The Headquarters and Headquarters Troop Commander as Brigade Combat Team Chief of Reconnaissance

by CPT Michael L. Hefti

The "chief of reconnaissance" (CoR) is currently a non-doctrinal position, which is a characterization debated by maneuver leaders and the intelligence community.[1] There is minimal documentation on the CoR's incorporation, but the most common argument suggests the cavalry squadron commander – or the cavalry squadron as a whole – acts as the CoR similar to the manner in which the fires-battalion commander serves the brigade combat team (BCT) as its fires-support coordinator.[2]

As our transition returns to training skills such as combined-arms maneuver, these two recommendations pose many challenges. Most importantly, the cavalry squadron is rarely co-located with the BCT and is often unable to take part in the BCT's targeting workgroup meetings; intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) planning; priority information requirements (PIR) input; and named areas of interest (NAI) input during the BCT's military decision-making process (MDMP). In addition, the cavalry squadron is typically on a condensed MDMP timeline of its own while developing a plan off the first two warning orders from the BCT. Therefore, the cavalry squadron's headquarters and headquarters troop (HHT) commander is recommended as the CoR to facilitate the proper amount of attention on reconnaissance and security (R&S) during the BCT's MDMP and while assisting in the execution of the BCT's R&S fight.

Employing HHT commander

In a Force XXI structure, the HHT commander is located at the forward-trains command post (FTCP), where the forward-support company (FSC) commander is also located.[3] This made sense prior to the FSC's integration. However, since the FTCP serves as the primary direct-coordination element between the cavalry squadron and the brigade support area, the FSC commander is capable and better suited to provide this function, especially due to the organic relationships established within the brigade support battalion. This leaves the HHT commander as a minimized combat multiplier on the battlefield.[4]

Professional on-line forums such as milSuite frequently discuss the frustration of how to employ the HHT commander.[5] Rotations at the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, CA, demonstrate a feasible solution: employing the HHT commander as the brigade CoR. The HHT commander by the modified table of organization and equipment is an armor officer and should have a firm grasp on cavalry tactics furthered through attendance at the Cavalry Leader's Course. The HHT commander has a unique and current understanding of the unit, its capabilities, limitations and personalities because he/she is still in command and serves directly with the cavalry squadron. The HHT commander also has an understanding of the BCT's ISR assets and most division assets.

The CoR's roles and responsibilities have never been clearly defined within U.S. Army doctrine. For that matter, the CoR's role may never be clearly defined in Army doctrine to provide commanders the necessary flexibility to execute mission command on how leaders are employed. Of note, old Soviet doctrine used the CoR at the regimental level, and at higher echelons, to control all the intelligence and reconnaissance assets within the regiment.[6] The Soviets' CoR held tasking authority and reported to the Chief of Staff while also directly communicating with the regimental or division commander. The Soviets' CoR was not subordinate to the operations officer.

CoR's chain of command

Tasking authority is not critical to the position, which removes the argument for having the BCT operations or cavalry squadron commander serve as the CoR within the BCT. The following are, however, key questions: To whom does the CoR report? Who provides the guidance? What are the CoR's roles and responsibilities?

Determining the chain of command for the CoR is important to prevent conflicting guidance and duties. If the HHT commander serves as the CoR, it is important that squadron and brigade leadership understand the CoR belongs to the brigade and is not the squadron CoR. Since the CoR does not have tasking authority, qualifications for the HHT

commander to be the CoR are reduced as the commander has not attended Command and General Staff College and has not held a field-grade-officer key-developmental position.

However, it does mean the CoR should act in the BCT's interest when dealing with assets and enablers. By default, this still benefits the squadron. The CoR reports to the squadron and BCT commander and directly liaisons with the BCT executive officer to help the BCT in treating R&S as major phases of every operation.

However, the HHT commander cannot be a permanent staff officer. Although units can temporarily facilitate this role during a combat training center rotation, it is not a sustainable solution. The CoR needs to retain some autonomy from serving solely as a staff officer; that way he/she can still execute the HHT command responsibilities, such as property accountability, personnel and administrative requirements.

CoR relationships

If the CoR retains autonomy, he/she is able to move fluidly between the intelligence and operations sections during the planning phase. This ensures attendance at various workgroups and rehearsals to address potential issues prior to transitioning to current operations and managing the BCT R&S fight within the tactical-operations center (TOC). This allows the CoR to act as a subject-matter expert on R&S tasks for various staff entities such as the BCT intel collection manager, who is typically a warrant officer with an excellent grasp of the technical capabilities of various assets but may lack the maneuver experience to integrate those capabilities with cavalry ground operations.

While working with the S-2, the CoR reviews NAI to ensure they are coordinated and validates the information requirements (IR) associated with the BCT's PIR. The NAI and PIR are critical to the BCT's decision points. Therefore, the CoR is critical to developing the IR that the scout within the cavalry squadron can answer, as well as for other BCT ISR assets. This allows staffs the ability to analyze the answered IRs, identify which PIR they answer and make recommendations to the commander.

The CoR also plays a critical role within the BCT S-3 staff section. The CoR helps planning to ensure the cavalry mission is synchronized with the BCT's main effort and can feasibly accomplish the mission within the squadron's capabilities. The CoR also identifies issues and reviews the effects of various warfighting functions on the cavalry squadron. The CoR provides input to better focus the BCT's R&S mission, which is critical to overall mission success.

The CoR's other important function is in the BCT TOC during the cavalry's fight. The CoR does not act as a battle captain, but rather, he/she observes and advises on R&S missions during execution, providing context to the BCT's common operating picture (COP). The CoR continuously echelons ISR assets to push reconnaissance as far forward as possible while simultaneously giving the cavalry squadron a COP of the area where it is fighting. This reduces the squadron's attrition in the counter-reconnaissance fight. This also enhances the cavalry squadron's tempo during its R&S missions as ISR assets help confirm or deny IR/PIR at various NAIs and refine the unit's focus, helping neutralize enemy reconnaissance and disrupting enemy forces before the BCT commits its main effort. During the R&S fight, the CoR also ensures ISR assets are executing the appropriate NAIs and contrasting the intelligence analyst's input against ground maneuver experience and the current COP. As the cavalry squadron transitions out of the night fight, the CoR communicates with the cavalry squadron commander to confirm the BCT COP and briefs the BCT commander on the prior night's R&S fight. The CoR then ensures the combined-arms battalions have a situational understanding of the battlefield based on the cavalry squadron's fight.

The CoR is not just limited to operations and intelligence. The CoR also supports sustainment, fires planning / execution and other areas on staff. Having direct liaison with the BCT executive officer helps the CoR facilitate this integration with the staff. As the cavalry squadron executes missions ahead of the BCT, the CoR helps the brigade staff understand and plan for the drastic distances between the cavalry squadron and the BCT, the earlier timeline and how the cavalry squadron's operations at night affect combat service support. Whether coordinating ambulance exchange points during night operations, modifying logistic timelines or helping fires understand which targets the squadron can observe are all areas where the CoR can help. This contribution is not solely the CoR's; it is also based on the cavalry squadron's plan the CoR uses to help refine the BCT's plan.

In addition to the input the CoR gives to the BCT, he also owes input to the cavalry squadron. One of the challenges for the cavalry squadron is parallel planning with the BCT because the squadron's operations order comes out of the BCT's warning order, both one and two. The cavalry squadron already executes a hasty MDMP based on its execution timelines in comparison to the other combined-arms battalions. The CoR has an intimate experience with these challenges, so he/she can help the cavalry squadron understand the courses of action (CoA) the BCT is considering as part of its planning process, enabling the cavalry squadron's parallel planning. The CoR facilitates this by sharing unpublished drafts of the BCT's Annex L, the ISR Plan and unpublished CoAs to assist the cavalry squadron with its MDMP. The key to success is shared understanding between CoR and cavalry squadron, and between the BCT and cavalry squadron staff shops. With this in mind, the CoR distributes the cavalry squadron's plan to the BCT to ensure future planning synchronization of the combined-arms battalions. As such, the CoR becomes the catalyst for planning between the BCT and cavalry squadron, ensuring synchronization and shared understanding.

While we may continue to professionally debate about who should be the CoR, the HHT commander certainly serves as a feasible, suitable and acceptable solution. It also helps squadron and brigade commanders practice talent management by forecasting the right leader for the HHT command. Incorporating the CoR role during home-station training is crucial to success; it affects clearly defined roles and responsibilities, prevents the CoR from becoming just a BCT staff officer, shares understanding between the BCT and cavalry squadron commanders on employment and establishes clear lines of information flow for the CoR between the BCT and cavalry squadron. The mere debate about the CoR position has identified the need for a focus on R&S operations at the BCT level. With that in mind, the currently underemployed HHT commander fills the void and adds a combat multiplier to the fight.

CPT Michael Hefti is a small-group leader for the Maneuver Captain's Career Course, Maneuver Center of Excellence, Fort Benning, GA. His previous assignments include troop primary observer/coach/trainer for Cobra Team, Operations Group, Fort Irwin, CA; brigade plans officer, 3rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT), 1st Infantry Division, Fort Knox, KY; commander, Troop B, 3rd IBCT, 1st Infantry Division, Fort Knox; plans officer, 6-4 Cavalry Squadron, 3rd IBCT, 1st Infantry Division, Fort Knox; Headquarters and Headquarters Troop executive officer, 6-9 Cavalry, 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team (ABCT), 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, TX; and Troop B executive officer and platoon leader, 6-9 Cavalry, 3rd ABCT, 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood. CPT Hefti's deployments include tours to Afghanistan and northern Iraq. His military schooling includes Maneuver Captain's Career Course, Cavalry Leader's Course, Scout Leader's Course, Ranger School, Armor Basic Officer Leader Course, Basic Officer Leadership Course II, Combatives Level I and Officer Candidate School. He holds a bachelor's of arts degree in law enforcement from Minnesota State University-Mankato and is working on a graduate degree from American Military University in criminal justice. His awards and honors include the Bronze Star with two oak-leaf clusters, Meritorious Service Medal, 2013 General Douglas MacArthur Leadership Award, LTC Keith Antonia Officer Leadership Award and Draper Leadership Award.

Acronym Quick-Scan
ABCT – armored brigade combat team
BCT – brigade combat team
CoA – course of action
COP – common operating picture
CoR – chief of reconnaissance
FM – field manual
FSC – forward-support company
FTCP – forward-trains command post
HHC – headquarters and headquarters company
HHT – headquarters and headquarters troop
IBCT – infantry brigade combat team
IR – information requirement
ISR – intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance
MDMP – military decision-making process
NAI – named area of interest
NTC – National Training Center

PIR – priority information requirement
R&S – reconnaissance and security
TOC – tactical-operations center

Notes

[1] The author's observations and conversations with many leaders is the basis for this statement.

[2] LTC Brian K. Flood, MAJ James A. Hayes and MAJ Forrest V. Cook, "IBCT's Reconnaissance Squadron," *ARMOR*, March-April 2011, and MAJ Morrie J. Fanto, "Targeting the Complex Threat: The Art and Best Practices of Targeting during Reconnaissance Operations," *ARMOR*, September-October 2012.

[3] Field Manual (FM) 3-20.96, *Reconnaissance Squadron*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, March 12, 2010.

[4] As observed by Cavalry squadron trainers at NTC during decisive-action training environment rotations.

[5] A search for HHT and headquarters and headquarters company (HHC) commanders on www.milSuite.mil will result in many discussions on how to employ HHT/HHC commanders, especially since the HHT commander does not have any organic maneuver elements such as mortars or scouts.

[6] FM 200-2-1 (obsolete), *The Soviet Army: Operations and Tactics*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, July 16, 1984.