

The Squadron Commander as Chief of Reconnaissance

“Despite the importance that reconnaissance and security operations play in setting the conditions necessary for tactical and operational success, the Army’s brigade combat teams struggle to effectively employ their organic cavalry squadron. ... Brigade commanders and their staffs lack leader development and training to plan and execute [reconnaissance and security] missions. Brigade staffs ideally comprise subject-matter experts with a variety of skills, including fires, aviation, intelligence, engineering and logistics. In the case of [reconnaissance and security] operations, however, no designated staff officer possesses the unique training and experience required to assist the brigade commander to properly employ and use his [reconnaissance and security] assets in answering his priority information requirements.”¹—BG Lee Quintas, 48th Chief of Armor

by CPT John F. Palmer

No leader in the brigade has more reconnaissance and security expertise than the cavalry squadron commander. He has the professional expertise to plan, direct, and assess information collection (IC) within the brigade commander’s intent and the authority to task all IC assets.

The squadron commander now has the capability to provide that expertise to the brigade commander as quickly as he needs it, no matter where the squadron is positioned on the battlefield. Due to the implementation of Upper Tactical Internet (TI) mission-command systems at the squadron level, the squadron commander is now able to control all phases of IC and rapidly share information across the brigade. Because of this, the squadron commander is best suited to be the brigade chief of reconnaissance. This allows a senior commander to completely focus on answering the brigade commander’s information requirements (IR), and it allows the brigade S-2 (intelligence) officer to focus on the next enemy course of action (CoA).

Problem

The current brigade IC process presents a problem because it is decentralized, which often makes it desynchronized. No staff section is in charge of both the planning and execution of IC. The brigade S-2, S-3 (operations), IC manager, cavalry squadron, military-intelligence company, attached aviation units and attached unmanned aerial systems (UASs) all have a major role in the IC process. Currently, the brigade commander is responsible for synchronizing all these entities to drive the IC process. Instead of providing the brigade commander with the situational understanding he requires to make decisions about the overall operation, this process encumbers the commander with synchronization efforts. The commander is therefore left with the decision to either get bogged down by directing the IC process or to allow the brigade staff to collaborate with no clear integrator or leader.

The commander’s role in the operations process is to understand the tactical problem, the operational environment and the enemy; describe the operational framework, including the operation in time, space and purpose; and direct the synchronization of the warfighting functions through plans and orders to achieve the endstate. This role is particularly pronounced in reconnaissance operations, where the operational environment is relatively unknown and unfamiliar, and the brigade commander requires answers to IRs to aid understanding and decision-making. To perform this role, the brigade commander can either delegate synchronization of IC assets and activities, manage the activities personally (therefore relegating the commander’s role to one of a staff officer) or rely on the most experienced reconnaissance commander in the formation to synchronize these activities.

Ideally, the brigade commander would be able to delegate synchronization of the IC process to his staff. The problem is to whom should the commander delegate? In his “Cavalry Update,” BG Lee Quintas identified leader development in reconnaissance and security as a major issue for brigade staffs. Not only is leader development and proficiency an issue, brigade staff officers also have competing duties. The brigade executive officer can coordinate staff sections, plans and orders during the planning process, but the brigade executive officer has limited ability to control subordinate units during the execution phase. Neither the brigade S-2 officer nor the brigade S-3 officer has the time or staff required to completely coordinate the IC process. The brigade IC manager has technical expertise in UAS platforms but does not have the authority or the experience to task brigade IC assets within the commander’s intent.

The brigade commander needs an officer designated as the brigade chief of reconnaissance who can control all phases of the IC fight. The duties and responsibilities of the chief of reconnaissance should be:

- Direct IC planning for the brigade to answer the brigade commander's IRs;
- Task and direct all IC assets in the brigade;
- Analyze all collected information; and
- Disseminate information to brigade and battalion commanders (and to their staffs) to enable shared understanding.

Further adding to the problem is that no current or former Army doctrine addresses a brigade chief of reconnaissance. Therefore, there is no guidance for a brigade chief of reconnaissance to reference for duties and responsibilities. This lack of a standard also causes leaders to have many differing ideas as to who should be the brigade chief of reconnaissance. These differing ideas limit professionally captured best practices and lessons-learned.

Solution

The cavalry squadron commander (SCO) is the most qualified leader in the brigade to be the chief of reconnaissance. The SCO has the experience, maturity and authority to perform all the duties of the chief of reconnaissance and bring unity of effort to the reconnaissance fight. Furthermore, the SCO has the necessary tools to leverage this knowledge and expertise to rapidly provide shared understanding across the brigade.

The benefits of having the SCO as the brigade's chief of reconnaissance are twofold:

- It places a senior commander in charge of all things IC; and
- It allows the brigade S-2 to focus on the next enemy CoA.

The SCO is better positioned than an assistant S-2/ S-3 officer or the brigade IC manager to be in charge of all IC in the brigade. The SCO has command of the ground cavalry units; the maturity and experience to plan, direct and assess IC within the brigade commander's intent; and the authority to task all the IC assets. Conversely, an assistant staff officer does not have any tasking authority, making him or her a middleman of sorts. The staff officer would only be able to simply coordinate and manage various IC assets to provide someone with authority the information required to make a decision about tasking IC assets.

If the cavalry squadron controls some IC assets, and various brigade staff officers control other IC assets, the brigade S-2 is forced to be the point of information synthesis. If the brigade S-2 is busy juggling multiple sources of IC input, the S-2 section cannot dedicate its full time and resources to plan the future enemy situation, which is imperative in a continuously changing operational environment. However, with the SCO as the chief of reconnaissance, the brigade S-2 can focus on the next move the enemy will make. The brigade S-2 develops the initial enemy situation template and, with the help of the brigade S-3, the initial brigade commander's IR. The squadron, under the leadership of the chief of reconnaissance, then develops and executes the plan to answer these IR, confirming or adjusting the enemy sittemp for the brigade. Once the IR are answered, the brigade S-2 can use those answers to develop the next enemy CoA, and this intelligence and IC cycle repeats as the fight progresses.

While the SCO is the most qualified leader to perform the duties of a chief of reconnaissance, he or she still needs to be able to connect with the rest of the brigade to perform the duties of the chief of reconnaissance.

Fortunately, the implementation of Upper TI systems at the squadron level now facilitates rapid information exchange across the brigade through such systems as Command Post of the Future (CPOF), Ventrillo, Jabber, Secure Voice of Internet Protocol (SVoIP), Internet portals, email exchange and Distributed Common Ground System-Army (DCGS-A). These systems now enable the SCO to execute all the aforementioned duties of the chief of reconnaissance at a rapid tempo to create shared understanding.

SCO as chief of recon

Validation of this concept came during the 5th Battalion, 4th Cavalry Regiment's National Training Center (NTC) rotation in March 2015. The unit proved the squadron commander was able to perform the aforementioned duties as the chief of reconnaissance. Therefore, the squadron – and the brigade – were highly successful. As chief of reconnaissance, the SCO effectively directed both staff and troops, leveraging the use of Upper TI mission-

command systems to enable doctrinal planning of reconnaissance, execute an aggressive operations tempo and rapidly report up and across the brigade.

The biggest impact the SCO had as chief of reconnaissance was providing real-time intelligence updates to the brigade commander and brigade staff while also informing fellow battalion commanders and their staffs. This was done primarily through the use of a “recon pasteboard,” a tool developed by the squadron battle captain. The recon pasteboard used CPoF to maintain a reconnaissance common operating picture (COP) that could be accessed from across the brigade. The pasteboard tool centered on a map of the brigade area of operations that served as the COP. It was tied to a position-location information feed from the squadron tactical-operations center’s (TOC) Joint Capability Release (JCR) that populated the location of friendly units from the brigade onto the map. This allowed everyone to know the exact locations of recon elements, reducing the risk of fratricide.

As reports came in from the IC assets assigned to the squadron, the battle captain populated enemy locations (to include obstacles and battle positions) onto the map. The squadron S-2 then wrote a brief assessment of the enemy CoA. The battle captain also maintained an updated combat slant and priority information requirement status on the recon pasteboard. The battle captain also added the line-of-sight (LoS) overlay (produced with either CPoF or DCGS-A) to show the coverage the squadron provided. The output of all this was a single pasteboard that anyone from brigade or battalion staffs could easily access to receive situational understanding of the enemy status as gathered by the reconnaissance elements.

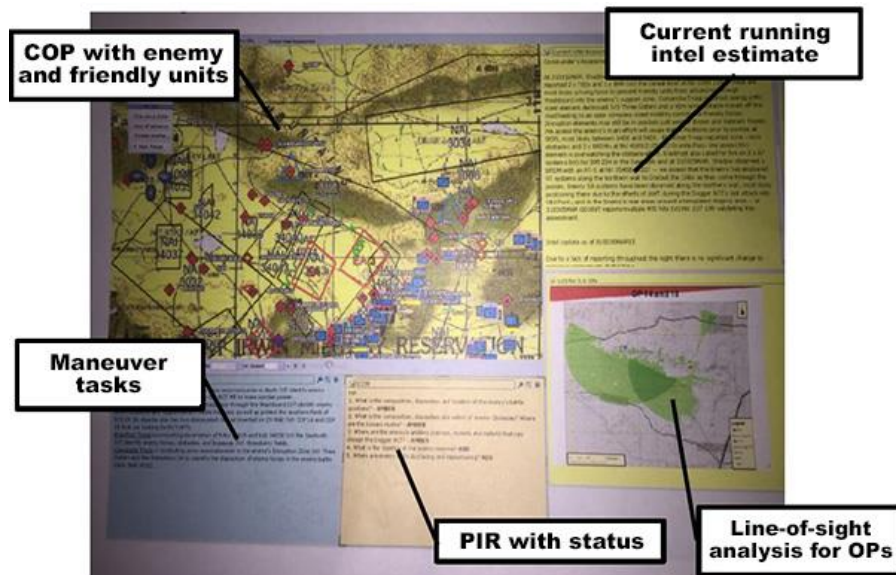


Figure 1. The recon pasteboard.

While the recon pasteboard helped the brigade commander visualize the operational environment, it was the SCO’s assessment that helped him understand it. The brigade conducted a net call over Ventrillo one hour before start point for the combined-arms battalions (CAB), which was also the last time information was of value (LTIOV). During this call, the SCO used personal experience to provide a commander’s assessment to the brigade. Essentially, the SCO was able to use his expertise to turn the information collected by his units into an intelligence update – exactly the role of a chief of reconnaissance, and it was a role that only a senior commander could perform.

The SCO also leveraged personal expertise to direct a planning process that could effectively integrate external IC assets, information from other units and technical analysis of terrain. Through tactical Secure Internet Protocol Router (SIPR) communication, whether SVoIP phones or SIPR email, the squadron staff was able to frequently communicate with external IC assets throughout the planning process. The squadron staff was also in constant communication with the brigade IC manager; S-2 section; intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance platoon leader; and its tactically controlled OH-58D (Kiowa helicopter) troop and the rotary-wing aviation troop.

The squadron was also able to nest with the brigade planning efforts through the brigade portal and email exchange. Previously, these communication efforts would have been greatly encumbered by having to use Lower TI communication (radios) or in-person interaction to communicate across a wide brigade area of operations. Finally, LoS analysis was a major planning asset, enabled by Upper TI. The LoS tools on both DCGS-A and CPoF enabled the squadron staff to effectively plan redundant observation posts (OP) in depth based off the IC plan and to identify gaps in coverage of named areas of interest (NAIs) by the OPs that could be covered by external IC assets.

Because of his authority as a commander, the SCO was able to make further use of Upper TI systems to enable aggressive execution of the reconnaissance plan. The squadron commander was able to be aggressive because he maintained control of all IC assets in the recon fight. Therefore, the commander could quickly maneuver all recon assets without having to wait for brigade approval because they came from the cavalry troops organic to his squadron. Moreover, the brigade also assigned all IC assets in the recon fight to the squadron. Therefore, the squadron commander could direct prioritization of NAIs for these assets based on his current assessment of the situation.

Had the SCO not had these assets, he would have had to make a recommendation to the brigade commander, S-2 or S-3, who would then have to coordinate with the IC manager or the Shadow platoon (that provided the RQ-7B Shadow UAS). With the SCO assigned these external assets, it streamlined the process; the SCO was able to quickly maneuver all assigned assets. This tempo was possible because the analysts in the squadron S-2 section were able to quickly communicate with the UAS pilots through Jabber chat, another Upper TI system.

More assets, enablers

While the SCO effectively served as the chief of reconnaissance during 5-4 Cavalry's NTC rotation, there are several changes to current practices that would allow future squadron commanders to be even more effective. The cavalry squadron should be assigned responsibility of all the brigade NAIs within the recon fight. This enables the SCO to ensure the IC plan synchronizes efforts across the entire area of operations and prevents any seams in reconnaissance coverage. It helps the brigade achieve continuous reconnaissance.

To cover all these NAIs, the SCO also needs tasking authority for all IC assets allocated by the brigade to the recon fight. For example, the squadron is not able to observe NAIs outside the LoS of their OPs without the help of a UAS platform. However, if the SCO controls these assets, a seamless reconnaissance handover can be conducted between that UAS platform and the scouts in the OPs as the enemy moves between NAIs. The only exception to this requirement is that any human-intelligence collection sources should continue to be under control of the brigade S-2, as they are trained to manage these, with the S2X section (part of S-2), humint tech and counterintelligence-analysis officer.

These additional IC assets increase the need for more IC analysts. The brigade should consider task-organizing the brigade IC manager and additional IC analysts to the cavalry squadron as the mission dictates. With Upper TI, the squadron TOC is now able to facilitate its mission to the same degree as the brigade TOC. The brigade IC manager should provide the SCO with another staff member who has the technical expertise to advise on employment of UAS platforms.

Counterarguments

There are several counterarguments to the appointment of the SCO as the chief of reconnaissance, and while they can be answered, they do point to the need for follow-on work. One might argue that the SCO cannot be the chief of reconnaissance because he loses Upper TI capability when on the move. However, the squadron TOC does not have to move throughout a battle period because frequency-modulation (FM) radio retransmission, high frequency and tactical satellite enable effective communication with troops at extended distances. Any need for a squadron mission-command element to move throughout the battle period can be accomplished with the squadron tactical command post (TAC). Further research into this could determine whether there is the possibility to provide the squadron TAC with Upper TI on the move with a vehicle similar to one outfitted with point-of-presence systems.

Another counterargument would be that companies do not have Upper TI so the information shared by the recon pasteboard would not be available to them. In his 2012 article "Intelligence Support to Combined-Arms Maneuver," MAJ Michael Childs argued that intelligence products should be shared across the brigade by the lowest common denominator, which, in the case of companies is Force XXI Battle Command Brigade and Below (now JCR) and FM radio.² However, while they do not have Upper TI, most companies from the CABs are located in close proximity to their battalion TOC prior to the LTIOV in movement-to-contact, attack or defense operations. Therefore, initial products can be generated for companies using JCR, and then the CAB staff can refine them based off the recon pasteboard if necessary. Also, brigade staff can refine JCR overlays based on the recon pasteboard and disseminate them to the CABs.

Regardless of the method of dissemination to the companies, they are still getting the information much faster as a result of the real-time information sharing between the squadron and the CABs. Further research should determine a method to allow the CABs to quickly translate information garnered from the recon pasteboard to JCR.

Conclusion

In the near-term, this idea of the SCO as chief of reconnaissance should be captured in brigade standard operating procedures. In the long-term, it needs to be codified in Army doctrine. Army professionals have identified the need for a chief of reconnaissance for too long, and the practice proved too effective during the 5-4 Cav NTC rotation for it not to be standardized through doctrine. With the SCO as chief of reconnaissance, an IC process already improved by new IC platforms can be streamlined further through effective use of Upper TI systems.

CPT John Palmer commands C Troop, 5-4 Cavalry, 2/1 Armored Brigade Combat Team (ABCT), Fort Riley, KS, and is forward-deployed in support of Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR). His other assignments include squadron assistant S-3 officer, 5-4 Cav, 2/1 ABCT, Fort Riley and in Southwest Asia supporting OIR; brigade adjutant, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), Fort Campbell, KY, and in Afghanistan supporting Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Rotation XIII; troop executive officer, C Troop, 1-61 Cav, 4/101 Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT) (Air Assault), Fort Campbell; and platoon leader, 3rd Platoon, B Troop, 1-61 Cav, 4/101 IBCT (Air Assault), Fort Campbell and in Afghanistan supporting OEF X-XI. CPT Palmer's military schools include Armor Basic Officer Leader's Course, Maneuver Captain's Career Course, Air Assault School, Pathfinder School and Ranger School. He earned a bachelor's of science degree in American politics from the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, NY.

Notes

¹ Lee Quintas, "Cavalry Update," *ARMOR*, July-September 2014.

² MAJ Michael J. Childs, "Intelligence to Support to Combined-Arms Maneuver," *ARMOR*, September-October 2012.

References

Anderson, Wayne B. and Gerald S. Garfinkel, "Maintaining the Information Flow: Signal Corps Manpower and Personnel Requirements for the Battlefield," 2004 *Command and Control Research and Technology Symposium: The Power of Information Age Concepts and Technologies*, http://www.dodccrp.org/events/9th_ICCRTS/CD/papers/144.pdf (accessed Dec. 30, 2015).

Betson, William, "Reconnaissance and the Maneuver Brigade," *CALL CTC Quarterly Bulletin*, 4th Quarter, Fiscal Year (FY) 97, No. 97-18 (September 1997).

Flood, Brian K., James A. Hayes and Forrest V. Cook, "The Infantry Brigade Combat Team Reconnaissance Squadron Commander as the Brigade chief of Reconnaissance," *CALL: JRTC Full Spectrum Operations Newsletter*, No. 11-24 (April 2011).

FY11 recon summit, "Summary of Outcomes," *Maneuver Center of Excellence* (April 2011), <https://www.benning.army.mil/Armor/ReconSummit/content/pdf/Recon%20Summit%20DOTL%20Summary%20v2.pdf> (accessed Nov. 27, 2015).

Field Manual (FM) 17-95, *U.S. Army Cavalry Operations*, Department of the Army, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1996.

FM 3-55, *U.S. Army. Information Collection*, Department of the Army, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2013.

FM 7-100.1, ***U.S. Army Opposing Force Operations***, Department of the Army, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2004.

FM 3-20.96, ***U.S. Army Reconnaissance and Cavalry Squadron***, Department of the Army, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010.

FM 3-98, ***U.S. Army Reconnaissance and Security Operations***, Department of the Army, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2015.