# Reforge the Broken Saber:
# Evolving the Infantry Brigade Combat Team's Cavalry Squadron to Win the Recon Fight

**by SGT Christopher Broman**

**Part 1 of 2**

The infantry brigade combat team (IBCT) cavalry formations of today are suffering from an identity crisis. More than 18 years of counterinsurgency (COIN) warfare has morphed the cavalry into an organization that is no longer the subject-matter expert on reconnaissance and security (R&S) operations. We spent so much time kicking in doors instead of building hide sites that we've lost our touch. Now, as we return to the *raison d'etre* of our force, the technological advances of our near-peers have left us as a whole struggling to figure out how to adapt to these changes.

What are we to do? The first step in fixing any problem is admitting we have one. The IBCT cavalry squadron as an organization is unable to accomplish its mission sets and cannot compete against our near-peer adversaries.

Squadron, troop and Soldier/vehicle suggested changes will be discussed in this two-part series.

## Problem

To many this will not be new information. In the July-September 2014 of **ARMOR**, then-Chief of Armor BG Lee Quintas spelled this out clearly with the problem statement: Is today's cavalry squadron manned, trained and equipped to accomplish required R&S missions? The answer written in capital letters is simply NO.[1]

The modular BCT was created so "Soldiers, leaders and units [will] be extremely capable in [COIN] operations without sacrificing their ability to prevail in conventional combat."[2] The problem is that the fielding of cavalry squadrons into three different modular formations resulted in three organizations with various degrees of effective R&S against current or projected threats.[3] The Army requires that cavalry units conduct 13 missions covering reconnaissance, security, offense and defense. Of these, the IBCT cavalry squadron as organized is fully mission-capable of accomplishing six. The other seven can only be accomplished in a permissive environment in which combat with peers or near-peers is unlikely.[4]

This is not a matter of opinion but doctrine. Per Field Manual (FM) 3-20.98, **Reconnaissance and Scout Platoon**, "Currently platoon elements have limited dismounted capability and limited direct-fire standoff, lethality and survivability in full-spectrum operations."[5] This makes sense considering that the Russian lead reconnaissance effort is often a reinforced platoon followed by a mounted reinforced company, often equipped with vehicles that have more armor and heavier weapons than a humvee.[6]

It's not just a problem with the current organization structure of our units. We've had a failure for years in performing our inherent task. The inability to conduct effective reconnaissance was seen at the training centers even before the Global War on Terrorism; the RAND Corporation in 1993 conducted a study of 34 battles where Blue Forces did poor reconnaissance, of which 26 ended in failure, six in standoffs and only two victories. Enemy positions were not identified during half the missions, and route reconnaissance was conducted less than half the time. Scouts also failed to dismount 50 percent of the time and to avoid enemy contact 75 percent of the time, even though both directly correlate to recon success.[7]

Even with the shift away from COIN, scout platoons still seldom conduct true reconnaissance at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), with the focus being more on security or offensive operations.[8] While some may blame the brigade commanders for fighting their scouts because they do not understand either the capabilities or missions they can accomplish, this is not true. Ultimately it is the responsibility of the squadron commander to make sure the brigade knows the most effective way to use his troopers.

**Figure 1. New York Army National Guard PFC Mathew Smithers, a cavalry scout with Troop B, 2nd Squadron, 101st Cavalry, based in Jamestown, NY, scans his area with an Mk-19 Grenade Launcher for enemy forces at JRTC, Fort Polk, LA.** *(U.S. Army photo)*

It has been suggested by some that, because of the cavalry's inability to conduct reconnaissance and survive contact with the enemy, regular infantry or combined-arms battalions can conduct these missions instead. While infantry units have their own scout formations and can conduct limited area reconnaissance, they do not possess the skills, equipment or training to accomplish the full spectrum of cavalry operations. The cavalry's role is that of a specialized unit, no different than combat engineers, and its replacement will just further dilute the brigade's ability to conduct reconnaissance.[9] Instead, the IBCT cavalry squadron needs to evolve.

## Squadron, troop organizational solutions

This evolution cannot be done by simply changing a modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) on a PowerPoint slide or equipping units with some new vehicles. IBCT cavalry squadrons need to become hybrid organizations capable of meeting and defeating any peer threat; have the technological capability to conduct reconnaissance across all spectrums; and possess the expertise to become the force-enablers that our infantry brothers need to be successful in their missions. Sweeping changes need to be seen not just at the squadron, troop and platoon level but also in the equipment carried by the individual trooper and on our vehicles.

Some organizational solutions may be:

- **Remove "RSTA."** What's in a name? The name of an organization gives an idea of its purpose and the mindset adopted by its Soldiers. IBCT squadrons are currently called reconnaissance, surveillance and target acquisition (RSTA), not cavalry. While this may seem like semantics, there is an important distinction between the two. The pre-December 2002 governing manual, ***Cavalry Operations***, states, "The fundamental purpose of cavalry is to perform reconnaissance and provide security in close operations."[10] Per doctrine, the IBCT squadron needs to be able to conduct both security and reconnaissance, yet the RSTA name does not mention security. This change would help accurately describe the role of the squadron within the brigade. Only the battlefield-surveillance-brigade reconnaissance units should be designated as RSTA since their organization of just six Long-Range Advanced Scout Surveillance System-equipped humvees per platoon falls within the surveillance mindset of their brigade.
- **Make the squadron commander the chief of reconnaissance.** "Brigade commanders and their staff lack leader development and training to plan and execute [R&S] missions," according to BG Quintas, 48th Chief

of Armor.[11] At this time, no staff section is in charge of both planning and executing information collection (IC). The brigade S-2, S-3, IC manager, cavalry squadron, military-intelligence company (MiCo), attached aviation and unmanned-aerial-system units all have a major role in the IC process.[12] This leaves the brigade commander, unless he delegates the responsibility, as the person to synchronize all these efforts while he is also making decisions about the overall operation. In addition, the squadron's organic assets are not enough to provide continuous reconnaissance, and not all information requirements can best be answered with just ground units.

To solve these problems, the squadron commander needs to be doctrinally established as the brigade chief of reconnaissance. As chief of reconnaissance, the squadron commander would direct IC planning for the brigade to answer all information requirements; task and direct all IC assets in the brigade; analyze all collected information; and disseminate information to enable shared understanding.[13]

By having the squadron commander in charge of IC efforts, the brigade S-2 would be able to focus on enemy courses of action, and a senior commander would be able to represent all IC efforts at brigade meetings. The squadron would also be responsible for all the brigade's named areas of interests within the recon fight. As chief of reconnaissance, the squadron commander would then have the tasking authority for all IC assets to ensure the proper use of cueing, redundancy and mixing for effective IC.

The concept of the cavalry squadron being in charge of all IC assets is already doctrinally established in the Stryker brigades. The Stryker brigade MTOE organizes all brigade intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets under the reconnaissance squadron in a surveillance troop with human-intelligence (HUMINT) personnel directly integrated into the squadron's organic reconnaissance troops.[14] In March 2015, 5th Battalion, 4th Cavalry Regiment, validated this concept during its National Training Center rotation, with the unit seeing great success in this role.[15]

Some might point to the squadron's need to move to stay in the recon fight and lack of a vehicle to enable use of Upper Tactical Internet applications such as Command Post of the Future (CPoF) and Distributed Common Ground System-Army (DCGS-A) on the move as reasons to not make this change.[16] The squadron tactical-command post is more than capable of moving closer to control the squadron while the squadron command post completes its coordination tasks before moving forward. Also, while CPoF and DCGS-A are excellent coordination tools, they are not available to the troop/company commanders, thus creating an intelligence-sharing "speed bump" at the squadron/battalion level. By moving any general intelligence products to the Joint Battle Command-Platform (JBC-P), any information needing to be shared can be distributed quickly across the entire brigade without needing to be "translated" from a CPoF slide deck to a JBC-P overlay first.

## EW at squadron and troop

After the Cold War ended, the Army got rid of almost all of its electronic-warfare (EW) assets, believing the Navy or Air Force could provide those necessary capabilities. The focus of fighting non-state actors over the last decade did little to increase the need for these assets. Even when an EW position was later added to the squadron staff, the focus was more on countering improvised explosive devices than on traditional EW.

During this time, Russia kept practicing and perfecting EW to great success. In 2017 the Army released a study detailing how Russia was shutting down Ukrainian radio and cellular networks; was able to effectively jam and bring down 100 Ukrainian drones; and emitted signals to cause artillery and missiles to either prematurely detonate or veer off course.[17] One shocking example was when Russia sent hoax messages to Ukrainian soldiers' families saying their sons were killed, and then minutes later used artillery to strike a location where a large group of cellphones had been detected as families tried contacting loved ones to see if they were alive.[18] The Russians have also been honing their skills in Syria by effectively jamming our drones and disabling our EC-130s, EW planes equipped with jamming pods.[19]

Realizing the Army is losing the EW fight has forced it to start adding EW assets to its brigades. Currently the plan in 2020 is to start adding an EW platoon to the MiCo and have it serve as a brigade asset.[20] While this an important step forward, it is important to remember that each Russian armored or infantry brigade has its own EW company.[21] This is why the cavalry squadron needs its own EW section organically assigned to provide both offensive and defensive options in its mission to collect information.

The squadron EW officer (either an officer or senior-enlisted Soldier) should be in charge of two combat EW intelligence (CEWI) teams of three Soldiers each, equipped with systems like Raven Claw and Sabre Fury. Raven Claw would allow them to manage the electromagnetic (EM) environment on the move and without network connection and to be able to "search and attack" potential EM threats.[22] Another similar system, the vehicle-mounted Sabre Fury, would give the squadron commander the ability to quickly move these teams to where they are needed most.

All members of the EW section would also be sent to the Low-Level Voice Intercept Operator's Course to add a further signal-intelligence (SIGINT) function to the teams.

This intelligence collected across the EW spectrum would give the squadron commander the options to either to continue to monitor and employ indirect fires, or to conduct an electronic attack to disrupt enemy communications.[23] Integrating EW into the squadron MTOE allows the squadron's screen or guard to instantly begin operating across multiple domains.[24]

The downside is that integration of EW into squadron operations will inevitably degrade its own ability to communicate with friendly forces no matter how well-positioned or aimed the systems are.[25] SIGINT and EW activities broadcast a significant signature over the EM spectrum, making the teams susceptible to enemy collection efforts.[26] The EW officer at staff would be responsible for advising the squadron commander on the risks involved with each EW and SIGINT function and for managing the use of systems to drastically reduce the impact of the teams on other friendly-force communications.

Another consideration is that these teams need to spend as much time as possible with line units and not at squadron. If used effectively, the teams will be moving about the battlefield, and they need to be able to seamlessly integrate into scout-platoon positions without compromising them. Every opportunity should be taken to integrate the CEWI teams into training, especially as opposing forces. Almost no scout units have the resources or knowledge to effectively practice operations in an electronically degraded environment. The CEWI teams can help the line units practice operating in these conditions, leading to the development and implementation of new tactics, techniques and procedures.

## More squadron changes

Other suggestions for changes at squadron include:

- **Move snipers to squadron.** Currently the snipers in an RSTA are a part of the infantry dismounted reconnaissance troop (DRT). Yet, while they are under the command of the troop commander, they are almost never integrated into DRT operations because the squadron frequently uses them as a separate element. With the training to infiltrate a particular location to conduct reconnaissance, or target key enemy personnel to harass enemy lines and provide depth and breadth to screen lines, the sniper section becomes a valuable tool for the squadron commander.[27] The section should therefore be reassigned from the DRT and put in headquarters and headquarters troop (HHT).

Infantry battalions already have a sniper section at their headquarters for the commander to task, so this change would not be new. Having the section at squadron would also place the snipers closer to brigade assets that help facilitate insertion into target areas. To help replace the long-range precision fires lost by moving the snipers, the DRT would get an increase of squad designated marksman (SDM) slots.

- **Establish a HUMINT section at squadron**. Reconnaissance is not limited to just the open terrain of our training areas, devoid of a local populace. In World War II, 40 percent of combat in Western Europe was in urban areas.[28] Already more than half the world's population lives in urban areas, and with the number of megacities expected to double from the current 38 by 2050, this number will only increase, thus making reconnaissance operations in these areas inevitable.[29] While operating around civilian population centers brings with it a host of problems, it also brings with it a massive benefit: the opportunity to collect HUMINT.

The U.S. military has seen the benefits in Iraq and Afghanistan of talking to the local populace to gain intelligence. Ranging from locations of suspected terror-cell leaders to just how the population views friendly forces, all these can help fill the information requirements of the squadron and brigade. With how fast situations can change in

urban environments, IBCT squadrons need to have an organic HUMINT section to enable the rapid collection of information from civilians.



**Figure 2. SPC Oscar Ochoa, HUMINT collector from Company A, 3rd Special Troops Battalion, 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, interviews Donald Dust, an instructor with Foundry Intelligence Training Center, Fort Carson, CO, who is playing a role as an informant during the "Iron Vigilance" exercise.** *(Photo by SGT Grady Jones)*

The section could consist of two teams of two to three Soldiers each, led by a staff sergeant and falling under the S-2 section. The S-2 or squadron commander could assign the field teams to units most likely to encounter civilians. The section sergeant would be at the tactical-operations center (TOC), able to help analyze and to provide advice on proper implementation.

Some might wonder why it's important that the HUMINT section be a permanent part of the squadron and not just attached as needed. The reason is the same as why EW sections need to be organic: it is imperative they know how to function within a reconnaissance unit. There is a massive difference between conducting HUMINT in a semi-permissive environment – where there is security provided – to doing the same mission on the very forward edge of the brigade's lines. Simply grabbing HUMINT soldiers from the MiCo, assigning them to a scout troop and expecting them to function effectively will not work. Even if they do become effective, the time between when they are first assigned to when this happens is going to be larger due to unfamiliarity between the HUMINT soldiers and the cav. By having them as a part of the squadron, they can be integrated into all levels of training, and both can learn from each other's strengths and weaknesses.

- **Add mortars and gun trucks to the squadron**. By their very nature, squadron TOCs will usually operate forward of the infantry battalions to fulfill the brigade commander's intelligence requirements. This means they face an increased risk of air, indirect and ground attack but lack the means to effectively defend themselves. To rectify this, each squadron needs to have its own mortar team and more gun trucks.

While the brigade has many fire and support assets available, there is no guarantee that any of these will be assigned to the squadron. By assigning two 120mm mortars to the HHT, the squadron commander has a way to both defend the TOC position and potentially provide more indirect support to the troops. This concept is already used by the infantry battalions, which have a four-gun platoon of towed 120mm mortars for these same reasons.[30]

Another advantage is that these additional mortars can be used to swap with the line troops if their systems become damaged or destroyed, thus maximizing firepower forward.

Currently there are only two gun trucks assigned to the squadron TOC, one for the S-3 and the other for the squadron commander. With only these two vehicles, the TOC's defense is relegated to personal weapons and a handful of squad automatic weapons (SAWs). Also, if any medical or support vehicles require an escort to a forward element, it means having to potentially pull trucks from line platoons to accomplish these missions. The squadron TOC and troop trains must be able to self-secure during operations without "bleeding off" gun trucks from its scout platoons.[31]

By replacing four trucks in the squadron with gun trucks, multiple options suddenly become available to the squadron commander. They can be used to defend the squadron TOC, escort the squadron commander, support logistics, serve as medical vehicles or act as a quick-reaction force (QRF) to quickly support units requiring assistance. If vehicles or weapons get damaged, any of the four can be quickly "hot-swapped," meaning the squadron can maximize reconnaissance assets forward. While the need to sometimes pull Soldiers from HHT to man these trucks to accomplish the required mission will cause operational strain, the benefits provided to the squadron as a whole will far outweigh this downside.

## DRT into Stryker

The final consideration in this part of my two-part article is a suggestion to turn the DRT into a Stryker unit. The DRT has about 80 Soldiers, consisting of a troop headquarters, sniper squad, mortar section and two scout platoons consisting of three scout sections of two four-man teams.[32] The troop is most often used in missions or terrain where the nature of the operation is more closely suited for deliberate and stealthy reconnaissance.[33] If the squadron requires information collected in severely restricted terrain such as urban environments, mounted troops would not be able to collect as effectively as the DRT. Also, due to the many F7-coded Pathfinder slots, the DRT can be used as the squadron and brigade Pathfinder element.[34] With the addition of their Zodiac boats, the unit is capable of ground, air and water insertion.

Yet, for all its benefits, the DRT has many issues. Per doctrine, the scout troops are fully capable for *zone*, *area* and *route* reconnaissance, and *screen*, *local*, *route* and *convoy* security operations.[35] In comparison, the DRT is only fully capable of area reconnaissance and local security, with all other functions requiring permissive environments or reinforcement.[36] The lack of organic mobility is also an issue. The DRT cannot maintain the same mission tempo as the mounted troops, thus forcing the squadron commander to limit the width and depth of his area of operations, move his whole squadron at a slower tempo or leave his DRT out of this portion of the squadron mission.[37]

These are not good options. As stated in FM 3-96, **The Brigade Combat Team**, "Reconnaissance forces must maintain battlefield mobility, as fixed reconnaissance forces are ineffective."[38] The unit also has limited direct-fire standoff, lethality and survivability.

Instead of simply replacing the DRT with another motorized-reconnaissance troop, the DRT should be converted into a Stryker unit. Each section would have its own Stryker, plus one for the command team with attachments, making a total of four vehicles and eight more troops per platoon for crews. The mortar section would be in a Mortar Carrier Vehicle, with the staff sergeant being in the troop commander's vehicle. The first sergeant would have a Stryker, while supply and the medic attachments would have the vehicles they already currently use. The third platoon would be four Mobile Gun System (MGS) Strykers, with two Strykers per scout platoon being the upgunned Infantry Carrier Vehicle Dragoon vehicles. This would be a total of 15 Stryker vehicles and at least 28 more Soldiers for crews.

The infantry scout squads would also be modified in terms of equipment. Each four-man team would have a radio, a M320 grenade launcher, a M249 SAW and a SDM-Rifle (SDM-R). This would give these small dismounted elements the firepower to break contact and fall back to their support elements. The high number of SDMs help offset the loss of the snipers to the squadron, as mentioned earlier. Overall, the collective firepower of the troop would go from 14 SAWs, one M2 .50-caliber weapon, 18 M320s, two 60mm mortars, four sniper rifles and five Javelin command launch units (CLUs) to at least 10 M2s, five M240B machineguns, four 105mm guns, four 30mm guns, 12 SDM-Rs, a 120mm and two 60mm mortars, all while keeping the same number of SAW, M320s and CLUs.

**Figure 3. The author recommends that snipers assigned to an RSTA DRT be moved to the IBCT cavalry squadron's HHT.** *(U.S. Army photo courtesy Program Executive Office-Soldier)*

The addition of these vehicles and firepower now gives the squadron commander more options for winning the reconnaissance fight. The DRT can follow one terrain feature behind the two motorized troops, acting as a QRF for enemy contact. The squadron could now conduct a reconnaissance-in-force, with the DRT leading and the other troops supporting the flanks. In cases of dense terrain unsuited for vehicles, the DRT can still dismount their sections to conduct reconnaissance, with the Strykers then being able to pick up their teams without having to coordinate vehicles with squadron. The dismount element can still conduct air-assault or riverine operations (the Zodiacs would be moved from the troop to the brigade engineer battalion), and the Strykers can then be tasked to the motorized troops or kept as a ready reserve.

Since the DRT is already an infantry element, the squadron commander now has the increased ability to conduct platoon and troop offensive operations such as attacks and raids. The combination of MGS, Dragoon Strykers, 18 tube-launched, optically tracked, wireless-guided missile systems (using the 3x9x36 platoon), potentially seven 120mm mortars (if added at squadron), plus all the crew-served weapons and CLUs already assigned, would see the IBCT squadron able to effectively fight for information. The squadron would also have the necessary firepower required to deter, neutralize or destroy enemy forces during a guard mission.[39]

To help with the recovery and maintenance of the Stryker vehicles, the Modular Catastrophic Recovery System (MCRS) would be fielded to the IBCT squadron's support company. This system consists of an M983A4 Light Equipment Transporter, a fifth-wheel towing and recovery device and a tilt-deck recovery vehicle.[40] Developed originally as a Stryker recovery system, it has been used in Southwest Asia for several years and is able to recover any vehicle this new squadron could field.[41] This will not only allow the current support company to quickly recover the new Stryker-based vehicles but also improve the company's ability to recover heavier vehicles attached to the organization.

**Figure 4. SGT Jeffrey Palmer, an instructor, keeps a careful watch as students in the MCRS module of the H8 Recovery Specialist Course pull a disabled mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicle onto the MCRS' tilt-deck recovery trailer during training at Downer Range, Fort Lee, VA. The H8 course is a three-week additional-skill identifier course at Fort Lee.** *(U.S. Army photo)*

Part II will look at suggested technology, plus more Soldier and vehicle solutions that support the organizational solutions suggested here.

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## Notes

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## Acronym Quick-Scan

**ATP** – Army techniques publication
**ATTP** – Army tactics and techniques publication
**BCT** – brigade combat team
**CEWI** – combat electronic-warfare intelligence
**CLU** – command launch unit
**COIN** – counterinsurgency
**CPoF** – Command Post of the Future
**DCGS-A** – Distributed Command Ground System-Army
**DRT** – dismounted reconnaissance troop
**EM** – electromagnetic
**EW** – electronic warfare
**FM** – field manual
**HHT** – headquarters and headquarters troop
**HUMINT** – human intelligence
**IBCT** – infantry brigade combat team
**IC** – information collection
**JBC-P** – Joint Battle Command Platform
**JRTC** – Joint Readiness Training Center
**MCRS** – Modular Catastrophic Recovery System
**MGS** – Mobile Gun System
**MiCo** – military-intelligence company
**MTOE** – modified table of organization and equipment
**QRF** – quick-reaction force
**R&S** – reconnaissance and security
**RSTA** – reconnaissance, surveillance and target acquisition
**SAW** – squad automatic weapon

**SDM** – squad designated marksman
**SDM-R** – squad designated marksman-rifle
**SIGINT** – signals intelligence
**TOC** – tactical-operations center