The battalion considered DPICM too expensive to fire without an exact fix on the target. These patrols usually identified and targeted five to seven vehicles or fighting positions on each patrol. The payoff increases if the patrols target vehicles anchoring the enemy's flank along the task force's main avenue of approach.

The patrols also provided an excellent opportunity to develop platoon internal target reference points (TRPs) for use during the coming attack. At the NTC, adjusting fire is difficult at best, and using the GPS to find the exact locations of certain terrain features improves the accuracy and speed of calls for fire.

The platoon also modified the task

of *establish an observation post* as described in the manuals (ARTEP 17-57-10 MTP and FM 17-98-1). First of all, the OPs had neither an overwatching vehicle nor wire for communications. Each team concentrated on finding an OP with an excellent overview of their named areas of interest (usually high in the hills), a well-concealed hide site for concealing equipment and personnel, and concealed routes to and from it. Once the scouts were established at the OPs, their chief threats were Hind-Ds and foot patrols. Concealment is paramount.

In addition to the dismounted scouts' actions, the tracks remained active as well. Usually at least half of the tracks were in need of maintenance of some sort. The M-3 Bradleys take a great deal of punishment at the NTC, and their operational readiness rate often declines sharply. The tracks that needed maintenance returned to the unit maintenance collection point (UMCP) with a skeleton crew of two. The battalion UMCP gave scout vehicles priority. Meanwhile the other tracks served as relay stations for the transmis-

sions, stood by to evacuate casualties, and provided valuable intelligence on OPFOR activities in the security zone and immediately along the FLOT.

The track's role as a relay and alternate NCS was critical. Although the SINCGARS easily transmits 14 to 15 kilometers on line of sight, the dismounted teams, especially when patrolling, could not always broadcast from the high ground. The tracks provided an invaluable redundancy in communications. If the NCS slipped off the net, the tracks relayed information to battalion. Often, the section leader in charge of the tracks would immediately relay an important piece of information that the patrol leader and NCS had not received. Since scout teams are always in danger of dying with valuable information, this role was an important one.

No less important was their role in evacuating casualties. Admittedly, the platoon never got a chance to test the system. The two times the dismount teams took casualties, either the entire team was "killed in action" or the rest of the element was unaware of the casualties until too much time had passed. Still, leaders have an obligation to provide a viable option for evacuating the wounded. The plan was to effect a link-up after carrying the casualties out of the OPFOR sector. While the time consideration in casualty play at the NTC would have rendered these men "died of wounds," in a real-world situation, this plan would have saved some. Any other method of extraction (such as air evacuation) was too risky in such open terrain.

Although these methods were very successful, a number of criticisms were raised before, during, and since our rotation. The most significant of these are outlined and answered as follows:

Scouts who initiate fires die. Scouts are not killers. They must avoid firing upon the enemy. While the actions of our scouts in the security zone may conflict with the typical procedure for NTC scout platoons, it does not violate the six fundamentals of reconnaissance stated in FM 17-98, *Scout Platoon*. The principle of freedom of maneuver was

always used to the greatest possible extent. Surprisingly, the security zone turned out to be a much less dangerous place than we expected for a platoon-sized element that moved continuously and aggressively.

The size of the OPFOR teams in the security zone creates a situation in which there is safety in numbers. Granted, the platoon sacrificed concealment and stealth, but only during movement to the dismount points. From that point on, the dismounted teams use stealth to achieve freedom of maneuver. Conventional wisdom also maintains that scouts who initiate fire die. While this holds true when the enemy has the opportunity to mass, the OPFOR has difficulty doing this at night in the security zone. Besides, the platoon did not sacrifice stealth by firing upon the OPFOR; its movement



techniques had already given its location away. Speed and firepower provided the platoon's security. The platoon's intent was not to engage the enemy, but it often lacked the time to bypass the OPFOR and found it rather easy to overwhelm OPFOR reconnaissance teams with the massed direct fires of six Bradleys.

Relegating the Bradleys to a purely support role during a deliberate attack violates the scout fundamental of maximizing reconnaissance assets forward. The protection, sights, and firepower of the Bradleys are under-utilized. It is true that the dismount teams did not have the benefits mentioned above, but if we had used the Bradleys to infiltrate, the scouts would have had little confidence in their ability to survive. Infiltrating a Bradley is extremely difficult in such terrain. More important, the HIND-Ds

are quite adept at ferreting out the scouts during the day. Bradleys are just too big to hide at the NTC. I suspect that HMMWVs also have difficulty hiding from the HIND-Ds, although to a lesser extent.

The separation between the Bradleys and the dismount teams hinders the platoon's ability to exploit success during any follow-on battalion mission. Further, it makes casualty evacuation even more difficult. Again, keeping the Bradleys with the dismount teams would have made casualty evacuation far easier, but it would also have increased casualties by increasing the signature behind the OPFOR's FLOT. As for flexibility for follow-on missions, the platoon had ample opportunity to effect necessary link-ups for follow-on missions.

Operating a Bradley with a two-man crew significantly reduces its effectiveness. Once again, I agree, but the alternative was to reduce the number of dismount teams. I was prepared to accept some risk on the edges of the security zone and behind the friendly FLOT. On occasion, the platoon begged and borrowed soldiers from other companies to flesh out the crews.

In movements to contact, the platoon focused upon reaching OP locations from which to observe the enemy's movement. Often, scout platoons attempt to strip the OPFOR of its reconnaissance assets while also performing reconnaissance. This dual focus overtakes the scouts. In order to fight enemy reconnaissance, the scouts must be augmented by a destruction force that can kill the enemy's reconnaissance elements. While this does not give the scouts license to ignore the OPFOR reconnaissance, it does place boundaries on their role. Without forgetting that their primary mission is to gather information for their battalion commander, scouts must do everything in their power to locate enemy reconnaissance. Finding reconnaissance assets that have had an opportunity to establish and conceal OP locations is difficult at best, especially if time is constricted, as it almost always is during a movement to contact.

During our task force's movement to contact, the regimental reconnaissance had saturated the area of operations the night before. Instead of attempting to strip OPFOR observation and face the likelihood of heavy attrition, the scouts focused on establishing their own OPs. OPFOR reconnaissance generally sets up OPs in the high ground at the NTC. Consequently, the scouts decided that hugging the north and south walls of the central corridor was much riskier than moving down the East Range road. Using the road made the platoon easy to identify, but it also forced OPFOR gunners to shoot 1.5 kilometers (at night) to hit the Bradleys. Relying on speed and distance for protection, the platoon moved rapidly down the road to its OP locations. Each OP set up in a "keyhole" position along the corridor walls and Hill 876. (A "keyhole" position is one in which the Bradley is backed into a draw that runs perpendicular to the maneuver corridor.) This way, the sides of the draw provided protection from OPFOR observation and friendly bullets. Dismount teams moved higher to obtain a clearer overview of the battlefield.

Time lines and intervisibility lines are particularly critical during a movement to contact. The scout platoon leader must work with the S-2 to ensure that he understands not only where but when to expect the enemy. A thorough knowledge of the timelines permits the platoon leader to accept risk and determine his movement techniques. It is also vital to understand exactly where and how the task force commander expects to fight the enemy. With a solid estimate of when the OPFOR should reach certain points on the battlefield and where his commander expects to fight them, the scout platoon leader can effectively determine where his OPs need to be and how long he has to get them there. Once again, the key is to arrange the OPs in depth along the mobility corridor. This way, they can relay information on the activities of the enemy's trail and lead elements. The platoon must establish the OPs before the OPFOR arrives.

Due to the speed of the operation, the scouts must know exactly where the in-

tervisibility lines are and how best to use them. This knowledge determines OP location, routes, and movement techniques. Relatively easy to determine at the NTC; the scouts must be particularly aware of the intervisibility lines in a movement to contact. These lines tell scouts just where they can maneuver and still maintain concealment. Since the OPFOR uses them to conceal his own movement and may go to ground behind them, the platoon leader must consider them when planning his OP locations. Scouts must have observation over the intervisibility lines to aid their commander.

On a screen line, the terrain does not necessarily demand that a task force place its OPs forward of its reconnaissance destroying elements. In some locations, scouts will find that they can obtain better reconnaissance and security alongside or even behind the reconnaissance killing elements. The critical piece is the location of the ground that provides the best overview of the OPFOR reconnaissance's avenues of approach. As always, scouts must have observers throughout the depth of the security zone and be able to guide the killer teams to the OPFOR reconnaissance.

Resupplying the screen line is always difficult. Our scouts found that the best method was to pull back a vehicle from each OP simultaneously and leave the dismounts to watch the sector. The dismounts must have adequate communications when the tracks move back. Resupplying forward requires too many link-ups. But one of the hazards of pulling the vehicles back is the passage of lines. Units may or may not know where the obstacles are to their front (engineers may neglect to mark lanes). The scout platoon leader needs to coordinate for a guide to get his vehicles through. The battalion must task the friendly forward commander with this mission. Granted, this is an implied task, but the friendly forward commander has a great deal to do and may not emphasize it.

OPs on a screen line must always have enough dismounts to emplace a dismounted OP alongside the mounted

one. The OPFOR uses both dismounted and mounted reconnaissance. Tracks are extremely vulnerable to dismounted Stinger missile teams creeping up on them. Away from the track, this dismounted OP will also provide better hearing. A few short patrols with a GPS can improve the effectiveness of scouts tremendously. Besides being an effective way to find OPFOR reconnaissance, patrols are excellent for identifying TRPs. The OPs must have internal TRPs to improve the effectiveness of their calls for fire. Finally, a liberal use of illumination rounds from the mortars helps identify and disorient the OPFOR. There is a natural assumption that if the OPFOR fires illumination, he is alert to your presence. Illumination also slows an opponent's movement and may even cause reconnaissance elements to choose a different route.

A few final lessons learned about equipment issues: Scouts must be able to transmit and receive in the secure mode. Extra W-4 cables will also help. The abuse equipment takes at the NTC makes these cables a must. Tie-down straps are always in short supply as well; take an extra 40 per track. Finally, take along power cables for the VVS-2s. Our scouts found all their power cables cut, and scouts operate too much at night to work without them.

This article is intended as a starting point for scout platoon leaders and S-2s when wargaming strategy for intelligence. The key is to develop a plan months ahead of a rotation. This way, the platoon can develop SOPs and refine its strategy during train-up.

The NTC is a superlative training event and a tremendous amount of fun. If the scouts can own the night, their task force stands a good chance of succeeding in the battles that lie ahead of them.

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