KNOW YOUR BEAT:

NATIONAL GUARD UNIT CONDUCTS LONG RANGE SURVEILLANCE IN IRAQ

CAPTAIN MIKE MANNING

Soldiers from the 173rd Infantry Detachment (LRS) perform a terrain denial mission near Bayji, Iraq.

Photos courtesy of the 173rd Infantry Detachment (LRS)

The 173rd Infantry Detachment (Long Range Surveillance [LRS]), a unit organic to the Rhode Island National Guard, deployed to Iraq in January 2005 in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) III. The unit was assigned to the 42nd Infantry Division, Task Force Liberty, where it served as the division Long Range Surveillance Detachment (LRSD). In the months prior to deployment, the unit trained at home station in East Greenwich, Rhode Island, and at Fort Drum, New York.

I had the honor of commanding this unit throughout its entire cycle, from home station training until our return to the United States in November 2005. My intent with this article is to give readers a true sense of how the 173rd was task organized and employed during OIF III. My desire is to delineate what we did, in the hope that our experience may prove valuable to other units and Soldiers preparing to deploy overseas. This article will focus on the actions and experiences of the unit while deployed to Iraq and will describe how we fought is well within the capabilities of any reconnaissance unit at any level from battalion through corps.

Mobilization

Prior to mobilization, the 173rd was organized under a modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) and a property book that was dissimilar in many ways to that of other long range surveillance detachments. There were in fact some glaring differences. Our communication equipment was one example. The 173rd carried PRC-77s on its books as the primary means of Very High Frequency (VHF) communication. Additionally, LRS teams operating outside of VHF range found themselves communicating with the PRC-104. LRS units in the active component had used the PRC-138 or 150 for years. Thankfully, one of my team leaders had been employed by Harris Industries, the company that produces the PRC-150. Due to this relationship, my Soldiers had been able to become familiar with the PRC-150 in the two to three years leading up to mobilization. This would pay dividends for us during the deployment. The 173rd also did not have any satellite communication (SATCOM) capabilities, nor did we have any PEQ-2As and/or PAQ-4s nighttime laser aiming devices or any range-finding devices on my books.

These deficiencies in both the communication and laser arenas were corrected in the long run at varying times throughout the deployment through the use of an operational needs statement (ONS) and an outstanding detachment executive officer who always found a way to get the Soldiers what they needed. Subsequently, when deployed my teams could communicate with multiple means of communication, and through the use of night vision devices — including PEQ-2As and the Ground Commander's Pointer (GCP) — we owned the night.

Weapons, Training, and Ranger Cadre Support

One area where my organization had a distinct advantage was in the number of crew-served weapon systems we brought to the fight. Prior to our federal mobilization, I was able to laterally transfer five Mk19 grenade machine guns from a Military Police unit in the state. Additionally, when we arrived at Fort Drum, the 173rd acquired five M240B machine guns, five M2 .50 caliber machine guns, and nine M249 squad automatic weapons. Previous to this, the most effective casualty producing weapons in my arms room were our five M60 machine guns. With the acquisition of the Mk19s, M2s and M240Bs, we had the ability to get into a fight and win. Coupled with the multiple M1114 high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles we received in country, this was a formidable combination. Dialogue with reconnaissance experts who had recently returned from Iraq and Afghanistan told us that we would need the ability to reach out and destroy targets. This was reinforced by the cadre of D Company, Reconnaissance and Surveillance Leaders Course (RSLC), 4th Ranger Training Battalion, who were able to provide updates from those reconnaissance and surveillance units that had already been deployed. We also received instruction on urban reconnaissance and a planning exercise prior to deploying.

Once we had received our mobilization order, the 42nd Infantry Division G-3 made it clear that the 42nd ID did not intend to employ my detachment solely in a passive reconnaissance capacity. At the G-3's urging, in April 2004 I sent 15 Soldiers from the detachment to Camp Robertson, Arkansas, to attend the National Guard Marksmanship Training Center's Sniper School. With the addition of these 15 school-trained snipers, I had a total of 20 school-trained snipers in the detachment. Each of my six LRS teams now had its own sniping capability. Additionally, in May I took my HQs element and team leaders to Fort Benning to attend the Sniper Employment Course (SEO) at the U.S. Army Sniper School. It was during that stay at Fort Benning that we had the opportunity to participate in a mobile training team (MTT) event facilitated by cadre from D Company, 4th Ranger Training Battalion, in which subject matter experts from D Company instructed my unit in urban reconnaissance. All of these training opportunities were invaluable. We recognized early on that as LRS personnel we were first and foremost human intelligence (HUMINT) collectors; the commander was counting on us to provide near real time intelligence. However, through discussions with LRS personnel who had just returned from OIF, it was evident that to maximize our effectiveness in the contemporary operating environment (COE) we had to be prepared to assume the roles of full-time collector and sometimes civil affairs, psychological operations, hunter killer, and other missions as needed.

As part of our predeployment training, the detachment executed two Combat Training Center rotations. One rotation was through the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisianna, and the other was through the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California. We also completed a mission readiness exercise at Fort Drum. Every member of the 173rd also went through the First U.S. Army's Designated Marksman (DM) program of instruction. Over a two week period of time in September 2004, my unit expended 20,000 rounds of 5.56 ball ammunition. During this time, the unit received 20 M14 rifles and six M24 sniper systems. My sniper-trained Soldiers spent hours on the range in order to master the use of these systems. We worked extensively with vehicles, conducting mounted battle drills. In a unit of light fighters by design, most of my Soldiers and NCOs had to familiarize themselves with operating with vehicles. We rehearsed and drilled repetitiously, and soon my teams were comfortable operating in a mounted mode.

During these months of training, we never strayed far from our bread and butter skills as an LRSD; the NCOs made sure of this. My teams worked on such field crafts as hide/surveillance site construction, break out drills, land navigation, battle drills, and communications on a regular basis. Eight months is a long time to prepare a unit to deploy overseas, and we made full use of the time available to us. It was good that we had ample time to accomplish unit-specific training as well as generic mobilization tasks as specified by the mobilization site at Fort Drum. We knocked out the generic training up front in the early months, and then as a unit we focused on LRS-specific tasks. As commander, I had a lot of flexibility in how and what we trained; thankfully I had a supportive chain of command who saw fit to give me a lot of autonomy regarding the training calendar. You can never train enough, but I speak for my NCOs when I tell you that by December, we felt as a unit that we were ready for the "championship game."

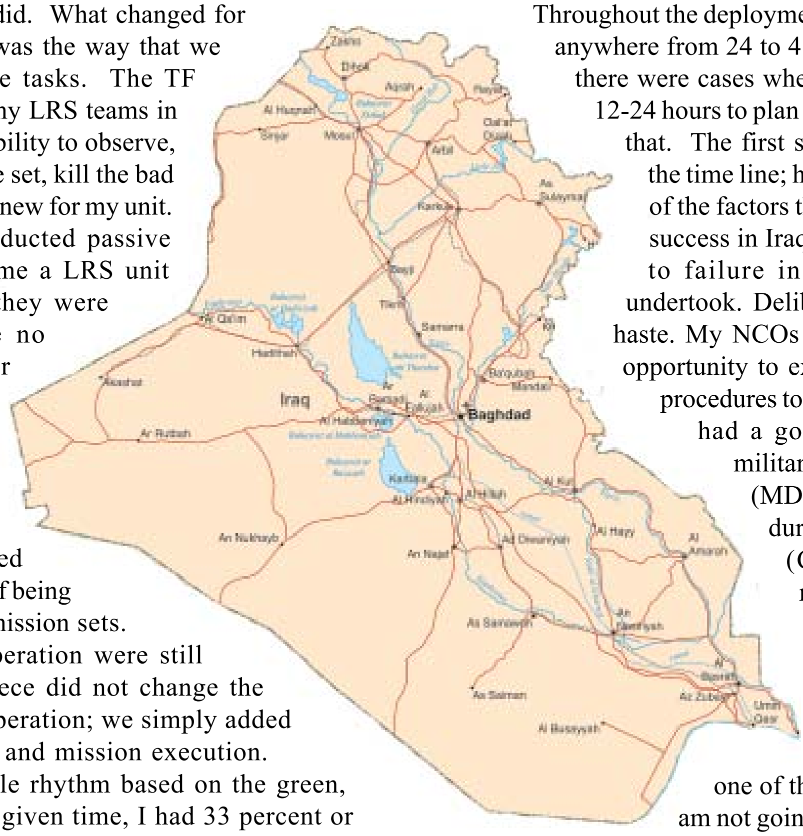
A 173rd Infantry Detachment Soldier zeroes an M-14 at a range outside Samarra, Iraq.

Arrival in Iraq

Prior to deployment, in October 2004 the 173rd had been attached to the 1st Squadron, 17th Cavalry, 82nd Airborne Division (Task Force Palehorse), which was assigned to the 42nd ID for OIF III. However, shortly after our arrival in country operational control of my unit was given to the 1st Brigade Combat Team (BCT), 3rd Infantry Division (TF Raider). The 1st BCT commander dispatched us to Samarra, Iraq, in support of the 3rd Battalion, 69th Armor (TF Power). TF Power was responsible for Samarra, its surrounding environs, and the western desert out to the division boundary with the II Marine Expeditionary Force. My unit was employed in an economy of force role in support of TF Power. The preponderance of forces assigned to TF Power was located in Samarra, but we operated throughout the task force's area of operations.

Operations in Samarra

During the 90 days that the 173rd supported TF Power, we executed a wide variety of missions that included reconnaissance, surveillance, and target acquisition. Most reconnaissance-oriented organizations will include these tasks on their mission essential task list (METL); we certainly did. What changed for my unit beginning in Samarra was the way that we understood and executed these tasks. The TF commander wanted to employ my LRS teams in the capacity where we had the ability to observe, report, and if the conditions were set, kill the bad guys. The interdiction piece was new for my unit. For years, LRS units had conducted passive reconnaissance — the only time a LRS unit pulled the trigger was when they were breaking contact. We were no different. However, in our experience, this was not a huge paradigm shift; frankly, we saw this as a natural progression to an LRS operation. Thankfully, during the predeployment phase of the operation, we had trained extensively for the inevitability of being tasked with offensive-oriented mission sets. The mechanics of the LRS operation were still the same. The interdiction piece did not change the way we approached the LRS operation; we simply added another step into our planning and mission execution.



The 173rd developed a battle rhythm based on the green, amber, and red model. At any given time, I had 33 percent or two six-man LRSUs employed in sector. These teams were employed as autonomous entities but also in a heavy team configuration with two LRS teams working in tandem. We had used some foresight during the predeployment phase and developed habitual working relationships between different teams within the detachment. These relationships proved to be lifesavers for us. In my experience, a six-man element cannot operate effectively in most circumstances in a mounted posture. Now, if I combine two six-man elements, I bring a lot more to the table by way of effectiveness: 12 men, four trucks, and firepower. To ensure the teams are at 100-percent fill, you can handpick Soldiers from teams that are off cycle. Another great tool the reconnaissance leader can place in his kit bag is to have a headquarters section and/or communications section comprised of personnel who have the ability to integrate into a team. LRSDs by definition have a very robust communications section; most of the men assigned to commo within my unit had secondary military occupational specialties (MOS) of 11B. During the predeployment phase, these men had participated in most of the training that my teams conducted. We embraced a concept of the "total athlete" in the unit and it paid off for us. Men assigned to my base radio teams often filled the ranks in my LRS teams. While two LRS teams were employed, two teams were in isolation preparing for the next set, and the remaining two teams (33 percent of my combat power) were recovering. The team in the amber cycle, augmented by personnel from my communications section or headquarters, was responsible for insertion, extractions, and assuming quick reaction force (QRF) responsibilities. We implemented this battle rhythm right at the beginning of the deployment and it worked.

Throughout the deployment, my teams had typically anywhere from 24 to 48 hours to plan. However, there were cases when my Soldiers were given 12-24 hours to plan and at other times less than that. The first sergeant was the keeper of the time line; he was the task master. One of the factors that truly contributed to our success in Iraq was that we never rushed to failure in any operation that we undertook. Deliberation had priority over haste. My NCOs were always afforded the opportunity to execute good troop leading procedures to standard. My team leaders had a good understanding of the military decision-making process (MDMP) and were held to task during their course of action (COA) decision brief regardless of the mission. In the LRS community, we celebrate our collective ability to plan — the ability to formulate a concise, coherent plan is one of the staples of a good unit. I am not going to suggest to you that my unit executed a doctrinal, by-the-numbers, planning sequence every time a team went through the wire because we didn't. Not once during my 11 months overseas did we receive a mission planning folder (MPF). Typically, I received a task and purpose from the S3 and a supporting named area of interest (NAI) or target area of interest (TAI) data from the S2; that was enough. What we developed internally as it pertained to planning was not rocket science, but it worked well. We developed internal controls within the detachment so that every time my Soldiers left the wire they had been given every possible tool to succeed during the operation. My 1SG and team leaders did a remarkable job of incorporating rehearsals, pre-combat inspections, and pre-combat checks. Given frequent time and mission constraints, time management was critical. Regardless of time constraints, there are certain gates a unit must hit prior to employing one of its elements. I have seen some units disregard this fact, and their Soldiers suffered because of it.

One additional note of importance pertains to the planning phase or amber cycle. Given that we were operating in close proximity to the forward operating base (FOB) and that we were working the same battle space over and over again, it was feasible for me and my leaders to actually recon a particular NAI prior to mission execution. Understanding that there were coalition forces (CF) all over the area, it was very easy for us in most cases to give the team an opportunity to look at the terrain and identify a possible hide or surveillance site location prior to mission execution. Again, this was dependent on METT-TC (mission, enemy, terrain, troops, time, civilians), so it was not always possible. Many times, the 173rd was the only show in town, so it was not prudent for us to show our hand or close on a particular area lest we compromise the mission. This was a big change to the way an LRSD historically conducted business. In the past, teams would be inserted well behind enemy lines, something that made it difficult to get a look at the ground. In the COE, the fight affords the recon Soldier an opportunity to do some things a little differently than he is accustomed to.

Passive Reconnaissance and the Short Range Patrol

The two most frequent tasks that we accomplished while in Samarra were reconnaissance and target acquisition or terrain denial. I will address the former task first. The preponderance of forces within the TF was centered around Samarra proper so we were tasked to execute a huge reconnaissance effort to the west. The purpose of this operation was to confirm or deny the presence of anti-Iraqi forces (AIF). There exists a north-south running road from Fallujah to Samarra. It was believed that this road and the series of trail networks to the west were heavily trafficked by AIF. Our job was to essentially go find the bad guys, and we did. This operation lasted approximately 30 days from start to finish. It incorporated both mounted and dismounted operations. This, by definition, was a hybrid mission for an LRSD. We relied heavily on the use of vehicles. Earlier in my career, I had spent some time as a platoon leader in a brigade reconnaissance troop. In this situation my team leaders applied many of the same Cavalry tactics, techniques, and procedures that I had learned as a young lieutenant. The beauty, however, of an LRSD or an infantry unit specializing in reconnaissance is that you have so many options when it comes to employment in the COE. I have always maintained that if a team can display proficiency in LRS operations from receipt of the warning order through the debrief, this same team will be capable of mastering other associated or disassociated tasks. This applies to mounted operations as well. The 173rd demonstrated the ability to sustain for 72 hours in a dismounted or mounted posture. During the execution of these sets, my teams relied heavily on high frequency and SATCOM in order to communicate with the detachment operations base. In my experience, I came in contact with very few units in Iraq that were capable of accomplishing the same feat due to differences in training and equipment. The HUMINT that my unit collected during this reconnaissance effort was utilized in a joint operation by the 1st BCT, 3rd ID and the 8th Regimental Combat Team, 2nd Marine Division. This was a very rewarding endeavor for us. Additionally, during this time, intelligence that my teams collected subsequently produced viable targets. We were then utilized to conduct surveillance on these targets, one of which was a suspected terrorist training camp.

In the previous paragraph, I alluded to the fact that my teams collected accurate HUMINT which subsequently led to follow-on operations by CF. What I did not mention was that the best intelligence was collected by speaking with the locals. If you take away anything from this article, I would ask you to pay special attention to this next topic. There exists a real need in the COE for Soldiers who are trained to execute covert operations in a dismounted or mounted posture. These Soldiers remain unseen, and thereby are afforded the opportunity to kill the bad guys at a specific place and time. This same Soldier, however, can often achieve the same effect by investing time and resources in the local population in order to develop community contacts. I was blessed in many ways with the Soldiers in my unit, but specifically I had a number of Soldiers who had been police officers in their civilian jobs. They understood the importance of community policing or developing community contacts better than anyone else that I came in

Soldiers with the 173rd Infantry Detachment (LRS) talk with an Iraqi man during a mission. By investing time and resources in the local population, the Soldiers were able to develop community contacts.

contact with over there. During this 30-day reconnaissance effort and throughout the remainder of the deployment, we committed a lot of effort to establishing rapport with the local residents. We identified early on that there are good people everywhere, and that if you can establish mutual trust with them, they will in time be forthcoming with intelligence that will assist you in doing your job.

The term "presence patrol" is thrown around very loosely. Iraq is too dangerous to push Soldiers through the wire just to make a presence in sector. Every time a patrol leaves the wire, it should have a distinct task and purpose. I would argue (as would my NCOs) that a unit executing a presence patrol is in actuality conducting a passive reconnaissance patrol.

We developed a technique while in Samarra which we later applied to Bayji and its surrounding environs. We called it the "Coalition of the Willing;" it was a combined 173rd, Shadow (corps tactical human intelligence teams [THTs]), civil affairs personnel, and PSYOPS effort. Not every element was represented at every turn, but we did work extensively with the corps THTs that were operating in Samarra. We developed a tremendous relationship with these Soldiers, and this effort was mutually beneficial. Many times the intelligence that the THTs collected was then in turn acted upon by my unit, i.e., surveillance, direct action, etc. My teams would roll out into sector and engage the local population in an attempt to collect HUMINT.

In order to be successful, we had to revisit the same sources repeatedly. I have seen the benefits of this method. On several occasions, we were led to multiple caches, and we also received HUMINT on TF high value targets (HVTs). This works. In my opinion, we need to continue to work on establishing relationships with the local population.

Target acquisition or terrain denial was the other type of mission with which we were tasked. My Soldiers were employed with the expressed intent of killing AIF. We executed these sets as part of the TF counter-IED/mortar fight. The TF 3-69 commander and his staff had a good understanding of how to deny AIF the use of terrain, and my unit was subsequently employed in an effective manner. Dan Smith wrote a great article in *Infantry* Magazine's July-August 2005 edition about this subject. Smith talked about the importance of hunting the enemy the way one would hunt a deer. I would like to expound on this concept. In Samarra, the TF had dedicated a tank company to route security/clearance along Main Supply Route (MSR) Tampa. This company was out there every hour of every day making contact. This is a very important stipulation in my opinion — they were making contact and maintaining contact. To make contact with the bad guys does not necessarily mean that you are exchanging small arms fire. In most cases, you make contact with the enemy without even knowing it in the COE. Why is this? Well, in Iraq for example, AIF in most cases look like any other Iraqis. A lot of times, you don't realize an individual is AIF until you observe him emplacing an IED, for example. This tank company, by virtue of being out in sector around the clock, was causing the AIF to react to them and not the other way around. The key is to get into their decision-making cycle and force them to react to you. Terrain denial is effectively accomplished by employing both overt and covert elements. In this case, the tank company was the overt element. With their vehicles, which were visible and seen by the locals, their presence forced the AIF to displace or break contact in order to conduct combat operations. Based on empirical data, the covert element is infused into the operation. In this case, the 173rd was that element. Based on an analysis the S-2 had conducted, my element was tasked with conducting terrain denial at a specific NAI or TAI. Coordination is the key here; the covert element has to be in step with the overt element. Both elements need to be dedicated to this operation for the long haul. It does no good to have a team covertly hidden if the overt element cannot stay in sector for the duration of the operation. Success is defined by killing AIF at a time and place of your choosing. Use the overt element to force the bad guys into a particular "window" and then kill them.

Adjacent unit coordination is imperative, not only for unity of effort but also to avoid fratricide. I cannot stress this last comment enough. My teams used everything from chicken coops, wells, abandoned buildings and elephant grass along the Tigris River for their hides. At other times, depending on the duration of the mission and NAI, they would set up 200-300 meters off the road in the desert, unseen even to a trained eye using night vision devices. In order to avoid the temptation of setting patterns, we used vehicles organic to the detachment, route clearance vehicles, civilian contractor vehicles and on the rare occasion, helicopters for insertion and extraction platforms. To be successful, one has to think outside the box. By making use of these different platforms, we avoided the natural tendency to set patterns.

We need to keep another point in mind: when operating in close proximity to other coalition forces, it is imperative to be cognizant of the battle rhythm and movements of adjacent units. On one occasion, one of my vehicles was destroyed by a mine during a LRS extraction along the Tigris to the east of Bayji. The mine had been emplaced in an area that was unfamiliar to my unit; we had not operated in this particular area before. However, I later came to find out that the infantry company that was responsible for this AO regularly patrolled the area in close proximity to the NAI. In fact, I also found out from the company commander that his tank platoon used to frequent this area almost daily. His platoon would establish overt observation posts intermittently throughout the day. I had done adjacent unit coordination with this commander prior to employing my team, and the S2 had given me historical data for this area. The company commander and task force (TF) staff were aware of our scheme of maneuver; everyone was on board. What I did not have was a clear understanding of the friendly situation in its entirety. My team leader responsible for the mission should have linked up with that tank platoon leader to fully understand the extent of their daily patrols, and I should have facilitated this meeting. When operating in an economy of force role, the TF area of operations is your playground. The implied task, however, is that the reconnaissance unit must be the master of all. You have to know everything concerning both friendly and enemy activity that is occurring in the battle space. In the words of Staff Sergeant Tommy O'Hare, "Know your beat."

These types of patrols are hunter-killer missions. A team is employed with the expressed intent of destroying a target. The S3 for 1-17 CAV, Major Neil Reilly, referred to these patrols as short range patrols (SRP), phonetically pronounced "sherp." Given the plethora of weapons and weapon systems that we had acquired during predeployment, we had a unique ability to manipulate the composition of the patrol and the different weapon systems utilized by the teams. For example, during dismounted operations, I mandated that at least one belt-fed weapon was integrated into the patrol. And in many circumstances, the team leader would opt to go with a crew-served weapon system and possibly an AT4 depending on METT-TC. These patrols were very effective, but success for these teams operating in a dismounted posture as a hunter is dependent on the overt element doing their job. Again, someone pushes the deer and another kills it. It sounds like a simple concept, but it is difficult to execute; you have to work at it.

In support of Operation City Market, Soldiers from the 173rd Infantry Detachment (LRS) set up a sniper overwatch/blocking position along the Tigris River in Samarra.

The latter half of our tour in Iraq was spent in Bayji supporting an armor task force. Try as we might, it just never came together concerning the terrain denial fight. So consequently, we had to redefine success. My original intent was to kill as many AIF as possible, but at a minimum, my presence denied him the ability to kill or wound coalition forces in the battle space that I owned. The terrain denial fight is everyone's responsibility. The AIF have identified the roads as the line of contact in Iraq. This is where he comes to kill us, and in turn, it is where we will kill him. Ideally, however, we should desire to interdict AIF in this case prior to him attempting to kill CF along the roads. In my opinion, the most effective way we do this is through offensive operations based on solid intelligence designed to kill or capture AIF. To reiterate, when it comes to HUMINT collection, nothing beats the passive reconnaissance patrol.

We were moved to Bayji by the brigade commander because the IED and VBIED threat had become increasingly more prevalent in the TF AO. My unit executed terrain denial operations almost exclusively. TTPs that we had developed in Samarra were for the most part applicable to this new AO. The caveat is that every AO has its own threat and its own pool of bad guys. However, what one AIF cell does in a particular AO in many cases is similar to what another cell is executing in another. AIF share TTPs and communicate with each other just like we do. This is why we felt compelled as a unit to ensure that our story boards were distributed widely. This is a technique that I would recommend to any unit, and not just those that specialize in recon. Take the time to do a good after action review (AAR) and debrief in order to capture the essence of the patrol. We don't need to reinvent the wheel every time we go through the wire.

Conclusion

In my opinion, the 173rd Infantry Detachment played a critical role in contributing to the overall success of two task forces during its 11-month tour. We capitalized on an opportunity to affect the TF battle space positively by going where other coalition forces could not. Given our ability to communicate at long ranges outside of VHF range and our ability to execute sets long in duration, we caused AIF to react to us and not the other way around. The Army is constantly changing the way it conducts business; it is evident to this Soldier that reconnaissance units that can collect intelligence in a variety of different ways and destroy targets with long range, direct fire weapons will contribute greatly to the success of our Army. Reconnaissance is a growth industry, and there will always be a need for highly trained, well-disciplined Soldiers in its ranks. I believe that reconnaissance elements found in light, mechanized, airborne, or air assault infantry units can be most effective by cross-training and integrating TTPs that exist in each of these types of units. In the reconnaissance arena, we do more with less, and the proper integration of a dedicated reconnaissance unit into the TF fight at any level will ensure that the commander manipulates the battle space to the best of his ability.

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