# Reconnaissance and Surveillance Leader's Course Enables Scout Squads' Success

**by promotable CPT Joshua J. LaFleur**

A well-positioned scout element can shape future operations or alter the course of a battle with proper observation, reporting, fires employment and the integration of enablers. To prepare these scouts, the Reconnaissance and Surveillance Leader's Course (RSLC) at Fort Benning, GA, trains its students to serve as a commander's insurance policy that mitigates risk when employing scout squads and teams.

RSLC students are taught to move to a position of relative advantage, report information to the commander and employ operational techniques to increase their survivability. As such, the course's mission is to develop the combat-arms-related functional skills of officers and noncommissioned officers whose primary focus is to conduct reconnaissance and security (R&S) operations.

RSLC remains the capstone school for scout-squad leaders in all types of brigade combat teams (BCTs). The skills taught at RSLC are still necessary for any small element to extend the security zone. The knowledge taught in RSLC, originally designed for units operating up to 180 kilometers forward, is now just as applicable to current formations operating within supporting fires. The requirement for these trained, dismounted recon leaders has increased due to the significant changes to cavalry organizations and scout platoons transitioning to the 6 (platform) x 36 (Soldiers), or 6x36 model, that supports additional dismounted scout squads.

Despite the increased requirement for dismounted recon leaders, some people question the requirement for RSLC. They cite the Army's deactivation of long-range surveillance (LRS) units as a reason to discontinue the RSLC requirement. Contrary to this perception, organizational changes in all BCT types have increased the need for dismounted R&S missions, especially since peer adversaries will challenge U.S. dominance in electronic and unmanned surveillance capabilities. That expected challenge is why the Army recognized the need to increase proficiency in these fundamental R&S skills among its infantry brigade combat teams (IBCTs), Stryker brigade combat teams (SBCTs) and armored brigade combat teams (ABCTs). The increased proficiency in these skills – trained at RSLC – will enhance effectiveness and survivability across the various types of units in the force.

## The course

RSLC is a physically and mentally demanding course where one block of instruction builds on the previous one, resulting in a multi-day, graded field-training exercise (FTX). Students answer the commander's priority information requirements in both urban and austere woodland environments. They are evaluated on high frequency (HF) beyond-line-of-site radio communications, which enable them to maintain contact with their higher headquarters regardless of terrain and distance.

Student teams conduct detailed mission planning, emphasizing intelligence preparation of the battlefield and contingencies. They learn the importance of reporting useable information by using techniques to collect information accurately, report the facts and quantify each report with imagery. Detection avoidance is integral in every aspect of the course from squad-movement techniques, camouflage and reduced emissions from radio-wave frequencies.

RSLC students are trained to excel in denied operational environments. They are prepared for encounters where systems are jammed or must be turned off to avoid electronic targeting, and they must operate within the commanders' intent when communications with headquarters are severed.

RSLC prepares students to operate in a small-team environment, to be skilled, adaptive and confident. Upon the successful completion of the 33-day course, graduates are authorized the 6B additional-skill identifier (ASI).

The target audience for RSLC is scout-squad leaders and team leaders. It is open to 33 military-occupation specialties (MOSs) and to the Army's sister services, but it primarily trains infantry (65 percent) and armor/cavalry scouts (15 percent). The other 20 percent of RSLC students are comprised of Special Operations Forces (5 percent), as well as field artillery, signal corps and military-intelligence Soldiers. The course is part of the leadership

progression for 19- and 11-series MOS scouts who are directly responsible for training and execution (sergeants or staff sergeants), or for those who will plan for and employ scout platoons and companies (second lieutenants to captains).

**Figure 1. A three-man element conceals itself in a sub-surface surveillance site while observing its objective**. *(U.S. Army photo by CPT Josh LaFleur)*

## Small-unit tactics

RSLC emphasizes camouflage, concealment, counter-tracking and small-unit tactics that enable scouts to have the confidence to patrol undetected, increasing their survivability. Students are organized into six- to eight-Soldier scout teams early on, which allows them to develop into a cohesive unit before the FTX.

Students are free to develop their own standard operating procedures (SOP) for formations and their own order-of-movement and battle drills. Students may share techniques, with guidance from the cadre, from across the Army. The basics of camouflage and concealment are reinforced throughout each lesson as well as counter-tracking techniques, which must be implemented during the FTX.

Students learn that a team-sized element cannot just carry more firepower; its survivability depends on reducing signature, avoiding detection and integrating enablers.

## Advanced land navigation

The ability to evaluate terrain for threat and friendly use is pertinent to gaining the advantage in battle. Therefore, RSLC emphasizes unaided land navigation to counter the over-reliance on satellite technology in the force.

Students are tested on written map reading and practical-exercise land navigation, which is a cross-country course conducted in restrictive terrain on Fort Benning. To pass, students must locate five out of five points within seven hours. They will travel about 13 km while avoiding roads, carrying a 25-pound rucksack containing safety items, during good or limited visibility. Unlike typical land-navigation tests where students use roads to locate a stake in the ground hidden behind a bush, RSLC points are military vehicles positioned on a main road and on a major terrain feature which simulates finding an objective or rendezvous point.

The intent is to ensure that those who graduate are physically indomitable, possess the critical thinking skills to continually evaluate the situation and focus under stress.

## Mission planning

RSLC instructs on an in-depth deliberate planning method that then allows students to better conduct troop-leading procedures (TLPs) in conjunction with their supported headquarters' rapid-decision-making synchronization process and field fragmentary order (FRAGO). RSLC seamlessly merges the higher headquarters

operations process with small-unit TLPs. This deliberate planning method mitigates risk for a six- to eight-Soldier team deployed at the edge of supporting fires. Students are able to synthesize a road-to-war brief, conduct information preparation of the battlefield and plan for claymore-mine emplacement at the individual-Soldier level. The student team leader leads the planning process through formalized briefs to the commander, following the steps of the military decision-making process. Students collaborate during mission planning by task-organizing components of the operations order based on their roles within the team.

As an example, the radio-telephone operator briefs Paragraph 5 of the operations order, including a communications primary-alternate-contingency-emergency plan and priority of antenna based on environment and communications windows. The senior scout observer develops primary and alternate routes, insertion methods and multiple contingencies for each phase of the operation. The students are evaluated on deliberate 24- to 36-hour mission-planning exercises to set an effective planning knowledge base in a garrison planning facility, as well as tested on seven iterations of rapid field planning and FRAGOs that are integrated into the FTX.

RSLC graduates provide added capability within their scout element. They are able to integrate into the battalion or squadron planning process, and they are well prepared to tailor the format learned at RSLC to their home-station requirements.

RSLC graduates provide added capability within their scout element. They are able to integrate into the battalion or squadron planning process, and they are well prepared to tailor the format learned at RSLC to their home-station requirements.

**Figure 2. Students conduct mission planning prior to the cadre-assisted situational-training exercise (STX**). *(U.S. Army photo by CPT Josh LaFleur)*

## Collection and reporting

RSLC focuses on rapid, accurate reporting to the supported maneuver commander. Reconnaissance begins during infiltration, where students are expected to record military aspects of the terrain, identify potential pickup zones, conduct route assessments and recognize signs of recent activity. This information is recorded in a logbook and

transmitted using standardized North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) report formats, which also enhance interoperability between units and their NATO allies.

Students construct their observation post. From it, they learn the roles and responsibilities for surveillance and hide sites. Operating from their observation post, students are taught proper techniques for efficient collection by visually organizing the objective, varying optic strength and developing naming conventions between observer and recorder. The team's information-collection plan is stress-tested during the FTX in a changing scenario involving military equipment, vehicles and people. This validates their ability to ensure useable information is accurately reported to the command. The team must maintain continuous observation, correctly identify information requirements and send critical reports by latest-time-information-is-of-value to accomplish the mission.

## Communications

Students receive robust communications instruction during RSLC. They are introduced to radio-wave propagation and antenna theory before advancing to practical exercises in frequency modulation, HF, ultra-high frequency and tactical-satellite communications. They are taught field-expedient antenna construction and best practices based on environment, time of day and atmospheric conditions.

RSLC also emphasizes radio-frequency emissions control through scheduled communications windows, low-powered data transmissions and directional antenna that reduce the probability of detection. Students are tested on their communications knowledge as they continue to build on it before the FTX.

The knowledge that students gain in the course allows them to understand inherent platform vulnerabilities and how to optimize equipment in any company's inventory to enhance the reliability of communications.

**Figure 3. Students send reports on the AN/PRC-150 radio with CF19 Toughbook**. *(U.S. Army photo by SSG Ian Redmund)*

## Survival, evasion and recovery

RSLC students are taught the basics of survival training, which gives them the confidence to extend operations to the edge of sustainment limitations. A team's survivability in a worst-case scenario depends on how well its members planned for hard and soft compromises, link-up points and coordinated for recovery. These contingencies, developed for extended evasion scenarios, must be applied when a small unit maneuvers to a position of relative advantage, potentially without direct-fire support.

Students receive rudimentary fieldcraft techniques for survival, including how to properly build hasty shelters, start fires using primitive methods, gather food and procure water. As said previously, RSLC students are also taught how to navigate without a compass by using the stars, how to build a field-expedient compass and how to determine the constants of true north in the environment.

**Figure 4. Students learn how to build a shelter from a parachute during survival training**. *(U.S. Army photo by SFC Joel Rockhill)*

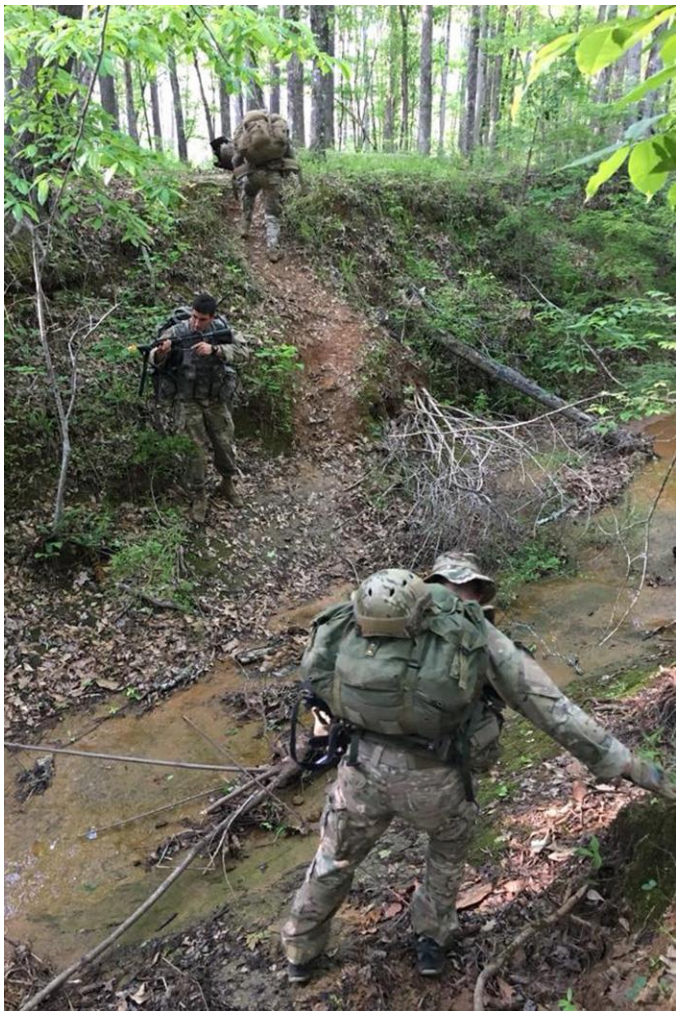

**Figure 5. Students break contact during evasion training.** *(U.S. Army photo by SSG Sergio Hernandez)*

## Insertion, extraction techniques

RSLC provides students concrete experience in several insertion and extraction techniques so they can better plan and execute them during the FTX. The course cadre is charged by the Maneuver Center of Excellence to maintain proficiency in these specialized techniques and provide subject-matter expertise to requesting units.

Airborne-qualified students have the opportunity conduct a static-line airborne insertion with an MC-6 steerable parachute from a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter. Military freefall personnel can also be accommodated. There are two jumps throughout the course where students progress from a non-tactical or “Hollywood” jump to a combat-equipment jump into the STX.

Unique to RSLC, students plan their own air-movement corridors and false insertions, and they coordinate directly with the UH-60 pilots. The pilots accommodate the team’s plan for either the Fast-Rope-Insertion Extraction System (FRIES) or Special-Purpose-Insertion Extraction System. Students also are taught how to properly use vehicle-drop off and vehicle-pickup procedures, using techniques to minimize their vulnerability.

**Figure 6. The team leader coordinates an air-movement corridor and false insertion with the UH-60 pilot prior to the FRIES insertion.** *(U.S. Army photo by SSG Sergio Hernandez)*

**Figure 7. A team inserts into the FTX via FRIES.** *(U.S. Army photo by CPT Josh LaFleur)*

## Way ahead

RSLC continues to receive international interest and often provides feedback to NATO allies on the course's iterative training methodology and cutting-edge operational techniques. The course also has initiatives to evaluate emerging technology. Therefore RSLC incorporates cyber, electronic warfare (EW) and subterranean threats to enhance the scenario and student experience. The course is postured to provide baseline instruction for EW, cyber- and signals-intelligence leaders to deploy independently or as enablers for various reconnaissance missions.

RSLC course leaders plan to place greater emphasis on current threat vehicles, weapons and mission-command node identification. RSLC has lengthened the course to 33 days to provide training and/or retraining to students in land navigation because there has been a measurable decline in proficiency in unaided land navigation in the operational force due to current reliance on Global Positioning System (GPS) assistance.

There is a loyal customer base from IBCT and SBCT scout platoons, who have recognized an increased requirement for ASI 6B qualified leaders. A broader audience in cavalry squadrons in ABCTs and combined-arms battalions (CABs) is emerging, particularly with the transition to the 6x36 scout platoon model and its associated increase in the need for dismounted scout squads.

## Conclusion

RSLC remains the Army's premier dismounted reconnaissance course that trains leaders to find, collect and report in support of the commander's information-collection plan and reconnaissance guidance. The course institutionalized the enduring lessons developed from the long-range reconnaissance patrols in Vietnam, the former reconnaissance and commando, also known as RECONDO, schools and LRS units. Core lessons originally developed from Vietnam are just as relevant on the modern battlefield, even as technological advancements emerge globally.

RSLC-trained leaders mitigate risk for a maneuver commander's R&S operations while increasing overall effectiveness. Commanders still need to gain and maintain enemy contact using the smallest element possible, and they must be able to trust their dismounted scouts with more responsibility to survive, fight and win on the battlefield. RSLC remains the key to ensuring the maneuver commander's trust in the scouts.

RSLC is located at Camp Cornett, "the Recon Compound," on Fort Benning, home of the headquarters for the Department of Reconnaissance and Security, which includes the Army Reconnaissance Course and Cavalry Leader's Course (CLC). More course information can be found on the Fort Benning website or on Facebook.

*Promotable CPT Josh LaFleur is course director of RSLC, assigned to 3-16 Cavalry, Fort Benning, GA. Previous assignments include commander, Company A, 4th Ranger Training Battalion, Fort Benning; commander, Company C, 2nd Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 2nd BCT, 82nd Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, NC; and platoon leader, Troop B, 1-91 Cavalry Squadron, 173rd Airborne Brigade, Schweinfurt, Germany. His military schooling includes CLC; Military Freefall Course; RSLC; Jumpmaster Course; Survival, Escape, Resistance, Evasion or SERE-C; Ranger Course; and Maneuver Captain's Career Course. He holds a bachelor's of science degree in criminology from Indiana University of Pennsylvania.*

## Acronym Quick-Scan

**ABCT** – armored brigade combat team
**ASI** – additional-skill identifier
**BCT** – brigade combat team
**CAB –** combined-arms battalion
**CLC –** Cavalry Leader's Course
**EW** – electronic warfare
**FRAGO –** fragmentary order
**FRIES** – Fast-Rope-Insertion Extraction System
**FTX** – field-training exercise
**HF** – high frequency
**IBCT** – infantry brigade combat team
**Km** – kilometer
**LRS** – long-range surveillance

**MOS –** military-occupation specialty
**NATO –** North Atlantic Treaty Organization
**R&S –** reconnaissance and security
**RSLC** – Reconnaissance and Surveillance Leader's Course
**RUT** – resident unit training
**SBCT** – Stryker brigade combat team
**SOP –** standard operating procedure
**STX** – situational-training exercise
**TLP –** troop-leading procedure