

Understanding the Tempo of Reconnaissance

by CPT Nathan Sitterley

The term **tempo**, as defined by Army Doctrinal Publication 3-90, *Offense and Defense*, is a rate of speed and rhythm of military operations over time with respect to the enemy. The doctrine should also relate tempo to the capabilities and supporting efforts within an organization. This definition, though different than the definition of the tempo of reconnaissance, does relate. Tempo generally controls or alters the rate of the operation to maintain the initiative for offensive operations. This type of “tempo” is what most Army leaders are familiar with.

Visualization is key when it comes to tempo. Field Manual (FM) 3-98, *Reconnaissance and Security Operations*, includes an “X” chart that describes the two sets of tempo: **rapid and forceful**, and **stealthy and deliberate**. The purpose of this article is to 1) examine where we can actually apply tempo within reconnaissance operations; and 2) familiarize commanders with a few more reconnaissance tempos that are acceptable to mitigate risks.

Before jumping into the reconnaissance tempo, commanders and scouts must identify the framework of reconnaissance. This is once again different than the sequence of offensive and defensive operations. Although not in the doctrine, the framework of reconnaissance builds a reconnaissance mission sequentially. This is mainly used as a planning tool to help sequence and give left and right limits to subordinates from the commander. This overview should help simplify reconnaissance planning.

Offense/defense operations sequence

- Gain and maintain threat contact;
- Disrupt;
- Fix;
- Maneuver; and
- Follow through.

Reconnaissance framework

- Planning and preparation;
- Infiltration/insertion;
- Counter-reconnaissance;
- Transition to security operations;
- Reconnaissance handover/information collection; and
- Consolidation and reorganization.

This informal sequence illustrates chronological events that must be executed to accomplish the mission sequentially. Understandably, reconnaissance must allow for flexibility within the plan. It must have decision points for commanders to answer. Reconnaissance tempo will help determine commanders’ decision points if we apply it correctly within the framework. Note: tempo operates within the operational timeline and gives guidance about how much time and exposure scouts have to collect and gather detailed information.

Tempo overall helps commanders assume risk. However, to understand inherent risks within the operational environment, commanders must have situational awareness to make calculated decisions. This balances the scale for the art and science of mission command when giving the commander’s reconnaissance guidance (CRG) to your subordinates. Commanders should rarely allow platoon leaders to create their own tempo that is not realistic, feasible, calculated nor synchronized with his or her reconnaissance operation. This is not the platoon leader’s role.

What tempos mean

Let’s deep dive into what these tempos mean. There are two axes according to our chart. The Y-axis describes the amount of detail a scout is going to collect. Detail includes the amount of time it will take for an element to be as thorough as possible and meet all the critical tasks when it comes to certain forms of reconnaissance operations. The X-axis describes the level of covertness and willingness to fight the enemy to gain this information.

Information is the raw data that must be analyzed. This then turns into intelligence and is shared vertically and horizontally. The art of gathering and collecting information has higher risks than forming intelligence. Therefore, tempo helps commanders reduce or mitigate certain risks while his or her scouts collect those information requirements.

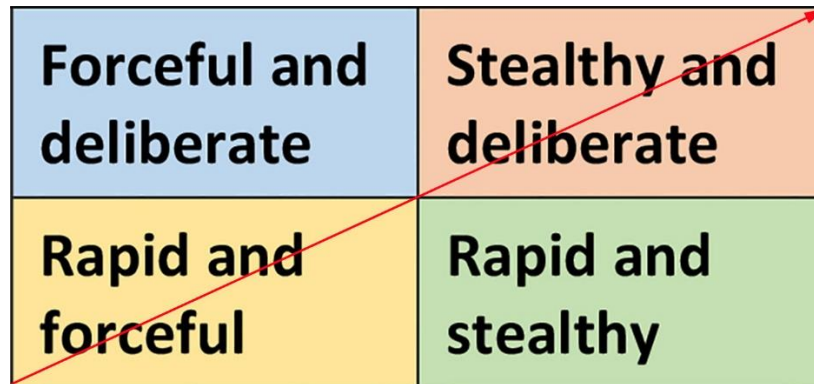


Figure 1. The Y-axis describes the amount of detail a scout is going to collect. The X-axis describes the level of covertness and willingness to fight the enemy to gain information.

Rapid and forceful. This describes the level of information to be more quickly collected. All information collection should be complete and be in accordance with the unit reporting standard operating procedures. **Rapid** also uses the lack of time as a critical factor within the mission variable (e.g., mission, enemy, terrain, troops available, time and civilian considerations, or METT-TC). **Forceful** describes the willingness to fight and the level of covertness of the element. Commanders must give aggressive or discreet engagement criteria to their subordinates to help preserve combat power and avoid decisive engagements.

An example of rapid and forceful tempo would be a mounted section conducting a hasty route reconnaissance using a rapid way of calculating the radius of a curve. This allows the commander to assume risk on certain radii of curves that would or would not permit the turning radius of their largest supporting vehicle or follow-on units. The reconnaissance framework this falls under is during infiltration/insertion and at times during information collection based on the mission variables.

Stealthy and deliberate. At most, scouts should be moving at one kilometer per hour during this tempo. This is once again based on the commander’s scheme of information collection. During this type of reconnaissance tempo, the commander must be descriptive in his or her information collection plan. All lateral routes, key terrains, ford sites, etc. will be reconnoitered in accordance with Annex L and his or her scheme of information collection. This tempo generally fits in during counter-reconnaissance near a named area of interest, target area of interest, obstacles or built-up areas.

This is where commanders must break down their priority intelligence requirements (PIR) according to FM 3-98. Being more descriptive in the information requirements does not hurt your subordinates. It allows him or her to meet your intent when it comes to that specific detail of that particular PIR.

Rapid and stealthy. To some this is an unfamiliar tempo. To state it simply, this occurs when moving from Point A to Point B. Collection of information is limited to maintain stealth. Compromise to the infiltration or exfiltration is unacceptable. It is one of the fundamentals to perform continuous reconnaissance. Scouts are going to gather information about certain routes or possible areas of a cache site, but this is not their mission. This is what we like to call little “r” or little reconnaissance in support of the big “R” or big reconnaissance. This part of the mission requires little detail-gathering because it lacks reconnaissance objectives and possibly cover/concealment. This generally happens within the infiltration/insertion sequence after crossing the line of departure.



Figure 2. A scout from Troop A, 3-4 Cav, scans the horizon in search of the enemy counter-reconnaissance force in Pohakuloa Training Area on the Big Island of Hawaii during Operation Raider Strike 2015. (Photo by CPT Nathan Sitterley)

Forceful and deliberate. This tempo may contradict certain subject-matter experts when it comes to reconnaissance. If we examine this carefully, sensitive-site exploitation falls within this tempo. Scouts do go into built-up areas within their capable means. They do cordon off areas to gain deliberate information on the population as well as key infrastructures.

Urban operations, no matter how small, are among the most risky operations. To mitigate risks, commanders must specify the information requirements as well as enforce the latest time information of value for his or her subordinates. This particular tempo usually occurs during the information collection and consolidation framework of reconnaissance. Remember, you and your subordinates cannot collect everything. You must prioritize your information requirements here.

This article should explain a little bit of the nuisances of planning for the tempo of reconnaissance within CRG. Commanders must assess the reconnaissance tempo and apply it within the reconnaissance framework. Overall, tempo helps commanders assume risks and maintains a sense of situational awareness on the battlefield.

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Acronym Quick-Scan

ABOLC – Armor Basic Officer Leader's Course
CRG – commander's reconnaissance guidance
FM – field manual
IBCT – infantry brigade combat team
PIR – priority intelligence requirement