

Integrating the Dismounted Reconnaissance Troop into an Armored Brigade Combat Team

by CPT Alexander Boroff

The National Training Center (NTC) is the Army's best proving ground for the ideas, techniques and practices of an armored formation. When 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team (ABCT), 4th Infantry Division, incorporated the dismounted reconnaissance troop (DRT) from 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT), 4th Infantry Division, into their operations, this enabled detailed, integrated and reliable collection at the squadron and BCT level, and at the ABCT.

An ABCT typically conducts dismounted reconnaissance near friendly personnel carriers and is deployed for either local security or reconnaissance operations. The attached IBCT DRT was able to extend past the forward-line-of-troops (FLoT) in the Cavalry squadron and focus its information collection (IC) on deep brigade named areas of interest. The unique capability the DRT gave to 3rd ABCT cannot be denied, given that the troop's collection teams were consistently postured to answer three to four of the brigade's priority information requirements at any given time during operations.

Deep fight

Currently the doctrinal "deep-close-security" framework defines "deep operations" as those that "involve efforts to disrupt uncommitted enemy forces."¹ This echoes historical doctrinal definitions, seeing "deep operations at any echelon [as comprising] activities directed against enemy forces not in contact designed to influence the conditions in which future close operation[s] will be conducted."²

The "deep fight" was one of the imperative tenets of AirLand Battle, defined by GEN Donn A. Starry as "not a luxury; it is an absolute necessity to winning."³ Each element is responsible for shaping its respective "deep fights" at echelon, enabling the deep attacks required to shape fights against typically numerically superior forces. GEN Starry defined "the operative tactics which support [this concept]" as requiring the ability to "see deep and begin early to disrupt, delay [and] destroy follow-on/reinforcing echelons."⁴ This asset, especially to an ABCT, is similar to the capability provided by a DRT that focused on deep collection.



Figure 1. Critical to the DRT's endeavor is its ability to conduct troop internal movement. Light Medium Tactical Vehicles were used in NTC 19-02 to fill the modified table of organization and equipment shortfall.

As collection asset

The DRT, when deliberately planned into the IC scheme, was able to provide extremely reliable intelligence and early warning to the brigade. This early warning proved critical on several occasions. Furthermore, when integrated into the IC scheme for the BCT deliberate attack, the DRT's maneuverability through heavily restricted terrain allowed them to rapidly identify the enemy reserve, command-and-control nodes, air-defense-artillery systems and field-artillery systems. Shaping the "deep fight" at brigade level became a much simpler concept, in

effect, because the DRT was able to retain freedom of maneuver and observe the enemy from positions of advantage in restricted terrain.

The ability to move dismounted through heavily restricted terrain provides an increase in reconnaissance capabilities that cannot be overstated. The biggest advantage the DRT provided was long-distance observation from undetected vantages the enemy did not predict; the DRT was able to position its forces at elevations that allowed observation out to 15 kilometers, well into the enemy's battle and support zones. Once the supported BCT moved past the DRT's positions, it would reconsolidate, conduct troop-leading procedures and then rapidly execute its next foot insertion. (Although aviation was available, the aircraft's signature degenerates the DRT's ability to achieve stealth through dismounted movement.)

Several IC assets benefit from insertion into the "deep fight," so at NTC, low-level voice intercept teams and an engineer reconnaissance team accompanied the DRT. The DRT proved to be a perfect vehicle for these additional assets, allowing these enablers to drastically increase the relative range of their collection equipment. In conjunction with organic assets, this allowed the DRT to cue or mix assets, painting an even greater picture for the brigade commander.

Deliberate integration planning

While the advantages of this formation's accompaniment of an ABCT are many, several glaring issues surfaced.

One, the ability to move and maneuver in the deep fight is hampered by an inability to rapidly sustain operations. Soldiers moved with extremely high "approach" loads while maneuvering.⁵ Mitigating this somewhat was the decision to remove the Improved Outer Tactical Vest and Enhanced Small-Arms Protective Insert plates from loads; however, the large amount of Class I required to be carried proved to be a limiting factor in the time the DRT could operate before becoming an issue. While aerial resupply is always an option, the large signature generated from such an operation is not congruent with the stealthy and deliberate nature of the DRT's mission.

Another disadvantage (or advantage, depending on how this is viewed) in using the DRT is its lack of dynamic retask ability. This forces extremely deliberate planning for the DRT. The dawning realization is that in the extremely mobile environment of an ABCT, dismounted operations are relatively slow-paced. This necessitates explicit planning for the DRT's integration. The positive aspect of this is that it forces the actual use of IC as established for the deep fight.

This is truly the third disadvantage to the DRT. Detailed planning is preached at any echelon; the true difficulty is that in practice, especially at crucible events for a unit, it is not always doable. Without deliberate, critically detailed planning, the DRT will not always be successful due to the relatively slow "flash-to-bang" of its effects when paired with an ABCT.

Overall assessment

NTC Rotation 19-02 displayed all of the aforementioned effects through statistics. The DRT came within 250 meters of the opposing force (OPFOR) four times during the rotation and remained undetected at all times during insertion movement. This modern-day version of "stormtrooper" tactics proved extremely effective.⁶ Once past the FLoT, the DRT was able to kill 30 dismounted enemy Soldiers discreetly and still accomplish its reconnaissance missions. Camouflage proved critical in this endeavor. The OPFOR force at NTC discovered only one squad-sized element from the DRT at any point of the 19-day exercise, but the DRT was able to successfully escape and evade to safety. The DRT's observations were responsible for 56 enemy vehicles destroyed by close air support and fires during 3rd ABCT's deliberate attack – including four 2S19s and one ZSU-23 – ensuring the success of the BCT's overall attack.

Integration of an asset focused solely on dismounted reconnaissance in the open and the observable terrain of NTC proved to be an extreme boon to both the intelligence and fires warfighting functions. Future elements should consider both the necessity of deliberate dismounted reconnaissance operations in the brigade deep fight and their utility in an ABCT's operations.

CPT Alex Boroff is a Joint Chiefs of Staff intern at Georgetown University's Student Detachment, Fort Jackson, SC. Previous assignments include commander, Troop C, 3rd Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, 2nd IBCT, 4th Infantry

Division; brigade planner, 2nd IBCT, 4th Infantry Division; commander, Troop C, 3rd Squadron, 16th Cavalry, 316th Cavalry Brigade, Maneuver Center of Excellence; battalion assistant S-4, 3-69 Armor Regiment, 1st ABCT, 3rd Infantry Division; and company executive officer, Company D, 3-69 Armor Regiment, 1st ABCT, 3rd Infantry Division. His military schooling includes Maneuver Captain's Career Course, Armor Basic Officer Leader's Course and Ranger and Pathfinder schools. He holds a bachelor's of science degree in mechanical engineering (honors) from the U.S. Military Academy and a master's of science degree in systems engineering from Johns Hopkins University. His awards and honors include the Bronze Star Medal, Meritorious Service Medal and the Combat Action Badge.

Notes

¹ Army Doctrine Publication 3-0, **Unified Land Operations**, Department of the Army: Washington, DC, October 2011.

² Field Manual 100-5, **Operations**, Department of the Army: Washington, DC, May 1986.

³ GEN Donn A. Starry, "Extending the Battlefield," **Military Review**, March 1981.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Army Technical Publication 3-21.18, **Foot Marches**, Department of the Army: Washington, DC, April 2017.

⁶ Christopher J. Ghiz, **Specialized Assault Units of the World War I Western Front: A Comparative Study of the German Stormtrooper Battalions, and Canadian Trench Raiders**, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2010.

Acronym Quick-Scan

ABCT – armored brigade combat team

BCT – brigade combat team

DRT – dismounted reconnaissance troop

FloT – forward-line-of-troops

IBCT – infantry brigade combat team

IC – information collection

NTC – National Training Center

OPFOR – opposing force