



By Alan Hastings

Our Cavalry formations have a maneuver problem. Somewhere between the line of departure and the reconnaissance objective, our reconnaissance stops. In our efforts to

conduct reconnaissance, we find ourselves falling well short of achieving the reconnaissance objective – answering the BCT Commander’s priority information requirements to inform his decision points. COL Ross Coffman, Commander of Operations Group at the National Training Center, asserts that there are five reasons why reconnaissance operations might stop:

1. We achieve the reconnaissance objective. We answer the PIR that informs the BCT Commander’s decision-making.
2. We gain contact with an enemy beyond our capability to defeat and we are unable to bypass
3. We outrun the range of our fire support
4. We outrun the reach of our sustainment
5. We outrun the range of our communications systems

Of these, it is the enemy that most frequently bars the way, preventing us from orienting on the reconnaissance objective. Some might mistakenly believe that simply by gaining contact with the enemy and fighting them where we find them, we are conducting reconnaissance. After all, in doing so, we have obtained information about the enemy. While true, we aren’t obtaining the right information – information that confirms or denies how the enemy intends to fight. As COL Curtis Taylor, commander of 1/4 ID SBCT recently commented, we must get away from the idea that we ‘see to fight’ and understand that we ‘fight to see.’

In this ‘fight to see,’ we must leverage the Cavalry formation’s capability to conduct combined-arms maneuver to defeat this threat. Indeed, ‘clear[ing] all enemy forces in the designated AO within the capability of the unit conducting reconnaissance” remains a critical task of zone reconnaissance, as listed in FM 3-98, Reconnaissance and Security Operations. To accomplish this, three things are required. **First, Commanders and their staffs must conduct detailed maneuver planning for the fight between the line of**

departure and the reconnaissance objective. In a recent *Armor Magazine* [article](#), CPT Luke Bowers aptly compared a Cavalry Troop's assigned NAIs to objectives assigned to an infantry or tank company. The latter would never cross the line of departure without graphic control measures to enable their maneuver towards the objective, so why would a Cavalry Troop (Figure 1)? **Second, we must develop shared understanding, through iterative training, of how we fight at echelon against enemy counter-reconnaissance forces. Put another way, we must achieve mastery of actions on contact and battle drills.** When a Cavalry formation gains contact with an enemy within its capability to defeat, how should it go about doing so? How should it react when gaining contact with an enemy force beyond its capability to defeat? **Finally, Commanders must tailor their Commander's reconnaissance guidance (focus, tempo, engagement/disengagement and displacement criteria) to communicate how they expect to fight during reconnaissance operations.** Detailed planning, mastery in conducting actions on contact and battle drills, and well-crafted Commander's reconnaissance guidance enable us to win the 'fight to see.'



Figure 1 - Typical Troop-level graphics for Troop zone reconnaissance between PL AMSTEL and PL DOS EQUIS, with enemy situation overlay depicting known and templated enemy counter reconnaissance forces.

Detailed planning results in a course of action that integrates and synchronizes combat power into a combined arms approach to the tactical problem. At the BCT-level, we must regard reconnaissance and security operations as not a tactical task assigned solely to the Cavalry Squadron, but as a 'whole-of-BCT fight'. Often, we plan the information collection operation at a very conceptual level, issuing an Annex L (Information Collection) with little course of action development and analysis for how we expect to traverse the distance between LD and the locations from which to observe our NAIs. The BCT staff must plan and provide mission command for the 'fight to see.' This requires detailed planning for the integration of BCT-level UAS, ground maneuver forces, attack aviation, close air support, and field artillery fires. At the Squadron-level, the staff must analyze the potential enemy

courses of action and, in course of action development, array combined forces in favorable combat power ratios against those templated threats. Developing branch plans for the employment of the direct fire company is one possible technique for accomplishing this. At the Troop-level, synchronizing the maneuver of multiple platoons is necessary to defeat enemy platoon-sized counter-reconnaissance forces within the Troop's AO (Figure 2).

[Detailed planning and development of the necessary graphic control measures to support this maneuver provides Cavalry formations the flexibility to mass combat power at the location and time of their, rather than the enemy's, choosing.](#) Enabled thus, the Squadron and the BCT's organic information collection assets are able to defeat enemy counter-reconnaissance formations that they would otherwise be unable to defeat.



Figure 2 - Troop-level hasty attack on known enemy positions during conduct of a rapid and forceful Troop zone reconnaissance between PL AMSTEL and PL DOS EQUIS. When the enemy situation is unknown, Cavalry formations can rapidly develop the situation and

maneuver using well-rehearsed battle drills and actions on contact.

Mastery of actions on contact and the conduct of battle drills at echelon enable us to rapidly develop the situation and maneuver on enemy in our AO that are within our collective capability to defeat. We must conduct the combined arms maneuver to defeat the enemy within our capability to do so. Our Cavalry formations conduct [iterative training](#) to be able maneuver at the moment that they gain contact. Further, we must understand when making recommendations to higher headquarters for the commitment of additional combat power is required. Frequently, our Cavalry Troops gain contact with similarly-sized enemy forces in hasty defensive positions and, lacking favorable combat power ratios, impale themselves in valiant attempts to defeat the enemy within their assigned area of operations and continue reconnaissance. We must resist this 'to hell with it, we'll do it live' approach. Cavalry leaders gaining contact with an enemy beyond their capability to defeat must be able to visualize the way in which the higher headquarters will defeat the threat and, exercising disciplined initiative, coordinate with adjacent units or make recommendations to the Commander. In this way, we will reduce the length of our decision cycles, resulting in rapid development of the situation.

Finally, the Commander's reconnaissance guidance provides an opportunity for the commander to communicate his vision of how the reconnaissance fight will unfold given the mission variables specific to the operation. In particular, engagement/disengagement criteria serve to specify how much risk the commander is willing to assume at echelon while fighting to defeat enemy counter-reconnaissance forces. Combined with intimate knowledge of his formation's battle drills, this reconnaissance guidance enables the Cavalry leader to envision what threats he is expected to defeat, how he might do so, and against which threats additional combat power is required to defeat.

When our commanders and staffs conduct detailed planning to integrate and synchronize combat power in support of Cavalry formations we become better able to defeat those

enemy that we might otherwise prove unable to defeat. When our formations master actions on contact and battle drills, we become better able to defeat the enemy within our organic capability to defeat. When the Commander issues well-tailored reconnaissance guidance, we gain a shared understanding for how he envisions defeating the enemy's security zone. With these capabilities, we will win the 'fight to see' and the enemy will rarely prove to be the reason why our reconnaissance operations stop.

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