

The Overmatch Dilemma: Leveraging Strengths of Stryker Cavalry Troop in Reconnaissance and Security Operations against an Opposing Armored Force

by CPT Andrew Chack

Stryker brigade combat teams (SBCT) preparing for a decisive-action training environment (DATE) rotation at the National Training Center (NTC) have a unique challenge in overcoming innate deficits when competing against a brigade tactical group (BTG).

Stryker brigades are fully aware of the overmatch in protection, mobility and firepower that the adversary vehicle platforms possess. The armor on an M1127 Reconnaissance Variant Stryker is comprised of a half-inch sheet metal lined with Kevlar, and its weapons platform is either an unstabilized Mk-19 40mm automatic grenade launcher or the M2 .50-caliber machinegun. On the other side, the armor on a *Boyeva Mashina Pekhoty 3* (Russian infantry fighting vehicle) (BMP-3) is comprised of welded aluminum alloy, and its weapons platform is a stabilized 30mm autocannon. In addition, the tracks on a BMP-3 provide greater off-terrain mobility than the wheels on a top-heavy Stryker. As a killing machine, the Stryker is outgunned in every imaginable way.

Despite the disparity in vehicle capabilities, Stryker units have one significant feature the BTG lacks. This feature is the Stryker's capability to transport and mass a substantial quantity of dismounted Soldiers rapidly over extended distances. This allows Stryker units to secure and defend complex terrain, infiltrate from unexpected avenues of approach and engage enemies undetected. Dismounted Soldiers carrying Javelin missiles and long-range optics maneuvering in severely restricted terrain can be more dangerous than the main cannon on an M1 Abrams main battle tank.

At the Maneuver Captain's Career Course (MCCC), my instructor, a visiting major from the Australian Army, asked the class if we understood the difference between *mechanized* and *motorized*. The juxtaposition of the employment between tanks and Strykers provided clarity as I was adjusting from my experience serving in a tank company. The Abrams has the individual firepower, armor and mobility to engage other armored targets. Conversely, a Stryker engages targets through the interoperability between its dismounts and the vehicle crew. In other words, a Stryker provides support to its dismounted personnel through transportation, command and control, and medium-caliber direct fire. The Abrams is *mechanized* while the Stryker is *motorized*.

Proper tactical employment of Stryker capabilities in reconnaissance and security operations is a complicated endeavor. Squad leaders – who are responsible for the Stryker itself, the three-man crew and the dismount team – need to master the unceasing transitions between mounted and dismounted, stealthy and forceful, and expected and unexpected enemy contact. Institutional training for the Stryker frames this as dismounting before, on or after the objective. However, this oversimplifies and misleads junior leaders on the level of detailed preparation necessary for the rapid transitions required for Stryker units to succeed in large-scale combat operations.

During the last decade and a half, a significant cadre of Army leaders has developed expertise in counterinsurgency operations (COIN). These heuristics and habits developed during COIN can prove fatal in the DATE scenario, where enemy capabilities have parity with U.S. forces and cultural engagement with the civilian populace is minimized. Only through deliberate planning and repetitive training can an organization develop new habits and refine tactics that will better serve in the next peer-to-peer war.

Build foundation, develop leaders

Typically, team-, squad- and section-level training are adequately resourced to be sufficiently challenging, realistic and developmental. At the platoon level, when the complexity of operations and the number of personnel required to be on the field increases, resourcing and coordination become increasingly challenging to sync. Therefore the quality of training fluctuates wildly. With that in mind, tactical leaders must understand that the results achieved at the culmination of collective-training events such as an NTC rotation begin at the earliest stages of the training cycle. An organization is built on the strength of its foundation.

Starting with the individual Soldier, conduct all qualifications to standard. Overburdened with last-minute garrison requirements, the prioritization of every task and an infinite amount of warrior tasks and battle drills to train from, conducting everything to standard is more complicated than stated. However, every serious organization needs to give its best effort to achieve this. Conduct rifle qualifications with pop-up targets both day and night. Implement an equipment academy to certify individuals on critical equipment like the Lightweight Laser Designator Rangefinder (LLDR), the Long-Range Advanced Scout Surveillance System (LRAS3), the Simple Key Loader, and how to extend the range of the Single Channel Ground and Airborne Radio System. Design a challenging gunnery-skills test (GST) that will develop subject-matter experts. Execute a land-navigation course. Do weekly ruck marches to condition the feet and shoulders. Certify as many combat lifesavers as possible.

At the crew, team, squad and section echelons, the focus is on improving individual tactical expertise, also known as “field craft,” and on leader development. Plan realistic and challenging simulated tactical exercises (STX) and live-fire exercises (LFX) that emphasize critical thinking. Avoid scripted scenarios and allow leaders to take risks and to learn from failure. For example, design a situation where reconnaissance teams dismount from a Stryker, conduct land navigation to establish an observation post (OP), and then deploy the M240L machinegun or Javelin missile to destroy an enemy. Upon reaching the displacement criteria, the team will exfiltrate back to the vehicle and conduct a casualty evacuation. The conduct of pre-combat checks and pre-combat inspections, the route to the OP, choice of movement technique, where to establish an objective rally point, method of engagement and frequency of reporting are just some examples where leaders can take initiative and diverge from a singular, optimal solution.

To have an accurate assessment of a leader’s tactical ability relative to his or her peers, the tasks, conditions and standards of the training event should be identical. However, due to factors such as instructor quality, time constraints and resource limitations, getting every Soldier the same quality of training is not feasible. To mitigate the variations in quality, develop events through a single planner.

For example, although noncommissioned officers are the primary trainers of individual tasks and skills, designate a platoon leader to be responsible for consolidating the expertise to execute the troop-wide equipment academy mentioned earlier. Do the same for GST, team STX and team LFX. Furthermore, have multiple touchpoints with your planners to provide coaching while steering the plan toward your vision. Start the platoon leaders early so they have plenty of time for revision and refinement. Rigorously adhere to the Eight-Step Training Model and the quality of training will drastically improve.

Finally, leverage talented individuals with unique experiences to further elevate the level of training provided. I was fortunate to have a Ranger-qualified troop executive officer who happened to be the officer honor graduate for his class. He helped teach, mentor and assess our dismounts and dismounted-team leaders according to the Ranger standard. My first sergeant had been an instructor at the Army Reconnaissance Course and provided quality scout training in lieu of sending every scout to the school.

Dismounted and mounted maneuver

As a motorized force, Stryker units are most effective with dismounts maneuvering along restricted terrain and vehicles providing support with the LRAS3 and crew-served weapon. Vehicle commanders must minimize the Stryker’s silhouette while bounding to cover and concealment. The greatest tragedy is when a Stryker is lost with all dismounts still present in the vehicle. If the squad leader is mounted, he or she needs to be in constant communication with the dismount team, the wingman and the platoon leadership.

Furthermore, while simultaneously controlling movement, the squad leader needs to monitor all the various forms of communications according to the primary, alternate, contingency, emergency plan. If the squad leader is dismounted, a radiotelephone operator needs to be trained, and the senior Soldier on the vehicle needs to be capable of serving as the Stryker’s commander.

Maneuvering a Stryker greatly stresses the ability to command and control for any individual. Standard operating procedures (SOPs) for simultaneous mounted and dismounted maneuver must be trained, drilled and rehearsed.

Fire your mortars

Mortars are the cavalry troop's most versatile weapon system. The range of the mortars and the scout's desire to stay hidden from the enemy naturally results in employing mortars as the weapon of choice. However, training for the mortar section can be forgotten on the wayside if there is no deliberate effort to develop them.

Stay engaged with the mortar-platoon sergeant to ensure that the gunner's exam, fire-direction center exam and the Mortar Training and Evaluation Program is executed to standard. Incorporate mortars with your scouts' training as much as possible and reinforce with virtual training. The sensor-shooter-sensor routing of fire missions must be repeatedly rehearsed. The ability to destroy targets by way of scouts calling for fire while mortars are engaging and conducting survivability drills will be tested for the first time at NTC. Units that excel at employing indirect fires have a target-location error of less than 100 meters. Set a goal for the first rounds to have effects on the enemy.

Furthermore, mortars tend to be more responsive to the needs of a cavalry commander. Unless priority targets are allocated for field artillery, flash-to-splash tends to lag behind target decay.

Surveillance vs. reconnaissance

Achieving tactical proficiency for scouts is incomplete without validating the ability to collect priority information requirements (PIR). While maneuvering, cavalry leaders need to receive data quickly, process it, filter out the signal from the noise and then accurately report to higher headquarters. This is achieved through the mastery of reconnaissance techniques, methods and management.

Training must incorporate this aspect at all echelons. For example, while certifying section leaders on the tactical task of "conduct area reconnaissance," I noticed that usually only one OP was established and oriented toward the named area of interest (NAI). The OP would then remain stationary until a scripted indicator came into view. Unsurprisingly, when the OP was established in a location where the indicator was hidden, the section, after a period of time, would report "no contact" before picking up and moving on. They misunderstood that reporting the lack of an indicator was just as important as reporting the presence of one.

I revised the tactical problem to coach the section and platoon leaders on the difference between *surveillance* and *reconnaissance*. Eventually, the leaders recognized that the OP had to observe from different locations to develop a full picture of the NAI. By keeping the OP stationary, the section leader was conducting *surveillance*. Bounding the OP to different locations or assigning a second OP to observe into dead space, they were now conducting *reconnaissance*. When cavalry leaders consciously employ reconnaissance push-pull using both mounted and dismounted methods and managed through the harmony of mixing, cueing and redundancy, reconnaissance nirvana is achieved.

Layer forms of contact

The eight forms of contact are direct fire, indirect fire, non-lethal, obstacle, chemical / biological / radiological / nuclear (CBRN), air, visual and electronic/cyber. A cavalry troop has the organic capability to apply three of the eight: direct fire, indirect fire and visual.

Direct fire is achieved through one of the many direct-fire weapon systems, including the .50-caliber machinegun, Mk-19 grenade launcher, M240 machinegun, Javelin missile and M4 carbine. Indirect fire is achieved through the 120mm mortars or the M320 grenade launcher. The cavalry troop also has optics such as the LRAS and LLDR that provide long-range visual contact.

With more planning and preparation, obstacle and air contact can also be achieved. Obstacle effects can be achieved by employing concertina wire. Air can be achieved by employing the Raven. Although the Raven is an organic capability, the level of planning and the number of approvals necessary to set up a restricted operating zone (ROZ) to fly the actual Raven render this incredibly difficult to deploy relative to everything else. The term "Hasty ROZ" is misleading because the approval process can take more than six hours, and the resulting ROZ received might not even achieve the effect you wanted.

Also, be aware that mortars are unable to fire through the ROZ.

Using all available capabilities, the cavalry troop can acquire, identify and destroy enemy targets with remarkable efficiency. First, either a mounted or dismounted platform using the LRAS3 or LLDR acquires a target. Next, a

secondary platform is cued to provide visual redundancy and to assist in identification. This secondary platform can be another Stryker, a dismounted OP or a Raven. With the target identified as hostile, the mortar section relocates to engage with indirect fire. Simultaneously, a dismounted Javelin team maneuvers to engage with its weapon system as well. By continually observing the target and reporting any significant change in posture, the observers allow both the mortars and the Javelin team to maneuver within the engagement range. Once set, mortars engage with indirect fire while the Javelin team engages with direct fire.

In the preceding example, three forms of contact were applied to facilitate the destruction of the enemy: visual, indirect and direct. With added attachments, it is within the realm of possibility for the cavalry troop to apply additional forms of contact and to truly bewilder the enemy.

Delegate special capabilities to maneuvering unit

Cavalry troops receive various attachments throughout the rotation. Maneuver attachments such as tanks, Mobile Gun System (MGS) and battalion scouts directly increase combat power. Other attachments as snipers, Joint Terminal Attack Controllers, low-level voice-intercept teams, Q-50 radars and CBRN reconnaissance provide unique capabilities that can expand the breadth of the mission.

Understand that attachments are only assigned after deliberate planning and wargaming. Through the military decision-making process, a battle staff has determined that the chance of mission success is materially higher when the attachment is allocated. There may be a specific PIR that can only be collected through a specific capability.

However, the physical transfer of attachments throughout the battlefield is often fluid and chaotic. A troop commander can easily be overwhelmed and lose accountability of a unit that recently arrived. To mitigate this:

- First, establish SOP for receiving attachments. Have a checklist to ensure the integration is thorough. At a minimum, the checklist should contain call sign, frequency, number of personnel, battle rosters, equipment and sustainment concerns.
- Second, the troop command post, along with the first sergeant and troop executive officer, needs to integrate the attachments using the SOP. This has an added benefit of ensuring that Red and Yellow reports are accurate.
- Finally, delegate the maneuver and sustainment of the attachments to the platoon that will likely employ them. However, I recommend that the troop commander directs any maneuver attachments as an additional combat platoon.

Employ hunter-killer teams

Conducting zone reconnaissance against an opposing armored force without mobile anti-armor capabilities such as a tank or MGS will drastically slow the tempo of reconnaissance. Strykers by themselves do not have the firepower and protection to rapidly deploy, engage and destroy enemy armor. Making contact with enemy armor will require dismounting three kilometers away and waiting for dismounts to maneuver within direct-fire range of a camouflaged, hull-defilade enemy.

When the cavalry troop is assigned a tank or MGS platoon, the hunter-killer team is unlocked. Reconnaissance variants, or the hunters, have superior optics and low-target-signature dismount teams that allow for target acquisition at extended range. The hunters conduct target hand-off by sharing this information with the killers or the tanks. The killers are then able to initiate contact and facilitate the destruction of the enemy from a position of relative advantage. Afterward, hunters bound forward and rapidly continue forward movement.

This cycle of target acquisition, target destruction and forward progress occurs rapidly and can completely dislodge the enemy plans if a high enough tempo is achieved. Furthermore, with further repetition, the lethality of this partnership will increase through the rotation.

Update enemy situational template

The military is shifting to fight another global power. From Day 1, build your team to fight a near-peer enemy. Use regionally aligned near-peer threats when conducting vehicle identification. Use near-peer capabilities when conducting intelligence preparation of the battlefield.

The enemy can currently engage at greater distances than we can, so determine the probable line of deployment and probable line of contact based on this knowledge. Ruthlessly enforce 500 meters of vehicle dispersion and dismount scouts to clear complex terrain.

Make contact with the smallest echelon possible. The enemy we are preparing to fight will capitalize on any tactical misstep with potentially catastrophic results.

Shaping fight

The brigade commander shapes the deep fight with four primary weapons: intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance platforms; the cavalry squadron; the field-artillery battalion; and attack aviation. These weapons allow the infantry battalions to seize objectives.

However, they must be applied judiciously and with purpose. Every time the cannons fire, there's a possibility of receiving counterfire.

The loss of even one attack-aviation aircraft exponentially diminishes the effectiveness of airpower. This risk/reward calculation translates into the designation of high-payoff/high-value targets and the accompanying attack guidance. In other words, anything outside of the high-payoff target list will require organic capabilities to destroy.

Carry your sustainment

Two fuel cans and two water cans are the basic issue items for the Stryker. This underlying issue will sustain a full day of maneuver before going completely black. As large-scale combat operations do not support cavalry operations from a combat outpost, the cavalry troop needs to prepare to operate independently for an extended period of time. At a minimum, each Stryker should carry eight fuel cans and four water cans. The two bustle racks on the side can each hold five cans while the rear racks can hold four.

This setup allows for a minimum of three days of supply of Class III. With the cavalry troop operating at the margins of the forward-line-of-troops, unsecured and elongated supply lines are created. In addition, the enemy will continuously attempt to disrupt rear supply nodes and, when successful, the effects ripple throughout the battlefield. A daily resupply is simply not guaranteed.

Get first sergeant a vehicle

The troop first sergeant is not authorized a vehicle under the current SBCT cavalry troop modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE). If rigidly abiding by MTOE, there are two options where the first sergeant either rides in the supply Light Medium Tactical Vehicle or the medical-evacuation vehicle (MEV) when attached from the squadron's medical platoon.

Both of these choices are less than ideal. Handcuffing the first sergeant to the supply sergeant or the medics in the MEV denies the first sergeant the flexibility to conduct battlefield circulation, logistics operations or risk mitigation. Allowing the troop's most experienced Soldier to operate independently will pay off tremendously. At NTC, draw a truck from prepositioned stock for the first sergeant.

Assign personal responsibility for equipment

Every piece of fighting equipment in the troop needs to be assigned to an individual. Avoid assigning equipment to the crew or squad. The diffusion of responsibility for the equipment will almost certainly occur.

Having a good command supply discipline program with the proper sub-hand receipt holders will help with some of this. Platoon leaders sign for platoon equipment and then sign the equipment down to the user. Weapons, CBRN equipment and sensitive communications equipment may be signed by the unit armorer, CBRN specialist and communications specialist, respectively. Individual responsibility is then assigned to the user through the master authorization list (MAL). The MAL needs to be vigorously enforced to ensure compliance and to develop a culture of ownership.

Maintenance is executed by the user, or the Soldier who is assigned the equipment based on the MAL, who performs operator-level preventative maintenance checks and services (PMCS) on the equipment. The unit armorer, CBRN specialist and the communications specialist then validate the faults discovered by the user, similar

to mechanics validating vehicle faults identified by the operator. They do not conduct operator-level PMCS for equipment not assigned to them.

Developing an organizational culture where Soldiers have personal responsibility for equipment is critical in maintaining the functionality of key systems.

Conclusion

A rotation at NTC is the crucible for many organizations. Months of planning, training and execution can either validate or invalidate a commander's theories on developing a lethal, resilient and cohesive organization.

With time as a finite resource, a company or troop must focus on improving keystone habits that will eventually extend into other areas within the organization. The difficulty will always be navigating the competing priorities and planning appropriately to maximize all resources when made available.

Hopefully these lessons I've shared will help your organization focus on what's truly important in achieving tactical success at NTC.

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Acronym Quick-Scan

BMP – *Boyeva Mashina Pekhoty* (Russian infantry fighting vehicle)

BTG – brigade tactical group

CBRN - chemical / biological / radiological / nuclear

COIN – counterinsurgency operations

DATE – decisive-action training environment

GST – gunnery-skills test

HHC – headquarters and headquarters company

JBLM – Joint Base Lewis McChord

LFX – live-fire exercise

LLDR – Lightweight Laser Designator Rangefinder

LRAS3 – Long-Range Advanced Scout Surveillance System

MAL – master authorization list

MCCC – Maneuver Captain's Career Course

MEV – medical-evacuation vehicle

MGS – Mobile Gun System

MTOE – modified table of organization and equipment

NAI – named area of interest

NTC – National Training Center

OP – observation post

PIR – priority information requirement

PMCS – preventative maintenance checks and services

RoK – Republic of Korea

ROZ – restricted operating zone

SBCT – Stryker brigade combat team

STX – simulated tactical exercise

SOP – standing operating procedure