Forgotten Fundamentals in Reconnaissance and Security

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Tanks from 1ˢᵗ Battalion, 8ᵗʰ Cavalry Regiment, conduct security operations during exercise Combined Resolve XIII at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center, February 2, 2020. (Photo by Army National Guard SGT Fiona Berndt)

Introduction

Executing mission tasks that are built from mere running estimates, fighting for information to inform higher headquarters, and shaping an operational environment with few "knowns," cavalry squadrons routinely lean on the reconnaissance and security fundamentals while operating in austere environments. Through their ability to fight for information and answer intelligence requirements, cavalry organizations enable freedom of maneuver and decision making for commanders at echelon. However, observations from training centers indicate that numerous cavalry formations are falling short in their ability to shape the fight, retain combat power, and set conditions for the brigade's main effort. When we neglect the fundamentals of reconnaissance and security, the squadron becomes an inhibiting liability rather than a dominating enabler. From multiple rotations at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center, the message is clear—cavalry organizations are forgetting the fundamentals.

U.S. Army Soldiers assigned to 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry Regiment, conduct dismounted troop reconnaissance training for a platoon external evaluation at Hohenfels, Germany, on January 26, 2021. (U.S. Army photo by SGT Julian Padua)

Adjacent Unit Coordination

✦ Orient on the protected force (fundamental of security).[1]

Communication issues will always be at the heart of every unit's after action review but most will focus on communication *up*, to the higher headquarters, or communication *down*, to subordinate units. Few, however, will focus on *lateral* communication issues inherent in coordination with adjacent units. This is paramount for a cavalry organization because of the nature of reconnaissance handovers during forward passage of lines and rearward passage of lines. The reconnaissance handover consists of a battle handover, or a transition of area of operations responsibility, as well as an intelligence handover, a transition of targets and collected information requirements. Squadrons must be able to facilitate the transition of intelligence, targets, and terrain knowledge to the protected force during reconnaissance handovers in order to set conditions for the follow-on force to accomplish its mission.

The largest obstacle inhibiting effective reconnaissance handovers is the failure to plan and rehearse with adjacent units. During planning, units fail to exchange mutually supporting operations graphics or mission intent before execution. This inevitably leads to miscommunication, lost engagement opportunities, and preventable combat loss. To mitigate degraded adjacent unit coordination, squadrons must include representatives of all units involved in reconnaissance handovers at the combined arms rehearsal.

In the defense, the reconnaissance handover must be rehearsed at the respective squadron or battalion combined arms rehearsals, even to troop level, if possible. All observers and leaders in the cavalry (down to the platoon leader level) should know what platoon or element is behind them, along with their future task and purpose. Cavalry troops must have mutually supporting graphic control measures, at a minimum. It is important to use target reference points along key avenues of approach to rapidly pass a target and facilitate its subsequent destruction. Simply reporting to brigade is not enough to enable a timely target acquisition or transition. Special considerations must also be established to account for the surface danger zones of defending and screening units. The probability of fratricide directly correlates to the level of dissemination and coordination of direct fire control measures between adjacent units. Squadrons must take ownership of coordinating shared understanding along their unit boundaries, especially during displacement operations.

In the offense, successful cavalry squadrons not only seek to answer priority intelligence requirements (PIRs) for the brigade, but they also identify how their scheme of maneuver ties into the overall concept of operations. For example, if the cavalry squadron is conducting a zone reconnaissance leading up to an objective, discussions between the squadron and the follow-on assaulting battalion should occur, focused on what the battalion commander will need to know in order to enable their attack. Battalion PIRs, route trafficability, obstacles, enemy composition and disposition, suitable avenues of approach, and any other specified information are all likely information requirements that the cavalry squadron needs to provide. These reports should flow not only to the brigade but also to the customer battalion immediately to the cavalry squadron's rear. This is the true definition of enabling timely decision making.

Displacing the Squadron

✦ Retain freedom of maneuver (fundamental of reconnaissance).[2]

✦ Provide reaction time and maneuver space (fundamental of security).[3]

British soldiers of the Queen Royal Hussars prepare for tactical maneuvering during Saber Junction 17 at the Hohenfels Training Area, Germany, May 6, 2017. (U.S. Army photo by SPC Michael Bradley)

With special consideration to the defense, cavalry squadrons rarely define what it means to reach their displacement criteria. When the trigger is met to displace, troops and squadrons have rarely prepared to displace in contact or under pressure. Ideally, displacement must consist of preplanned (and rehearsed) subsequent battle positions that are supported by indirect fires to enable the cavalry squadron to transition while maintaining combat power. Units must also be deliberate, not hesitant, in initiating their displacement. It exists for a reason and ultimately allows the cavalry to properly transition while maintaining the ability to continue to fight for the brigade. Triggers to initiate displacement must be clear and easily understood to the lowest level. Hesitation at the transition will lead to unnecessary combat losses.

Part of maintaining freedom of maneuver also relies on the squadron's ability to deny freedom of maneuver to the enemy. Since aggressive direct fire engagements are likely to compromise observation posts and increase unwanted decisive engagement, obstacles become the squadron's primary means of disrupting enemy force maneuver. Effective obstacle emplacement continues to be the most neglected component for cavalry organizations conducting a security mission task, almost to the point of nonexistence. Although the squadron's obstacles will not be as robust as obstacles that are along the support brigade's main defensive belt, they still need to be as deliberate. Emplacing obstacles directly correlates to providing increased reaction time and maneuver space for the protected force, especially during a guard.

Enduring Operations in Reconnaissance and Security

✦ Retain freedom of maneuver (fundamental of reconnaissance).[4]

✦ Provide early and accurate warning (fundamental of security).[5]

While not the perfect solution for enabling security operations, the use of engagement area development in the screen undeniably enables success for the cavalry squadron. By using all the steps in the process (including the commonly neglected rehearsal, which should include adjacent units, a verification of the reconnaissance handover plan, and the displacement plan), the cavalry can ensure it is prepared to answer intelligence requirements, fight for reconnaissance if necessary, and retain combat power. Any dead space should be mitigated using dismounted observation posts in depth, which platoon leaders and troop commanders should employ after careful analysis of the sector sketch.

Furthermore, establishing a narrative of how to interact with the enemy, codified as engagement criteria within commander's reconnaissance or security guidance, will allow the squadron to impose deliberate lethality and to preserve combat power. Too often, squadron staffs relegate engagement criteria into the rudimentary box checks, "engage enemy infantry fighting vehicles, but not tanks," rather than guiding the echeloned engagement of weapon systems in order to balance lethality with economy of force. (For phase II, use 155 mm to destroy enemy observation posts undetected, 120 mm mortar fire to disrupt or displace enemy-mounted reconnaissance, vehicle-mounted antitank systems to initiate direct fire contact with section-sized or below BRDMs, .50 caliber for squad-sized dismounts, etc.). In order to retain combat power, the cavalry squadron must tailor its engagement criteria appropriately to avoid becoming decisively engaged. Engagement criteria must be definitive and eliminate the guesswork for the scout on the ground. Otherwise, reconnaissance units will become unnecessarily compromised and unable to continue information collection efforts because of observation posts meeting disengagement or troop displacement criteria.

Feeding the Brigade's Information Collection Plan

✦ Ensure continuous reconnaissance (fundamental of reconnaissance).[6]

✦ Orient on reconnaissance objectives (fundamental of reconnaissance).[7]

✦ Report all information rapidly and accurately (fundamental of reconnaissance).[8]

✦ Perform continuous reconnaissance (fundamental of security).[9]

Cavalry formations continue to struggle with leveraging reconnaissance and security operations to enhance the brigade's information collection plan. Whether it is from collecting on irrelevant PIRs that do not enable the brigade commander to make an advantageous decision, or failing to answer PIRs within the latest time information is of value (LTIOV), reconnaissance organizations routinely neglect their critical role in information collection.

In order to influence the collection plan, squadron staff must integrate with their higher headquarters during intelligence preparation of the battlefield or risk degrading the full development of a focused reconnaissance objective and supporting PIR. Nesting with brigade during the earliest steps of the military decision-making process will enable the squadron staff to synchronize across all warfighting functions with its higher headquarters and ensure that the ground reconnaissance elements understand their role in answering PIRs. Inversely, failure to synchronize with higher headquarters will contribute to a domino effect of ambiguous reconnaissance objects, confusing information requirements, and wasted effort from troop collection assets that feed into an unfocused brigade collection plan. It is not just information that the squadron must collect; it is also the development of that information through analysis, as well as feedback to the brigade, that will lead to answering PIRs.

Cavalry organizations transition information into intelligence in order to drive brigade operations. Information itself is worthless unless it contributes to intelligence, and intelligence is useless unless it contributes to an assessment. With supporting intelligence, assessments are what allow the brigade S-2, and ultimately the brigade commander, to visualize the operational environment and make advantageous decisions within it. If we can make assessments lower in echelon, those assessments will portray, in a more timely and more accurate manner, the true events of enemy forces on the battlefield. Furthermore, troop commanders who are empowered to make decisions will decrease the amount of time it takes to answer a PIR within LTIOV and in turn allow the brigade commander to exert control over the enemy's decision-making cycle. In order to provide assessments, commanders at echelon must be able to comprehend and differentiate between the multitudes of possible enemy courses of action, which only occurs when the squadron staff is fully nested and integrated with brigade planning cycles.

All-Weather, Day or Night

Cavalry squadrons provide the most reliable set of eyes and ears for their higher headquarters to employ. Charged to dominate the operational environment, they must ensure shared understanding of both enemy and terrain and do so by adhering to a set of universal fundamentals. Fundamentals that, if ignored, prevent ground reconnaissance elements from achieving the reconnaissance objective and, subsequently, the brigade from realizing its decisive operation. Cavalry formations must be prepared to provide early warning and detection, generate assessments from collected information requirements, and destroy select enemy targets in order to enable reaction time and maneuver space for the protected force. Cavalry squadrons cannot accomplish this task if they are compromised, destroyed, or fixed by enemy reconnaissance. To live up to the status of being all-weather, day or night, squadrons must embrace *all* the fundamentals of reconnaissance and security. ✳

Endnotes

1. Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-98, *Reconnaissance and Security Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 1 July 2015), 6-2.

2. Ibid., 5-1.

3. Ibid., 6-2.

4. Ibid., 5-1.

5. Ibid., 6-2.

6. Ibid., 5-1.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., 6-2.

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