

OPFOR Reconnaissance

Techniques Worth Adopting

CAPTAIN PETER J. DON

Many commanders believe that the opposing force (OPFOR) scouts at the National Training Center (NTC) are the best in the world. Certainly, their ability to gather intelligence leads to their success on the NTC battlefield. Some observers contend that this success stems from their detailed knowledge of the terrain and the fact that they can practice and perfect their skills with each new training rotation. Although these factors contribute to success, other elements are more significant.

While U.S. Army doctrine relies heavily on technology as its edge on the battlefield, OPFOR reconnaissance doctrine emphasizes ground assets, and the scouts are organized to support their mission. Experience has taught the OPFOR scout platoons that success in reconnaissance depends mostly on infiltration skills, command and control, force structure, and tactical intuition.

By learning and understanding the tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) the OPFOR scouts use, a standard Army scout platoon can operate more effectively and efficiently on the battlefield.

Infiltration Skills

Infiltration skills are crucial to a scout platoon's success. When planning a traditional reconnaissance mission and issuing an operations order, leaders tend to disregard the scouts' ability to infiltrate into enemy territory, focusing solely on the commander's priority intelligence requirements (PIRs) and subunit instructions for each vehicle. As a result, soldiers and vehicles never reach their final positions. They are destroyed and do not obtain the information the commander

needs. Infiltration is both a science and an art that scouts can understand only if they realize the critical principles involved and then constantly practice them.

Infiltration techniques differ for OPFOR scouts, depending on whether the mission is offensive or defensive. During an offensive mission, such as a movement to contact, scouts must understand the doctrine used by the opposing force. The scout platoon leader must ensure that his soldiers know where to expect enemy reconnaissance and counterreconnaissance

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elements on the battlefield, along with the key terrain (as determined by the commander) and the PIRs from the S-2.

The commander's intent for an offensive mission is to have a scout occupy or clear a piece of key terrain for the main body. This is often a race against the clock and against the enemy's reconnaissance unit. Therefore, the unit must infiltrate quickly and securely into sector to reach vantage points from which to watch enemy reconnaissance elements and combat forces.

A scout platoon leader should position himself so that he can see where contact between forces will occur. His under-

standing of the enemy's mission, doctrine, and standing operating procedures will help him track and report the battle.

When facing a deliberate defense, infiltration becomes precise and requires more planning. This is where a scout's infiltration ability is tested. OPFOR scouts first determine whether to infiltrate into sector early or late. One successful technique has the scouts infiltrate early, before the Blue Force (BLUFOR) establishes a counterreconnaissance or screenline, which often means infiltrating in daylight or at dusk. It succeeds because it is unexpected. Upon establishing the screenline at night, the BLUFOR counterreconnaissance element scans deep in sector to identify movement or activity. By this time, the OPFOR scouts have identified the composition and location of the screenline and are well on their way into the main defensive area.

BLUFOR commanders and S-2s must make sure the reconnaissance and surveillance plan is finished and their scouts are deployed early, even before the task force or brigade order process is complete. Failure to execute in a timely manner gives the OPFOR scouts more time to infiltrate unopposed. OPFOR scouts will position one vehicle to track the screenline and guide the rest of the scouts through it. Another benefit of infiltrating early is the time window it provides. The scouts have the flexibility to decide whether to halt movement, wait out the screenline, or seek another infiltration route.

Infiltration late at night relies on the idea of exploiting any problems enemy security forces may encounter, such as

confusion, vehicle identification, and synchronization between scouts and the counterreconnaissance force. Timely infiltration can result in gaps in the enemy's screenline. Another consideration is that in many cases vehicle crews tend to be more alert and maintain stricter security between 1900 and 2300 than between 0100 and 0300. But this should not always be assumed. Scouts must base late-night infiltration on the enemy's morale, capabilities, strength, and experience. A disadvantage to late-night infiltration is the time constraint, which limits a scout's ability to reach his objective and complete the mission.

The OPFOR scouts excel at negotiating and exploiting enemy screenlines by initially conducting a thorough map reconnaissance and rehearsal. Each vehicle commander is well-versed on enemy disposition and locations and knows when and where he is likely to encounter a screenline. Each operation is divided into phases of contact. An example—in the order of contact—is: counterreconnaissance element, engineer/obstacle, main defensive area, and rear support element (brigade support area or tactical operations center). Also, the entire crew understands the unit's mission, enemy situation, and infiltration route through the screenline, and crewmen are cross-trained to execute their duties and responsibilities. Successful infiltration depends on the entire crew (track commander, gunner, and driver).

Another technique the OPFOR scouts use successfully is to have two soldiers in the hatch during infiltration. Two can scan twice as much area as one, increasing the chances of identifying the enemy early and reducing eye fatigue for the soldiers. The vehicle commander and gunner scan (using the clock method), alert the driver to an enemy vehicle, and guide him along the terrain. This enables the driver to adjust his route and take evasive action in case his vehicle is engaged. This is something all Army scouts should consider implementing into their training. The traditional technique of having the vehicle commander sitting alone in the front seat limits his field of view and his ability to read a screenline.

The final concept of successful infil-

tration is slow, steady, continual movement into sector. The scouts successfully infiltrate in accordance with the situation of the enemy screenline. They avoid the high ground and move low, avoiding enemy strengths and taking advantage of weaknesses. Continuous movement during infiltration decreases the chances of being identified. If an OPFOR scout vehicle is identified by an enemy scout or a counterreconnaissance vehicle, it adjusts

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its route so that the enemy can no longer track its movement. Conventional U.S. scouts would stop their advance upon identification and wait, hoping to develop the situation. When a scout vehicle continues moving slowly, the enemy counterreconnaissance is forced to guess its location and also alerts adjacent vehicles to its whereabouts. The time required to contact a vehicle, relay a report of enemy infiltration into a defensive sector, and coordinate movement is long enough for a scout to exploit the screenline and move deep into the defensive area. In addition, it is difficult for any electronic warfare direction-finding assets to obtain a cut or fix on scout vehicles continuously moving into sector while using radio listening silence.

Command and Control

The next advantage the OPFOR scouts exploit over their counterparts at the NTC is that offered by their command and control structure. The OPFOR re-

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connaissance company deploys and operates more independently than BLUFOR scouts. Each vehicle is a self-contained, independent reconnaissance element. A well-trained crew can oper-

ate independently of the others, thereby allowing each vehicle—even if it is the sole survivor—to collect PIRs and cover named areas of interest (NAIs). Each member of the OPFOR scout unit understands his mission as well as that of others in the vehicle. This enables a single crew to create a contingency plan for continuing to obtain information on the enemy.

The OPFOR scout platoon leader's role differs from that of a BLUFOR scout platoon leader. He may conduct reconnaissance instead of relying only on his other scouts for the required information. This technique gives the OPFOR scouts two distinct advantages:

First, upon establishing his final set, the OPFOR scout platoon leader helps the regimental commander determine the best route or course of action for the motorized rifle regiment to adopt. This concept would seem absurd for a BLUFOR unit, but the logic is sound: The OPFOR scout platoon leader is the senior lieutenant, the senior scout, and the junior officer with the most tactical experience. Thus, by positioning himself forward and observing the fight, he can advise the commander on the enemy's weaknesses and intentions. And having a direct communications link to the regimental commander, the S-3, and the S-2 decreases the probability of losing or misinterpreting crucial combat information because of communications security and radio transmission problems. Experience at the NTC has proved this tactic sound. The command staff receives combat information that has already been analyzed by the scout platoon leader. It is combat intelligence that goes down to the subunits for their final preparations.

The other command and control OPFOR advantage involves the role of the S-2, the communications net, and the reporting method. The OPFOR scouts operate on a single radio frequency and report directly to either the scout platoon leader or the S-2. This alleviates the problem of excessive radio traffic and ensures that the S-2 knows the enemy situation. In a normal BLUFOR unit, individual vehicles report to either the scout platoon leader or the platoon sergeant. Once the reports are received and recorded, the

traffic is relayed to the battalion S-2. This process is too time-consuming.

OPFOR success with this technique results in strict communications and operations security and proper reporting methods. During the infiltration phase, the platoon leader has overall command and control of the reconnaissance elements. During the actual battle, however, the S-2 may direct the scouts to answer any PIRs or cover NAIs. This works well because the OPFOR scout platoon leader reports combat information on the regimental net to the maneuver commanders. It also facilitates the OPFOR reconnaissance effort and collection plan.

Force Structure

The BLUFOR scouts, and the Army as a whole, can learn a lot from the force structure of the OPFOR scouts. The scout organization is a hierarchy. There are two reconnaissance companies; one replicates division reconnaissance and the other regimental reconnaissance. Each unit basically consists of four BRDM-2s, four BMP-1s, six dismounted reconnaissance teams (DRTs), and attachments (BRDM-2Rkh: chemical reconnaissance, tanks; IRD: engineer reconnaissance, and ground surveillance radar). A reconnaissance company is tailored specifically for each mission during a training rotation.

The order of importance for the unit are the DRTs, followed by the BRDM-2s, the BMPs, and tanks if available. The BRDM-2s are responsible for inserting the DRTs, the BMPs assist in the BRDMs' infiltration, and the tanks enable the BMPs to exploit the counterreconnaissance screenline. Using this structure gives the OPFOR scouts more firepower and provides additional combat power to help infiltrate priority vehicles. In the past, the tanks have proved to be a greater asset when used as a distraction on a flank, because the entire BLUFOR counterreconnaissance force focuses and collapses on them, allowing the BMPs and BRDMs to infiltrate on the opposite flank or through a gap.

As an example of this process, an OPFOR BRDM-2 that is detected or engaged while inserting DRTs will use a BMP as a distraction or penetration in the screenline. Thus, the BMP, which has

more firepower and protection, becomes decisively engaged instead of the BRDM, and the unit retains the crucial BRDM-2. It evades the screenline and the conflict and proceeds with its mission of inserting the DRTs to their positions. It also establishes its own final set before the battle. The DRTs provide most of the

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combat information and maintain continuity between the OPFOR division and regimental reconnaissance elements entering and leaving the sector.

Because of their size, speed, and stealth, the BRDMs always infiltrate ahead of the BMPs, attachments, and tanks. They also receive the deep infiltration missions to gain and maintain visual contact with the enemy's rear combat service support, reserve force, and assembly areas or battle positions. The BMPs infiltrate relatively shallow into sector to maintain observation of the enemy scouts and counterreconnaissance forces. The tanks are used as a shallow reserve or quick-reaction force to punch

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a hole in the enemy screenline if necessary. The chemical and engineer reconnaissance vehicles act as extra eyes on the battlefield and may act as yet another scout element if the need should arise.

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mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles). The added firepower and protection would increase the scouts' infiltration and survivability rate on the battlefield.

Another idea is to incorporate the former antiarmor company (Echo company) into the force structure. This company's secondary mission is reconnaissance, which would increase the effectiveness and survivability of today's scout platoon.

Tactical Intuition

The final advantage of the OPFOR scouts over their counterparts is tactical intuition. The goal is to sense the enemy on the battlefield, anticipate his actions, and take advantage of the situation. This intuition is difficult to measure, develop, or even describe. Many combat veterans of past campaigns and wars understand what it is like to sense the enemy, the terrain, and the battlefield. Through countless missions, rotations, and training at the NTC, the OPFOR scouts develop a battlefield instinct that helps them function in the uncertainty of battle and make decisions based on unknown actions of the enemy. Although experience gained is also important, it often becomes obsolete. Thus, the OPFOR relies on tactical and technical training to develop this intuition so it can take precedence over experience. Any soldier who has experienced a field training exercise or actual combat knows that events on the battlefield are not premeditated, but spontaneous, and these events are met with tactical intuition.

OPFOR scout platoon leaders ensure that their soldiers fully understand the enemy's capabilities, disposition, and composition as well as they do the terrain. This is reiterated and reinforced through countless rehearsals. The intent is to focus the soldiers' minds for the upcoming mission and help them visualize the battlefield. The result is a unit fully in tune with the enemy and his mission, and no discrepancy or abnormality goes unnoticed throughout the operation.

Any scout platoon preparing for an NTC rotation can achieve this state through tough and realistic training. The training must include detailed study of the OPFOR, the terrain, and the scout

platoon's capabilities and limitations. Commanders must emphasize their scouts' ability to fully understand the enemy's order of battle and TTPs. Then they can anticipate enemy actions and sense when something is unusual.

In addition, training must focus on developing other senses besides sight. The goal is to achieve the "gut feeling" and anticipate the enemy's next move. Leaders can develop this instinct through numerous rehearsals, war games, and sandtable exercises. For the OPFOR scouts, the terrain and missions have become second nature. Through monthly repetition and constant exposure to different units, these scouts can focus on and follow their

instincts while mentally analyzing their enemy.

Although incorporating these TTPs into traditional U.S. doctrine is not simple, it can be done, once units realize that doing so will enable them to operate more effectively against an adversary. The difficulties lie in training and testing scout platoons to reach and maintain the OPFOR scouts' level of proficiency. Overall, we must demand more from our scouts to provide timely and accurate combat information. We must also train our scouts to execute in-depth analysis of the enemy and terrain instead of just identifying and counting enemy equipment, vehicles, and personnel.

As leaders, we must learn to support our scouts with time, resources, and training (with guidance from S-2s). By incorporating these techniques, we can redefine the mission and training of our scouts and better focus our reconnaissance efforts.

Captain Peter J. Don served as an OPFOR scout platoon leader, rifle platoon leader, and company executive officer at the National Training Center and is now assigned to the 1st Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group in Germany. He is a 1990 ROTC graduate of Claremont McKenna College.

FIFTY YEARS AGO IN HISTORY SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1946

Events in China had captured world attention by the autumn of 1946. Nationalist and communist factions had already claimed portions of that immense land as their own, and the likelihood of conflict in contested areas was increasing daily. To the south, the role of U.S. forces in South Korea was being redefined as South Korean forces were becoming more self-sufficient. Meanwhile, U.S. Marines and their units returned from the Pacific Theater in increasing numbers as part of the postwar drawdown. In Germany, Soviet hopes for greater influence were dashed as communist candidates were defeated in the first postwar elections.

These and other highlights of the postwar years have been provided by Mr. Bud Hannings, in preparation for his upcoming chronology of the Korean War.

- 6 September** *The Chinese Nationalist Army assumes responsibility for the protection of the coal fields and rails lines running between Chinwangtao and Peiping (Beijing).*
- 11 September** *Believing—one year after the end of the war and Japanese occupation—that South Koreans should become self-sufficient, General Lerch, the U.S. Military Governor of Korea, orders all Americans in the Korean government to cease their day-to-day responsibilities and act only as advisors.*
- 13 September** *Special Representative George C. Marshall informs President Truman that his and Ambassador Stuart's diplomatic efforts to bring about a peaceful resolution to the crisis in China have reached an impasse.*
- 2-5 October** *Frustrated by the intransigence of both the Nationalists and the Communists, Marshall informs President Truman that there appears to be no workable solution to the Chinese situation and requests that he be recalled. Learning of this, Chiang Kai-Shek proposes a ten-day truce to encourage further negotiations.*
- 9 October** *Marshall visits Shanghai to meet with the Communists' Chou En-lai in an attempt to arrive at a compromise between the two factions. Chou En-lai subsequently accuses Marshall of favoring the Nationalists, and Marshall withdraws from serving as mediator in future negotiations.*
- 20 October** *The people of Berlin go to the polls for the first postwar free elections. The Soviets have agreed to this move because they believe that the Soviet-backed Socialist Unity Party will sweep the elections. To their dismay, the party is able to gain less than 20 percent of the vote. This democratic victory means, however, that the Allies will find the Soviets much harder to deal with in future negotiations concerning Germany.*