

From the Screen Line

# Understanding Reconnaissance Missions Instead of Focusing on Reconnaissance Platforms

by CPT Kyle Hoisington

The world of reconnaissance-and-security missions is vague to a lot of Soldiers and leaders despite no significant changes over the years. However, the platforms scouts use to conduct their missions vary greatly among the different brigade structures (armored brigade combat team (BCT), infantry BCT and Stryker BCT). Commanders should not look at the platform to determine a certain mission. How scouts conduct a reconnaissance mission is not formed by their platform. The scout's mission is formed through detailed commander's reconnaissance guidance. The argument that dismounted scouts conduct different reconnaissance missions than tracked-vehicle scouts is invalid. The platform in which scouts move about the battlefield does not have as much of an impact on their mission as the commander's reconnaissance guidance.

This article will assist in creating an understanding of the five reconnaissance missions and how multiple reconnaissance platforms are used. For purposes of this article, reconnaissance platforms are described as types of platforms scouts use when conducting reconnaissance missions.

## Reconnaissance missions

To understand how commander's reconnaissance guidance impacts a reconnaissance mission more than the platform scouts use, we must have a common understanding of the forms of reconnaissance. Army Doctrinal Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-90 identifies the five forms of reconnaissance as *route*, *area*, *zone*, *reconnaissance-in-force* and *special*.

**Route** reconnaissance is a directed effort to obtain detailed information of a specified route and all terrain from which the enemy could influence movement along the route (ADRP 3-90). Route-reconnaissance missions can focus on either terrain or enemy template to influence a route. When focusing on the route's terrain, commanders may want to know how to move their maneuver forces from the line of departure to their objective. When focusing on the enemy that influences the route, a route-reconnaissance mission inherits more risk. A commander must determine if the scouts' organic capabilities are enough to reduce the risk associated with an enemy-focused route reconnaissance.

**Area** reconnaissance focuses on obtaining detailed information about the terrain or enemy activity within a prescribed area (ADRP 3-90). An area is commonly described graphically as a named area of interest (NAI) and can also be graphically described as a checkpoint. NAIs can encompass a large surface or a specific point. This is due to the amount of, or lack thereof, mission analysis the staff conducts in developing the area of interest.

**Zone** reconnaissance involves a directed effort to obtain detailed information on all routes, obstacles, terrain and enemy forces within a zone defined by boundaries (ADRP 3-90). A zone reconnaissance allows subordinate leaders to look everywhere within their boundaries for the priority intelligence requirements (PIR). This differs from area and route reconnaissance because during a route- or area-reconnaissance mission, the higher headquarters is directing the information-collection asset to look at a specific area. During a zone reconnaissance, the understanding of the area of operations is usually more ambiguous, which requires subordinate leaders to take more initiative.

**Reconnaissance-in-force** is a deliberate combat operation designed to discover or test the enemy's strength, dispositions and reactions or to obtain other information (ADRP 3-90). A reconnaissance-in-force is a mission that requires more protection for the scouts due to enemy direct-fire contact that is required to test the enemy's reactions.

A reconnaissance-in-force differs from an enemy-focused zone reconnaissance for several reasons. A reconnaissance-in-force is solely enemy-focused, whereas a zone reconnaissance may focus on terrain or civil-based PIR. The intent of a reconnaissance-in-force is to discover a weakness in the enemy's formation to allow a

main body to exploit the weakness. This differs from an enemy-focused zone reconnaissance, where the intent is to determine size and location to allow the main body to conduct offensive operations.

**Special** reconnaissance is reconnaissance and surveillance actions conducted as a special operation in hostile, denied or politically sensitive environments to collect or verify information of strategic or operational significance employing military capabilities not normally found in conventional forces (ADRP 3-90). Special reconnaissance will not be addressed in this article because Cavalry formations found in the BCTs do not organically conduct special reconnaissance.

## Insertion methods

There are multiple ways scouts use reconnaissance platforms when conducting a reconnaissance mission. Several of the methods include air insertion, dismounted insertion, wheeled-vehicle insertion and tracked-vehicle insertion. All these methods of moving scouts to their reconnaissance objective are found in ABCTs, IBCTs and SBCTs. There are major differences in mobility from one platform to the other. However, each platform is only the way scouts are moved from their line of departure to their reconnaissance objective. The actions on the reconnaissance objective are the same among all reconnaissance platforms.

When most people think of scouts, they first think of stealth. This is a common trend throughout the dismounted formations and even in some of the wheeled-vehicle formations. Other people think of scouts as having large amounts of protection to survive first contact and are able to send reports under direct-fire contact. This trend is common in some of the wheeled-vehicle formations but predominantly in the tracked-vehicle formations.

I tend to look at the different types of platforms on a scale (Figure 1). On one end of the scale is the air and dismounted method, with the wheeled-vehicle method in the middle and the tracked-vehicle method on the far end of the scale. Along the same scale, stealth is directly correlated with the air and dismounted method, and protection is correlated with the tracked-vehicle method. I use this scale to visualize how scouts would execute any of the reconnaissance missions. By using this scale, there is some kind of stealth associated with wheeled vehicles, while there is some kind of protection with tracked vehicles. Of course, the mission variables play a role when identifying which type of platform can best conduct a form of reconnaissance. Given this basic analysis, it is reasonable to state that each type of platform can conduct each form of reconnaissance as long as the scout is given more guidance on how to use his particular platform. This additional guidance is given in the form of *commander's reconnaissance guidance*.

Recently, the development of the 6x36 scout platoon has given more abilities in each formation to allow a combination of both stealth and protection in each of the platforms. With 18 dismounted scouts in a tracked-vehicle formation, the tracked-vehicle scout platoon can combine both stealth with protection based on mission variables. This further builds on the statement that all types of formations can conduct all forms of reconnaissance with analysis of mission variables.

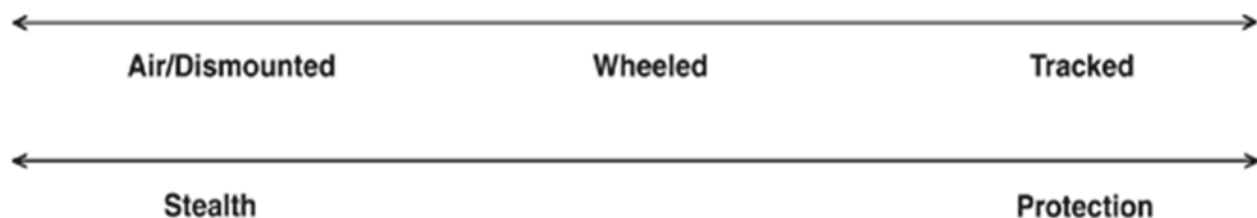


Figure 1. Scale of reconnaissance platforms.

## Commander's reconnaissance guidance

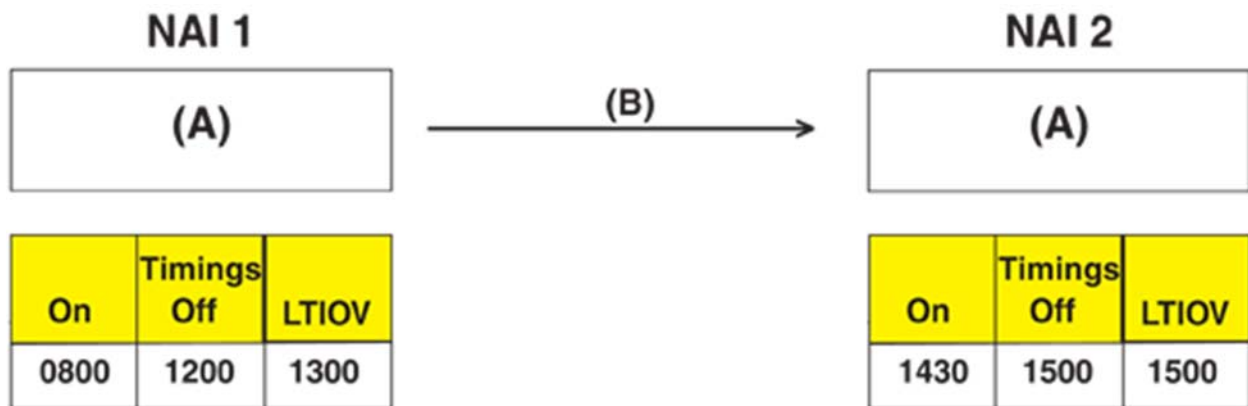
Cavalry squadron and Cavalry troop commanders communicate their intent for each phase of the operation through commander's reconnaissance guidance. When scouts execute a reconnaissance mission, they look at the six parts to commander's reconnaissance guidance: *focus*, *tempo*, *engagement criteria*, *disengagement criteria*, *displacement criteria* and *bypass criteria*. To understand how commander's reconnaissance guidance plays an important role in shaping a reconnaissance mission, we must have a common understating of what commander's reconnaissance guidance is.

**Focus** gives the scout guidance about what information gaps are in the plan and what information is important to report. Focus guides the scout when conducting the reconnaissance mission so the scout can know what type of information is most important to the mission. It also allows the subordinate leader to know what kind of risk is involved with the mission. For example, threat-focused reconnaissance involves more risk to the scout than a terrain-focused reconnaissance mission.

**Tempo** directly relates to the operational timeline and tells the scout how quickly to conduct the reconnaissance mission. Tempo is described by four terms: *rapid* or *deliberate*, and *stealthy* or *forceful*. *Rapid* and *deliberate* refer to the amount of information the scout must collect within a reconnaissance objective. Either the scout will take a lot of time (deliberate), or the scout will spend a very short amount of time (rapid) collecting information within the reconnaissance objective.

*Stealthy* or *forceful* refer to the amount of time it will take the scout to move from one reconnaissance objective to another. Either the commander wants the scout to move slowly and covertly (stealthy), or the commander wants the scout to move as quickly as possible (forcefully). Looking at Figure 2, rapid or deliberate are (A), while stealthy or forceful are (B).

There is not a set amount of time associated with any of the four terms. Therefore, the commander can dictate through a timeline the precise time the scout should collect information and when the scout should move.



**Figure 2.**

**Engagement criteria** establishes which targets the scout is expected to engage with direct and/or indirect fires (Field Manual (FM) 3-20.971). Engagement criteria should establish which weapon system to use when engaging those specified targets. The terms *aggressive* and *discreet* are clearly defined in FM 3-20.971, but even then, those definitions are open to interpretation. Engagement criteria are also clearly defined by answering how the scout will engage the target, how the scout will synchronize fires with other scouts and rules of engagement.

**Disengagement criteria** keeps the scout from being decisively engaged. This is the point at which the commander has identified that the scout should not continue to engage the target. Disengagement criteria are solely enemy-based and not time-based. Disengagement criteria are often mistaken with displacement criteria, but the two criteria are completely different. Disengagement from the enemy commonly leads to displacement from the scout's position.

**Displacement criteria** are the event or time trigger for when a scout should move from one reconnaissance objective to another reconnaissance objective to continue the mission. The movement can be forward, backward or lateral. When disengagement leads to displacement, the scout's movement is usually in the direction of the main body to create space and lead to a rearward passage of lines.

**Bypass criteria** are established by the commander to inform the scout which information has priority of collection. For example, the commander may need to know about the specific aspects of the terrain before engaging enemy scouts. Therefore, the commander would tell the scouts to bypass enemy scouts until the PIR is confirmed about the terrain.

Commander's reconnaissance guidance should be developed before deciding what form of reconnaissance is being conducted. The differences in the criteria and focus could mean a difference between a zone reconnaissance and a reconnaissance-in-force. Identifying how much risk is associated with the reconnaissance mission through the focus allows the subordinate leader to plan how many observation posts to emplace, additional assets to request and the scheme of maneuver. The amount of risk is greatly reduced by informing the scouts of their actions on contact through engagement and disengagement criteria and the speed at which to move. With this detailed guidance, the scout can use any type of platform and still collect the information needed.

## Conclusion

The importance of detailed commander's reconnaissance guidance cannot be overstated. By developing this guidance, the scout understands how to conduct actions on the reconnaissance objective. If leaders reduced the amount of time spent on attempting to figure out how to employ a specific platform and spent their time on giving detailed commander's reconnaissance guidance, subordinate leaders would have a better understanding of their assigned mission. Success does not come from how a scout moved from the line of departure to the reconnaissance objective. Actions on the reconnaissance objective make scouts successful during a reconnaissance mission.

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## Acronym Quick-Scan

**ABCT** – armored brigade combat team

**ACR** – armored Cavalry regiment

**ADRP** – Army doctrinal reference publication

**BCT** – brigade combat team

**CLC** – Cavalry Leader's Course

**FM** – field manual

**IBCT** – infantry brigade combat team

**LTIOV** – latest time the information is of value

**NAI** – named area of interest

**PIR** – priority intelligence requirement

**SBCT** – Stryker brigade combat team