

# Training the Task Force Scout Platoon

by Lieutenant Colonel Rick Lynch and Captain Steve Cichocki

One cannot overemphasize the importance of the scout platoon to the task force commander. That platoon is truly the eyes and ears of the commander, and must be trained to an extremely high level. The purpose of this article is to share some thoughts and ideas on how to do this.

Our observations are based on two years of experience training the scout platoon of Task Force 1-8 Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division. We used the First Cavalry Division Scout Platoon competition in 1993, and the III Corps Cav Cup competitions, to determine if our training program was properly focused. Specifically, we evaluated zone recon, screen, land navigation, enemy identification and doctrine, indirect fires, and communications during both competitions, and the task force scout platoon performed well, winning the Division 1993 competition and placing as the top HMMWV scout platoon in the 1994 III Corps Cav Cup. The true test came in March 1995 during the National Training Center (NTC) rotation. The scout platoon performed assigned missions admirably.

First and foremost, it is critical to define duties and responsibilities as we develop the training plan. Who's in charge of what? The task force commander has primary responsibility for training the scout platoon. He cannot delegate that. He knows what he expects from his scout platoon, and he has the authority to allocate necessary resources to ensure that the training is properly conducted. The task force commander also has the responsibility to ensure he has the right guy as his scout platoon leader. As a rule, this should be a seasoned platoon leader



who has attended the Scout Platoon Leader Course (SPLC). Specific competencies desirable in a scout platoon leader include confidence, stamina, endurance, and mature judgement. The task force commander must be willing to have a close personal relationship with his scout platoon leader. Their relationship must evolve to the point where the scout platoon leader knows what the task force commander wants, sometimes even before the commander asks for it.

The task force commander must allocate time and resources to the scout platoon to effect its training plan. All too often, the scout platoon gets detailed out on miscellaneous tasks which pull members of the platoon from critical training. The task force commander must prohibit that. One technique is to provide blocks of "protected time" for the scout platoon. The place to spend this protected training time is in the field.

The commander has sole ownership of the scout platoon. The scout platoon leader does not work for the S2 or the FSO; he works directly for the commander. All too often, the scout platoon

leader is overwhelmed by the number of "bosses" he has. When the commander allocates protected training time, the scout platoon leader must fiercely defend it. All the soldiers must participate in the training. He must bring problems to the attention of the commander immediately.

The scout platoon leader is the platoon's principal trainer. He knows what the battalion commander expects from the platoon, but he cannot do it alone. He must properly utilize his NCOs, who are clearly critical in training the platoon. The scout platoon leader must get them involved in the planning and execution of training. NCOs know the individual abilities of the platoon's soldiers. They must ensure that all individual skills are trained to a "T."

FM 25-100 and FM 25-101 lead us to truly battle-focused training. The training program that we designed for the scout platoon took battle-focused training one step further. We used the same priority intelligence requirements (PIRs) that we found ourselves employing in tactical missions to help us further define those critical skills — for the scouts individually, the scout sections, and the platoon as a whole.

All reconnaissance efforts must be focused to a finite level. The scout platoon must look for those things that the commander must know in order for the task force to successfully accomplish its mission. These requirements come in the form of PIRs. They must be drafted by the task force commander (upon recommendation by the TF S2). They must crystallize the things the commander must know. If the task force leaders understand the com-

mander's intent, and know the PIRs, then they have multiplied their chances for success.

An example set of PIRs for a task force defense are:

- 1) Size, location, and disposition of enemy reconnaissance elements
- 2) Location of enemy's main effort
- 3) Enemy's use of NBC assets
- 4) Enemy's use of FASCAM mine-fields
- 5) Location of engineer elements in movement formation
- 6) Helicopter/air insertions of dismounted reconnaissance teams

In the TF attack, they might be:

- 1) Recon element OPs
- 2) Size, location, disposition of recon elements
- 3) AT element locations
- 4) Obstacle location and size
- 5) Location of combined arms reserve
- 6) Location of battle positions/enemy main effort

While the PIRs provide focus for the actual conduct of reconnaissance, they also provide for a training baseline — an essential task list, if you will. The scout platoon must train on those collective and individual skills that allow it to successfully gather the PIRs. These are the skills that we focused on as we developed the scout platoon training plan. These fundamental skills included physical conditioning, dismounted operations, land navigation, and employment of direct and indirect fires.

Scouts must be in outstanding physical condition. The key to a successful PT program is innovation. Use all available resources. Our plan included morning PT that concentrated on sit-ups and different variations of long distance runs on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Monday through Friday afternoons, except Thursday, training concluded with a trip to the gym for a one hour weight-training session, organized and supervised by section. On Tuesday mornings, we swam laps at the pool, because scouts should be good swimmers. On Thursday afternoons, organized athletics helped team building. To maintain growth, we set goals during counseling and measured progress with

an APFT every third Friday. Our PT program was the result of experimentation, and we continued to find new ways to make PT interesting and challenging.

The scout platoon must understand dismounted operations. Nothing is more effective than a dismounted scout. Although the HMMWV is a stealthy vehicle, it is still essential to get up close to confirm what you think you see from a distance, and to gather more detailed information. Training for this task must be realistic, at night when appropriate, with all equipment, over moderate distances, and with an OPFOR.

If a scout has a most important task, it is land navigation. Every member of the scout platoon, down to the junior man, must be an expert. Although some scout platoons possess SLGRs, and scouts must be trained on them, too, the majority of land navigation training should be without them. Assume worst-case scenarios in your training program. Remember Murphy's Law of Land Navigation — SLGRs will malfunction at the worst possible moment.

There are really two critical subtasks to scout land navigation. The first is knowing where you are, where you want to go, and how to get there. Junior leaders must be superior navigators. Leaders can train subordinates on this task by asking for frequent fixes during every training event. Training must be both mounted and dismounted. PLDC and EIB practice courses are excellent dismounted training



*"The place to spend protected training time is in the field, with all assigned personnel and slice elements, to develop skills necessary to gather PIRs and develop a sound SOP..."*



*"Our PT program was the result of constant experimentation..."*

*Above, the platoon at the III Corps Cav Cup competition, which helped focus the unit's physical training program.*



*"Dissemination of PIRs is critical. Every member of the platoon must know what information the commander has deemed most important..."*

devices and, on a larger scale, platoon-constructed mounted courses can be imaginative and challenging if constructed properly.

The second critical subtask is figuring out where the enemy is and what he looks like. Junior leaders must also be trained in IPB to enable them to select routes, danger areas, and likely enemy positions as part of land navigation training. Of course, the R&S plan will aid in this process, but the scout must not rely on this completely. Including junior leaders in the IPB planning process during protected training time field missions is a great way to build understanding.

A scout that can bring effective long range indirect fires on the enemy is an essential asset. Even the most junior scout must be able to call for indirect fire. Preliminary training in garrison can employ devices like the Observed Fire Trainer (OFT), but every opportunity must be seized to train with live rounds. Mortar live fire is an excellent opportunity, as is registration for TT XII and other live-fire exercises in which mortars fire. Field artillery opportunities, of course, are just as important, but harder to come by. Battalion- and brigade-size live-fire exercises enable scouts to hone their indirect fire skills with the big guns.

The scout platoon must also know how to use available direct-fire systems. Fundamentally, we must remember that, by design, the HMMWV scout platoon has a limited direct-fire capability. Its weapons are primarily for suppression and self-protection. Although still in its final draft form, FM 17-12-8 is a manual badly in need of revision. Like its tank gunnery counterpart, it should train the live-fire situations that are most likely to be encountered. Close-in, ambush, and reaction-type engagements to suppress an enemy more accurately represent what a HMMWV-mounted scout will encounter. A scout has no need to engage a moving flank truck at a range of 800m in the offense during daylight. Further, multiple engagements at stationary and moving vehicles at night in the offense at 400m and 600m with 50 rounds of M2HB ammunition really suggest a departure from reality, given the platform, weapon, and scout mission. Finally, section runs by four vehicles more closely resemble what a tank

platoon would do, not what a scout section maximizing stealth would do. In the meantime, battalion scout platoons should tailor their scout gunnery programs to reflect their most likely engagements, given their missions. Analysis during tactical play can serve as a basis for designing the gunnery program. Commanders and scout platoon leaders must do a reality check and train the platoon in what most effectively supports their unit's METL.

The make-up of the scout platoon is an important training consideration. The scout platoon can consist of more personnel than just the 19Ds assigned. In each section, we carried engineers from the battalion's engineer company slice to evaluate obstacles in detail and calculate breaching assets required. Their knowledge assisted the platoon in more exact reporting, and we learned from them some of the expertise that was engineer-specific. Since we seldom used demolitions, our engineers also taught us the techniques they used for breaching, and the entire platoon benefited from our habitual relationship. The key is habitual association — the same engineers all the time. Cross-fertilization of skills is smart training.

As an army, we must do better at equipping our scout platoons. Quite frankly, binoculars are the most sophisticated piece of equipment the scout platoon has today in quantities. The tools scouts need for the future are found in technology that already exists. Efforts must be made to expedite their acquisition. Specifically, the intravehicular information system (IVIS), integrated with a global positioning system (GPS), are extremely effective tools that enhance the scout's abilities to gather PIRs and transmit that information to the task force commander. Scouts need the capabilities of these information-sharing systems, already fielded in the M1A2. Also, the Long Range Advanced Scout Surveillance System, integrated with the GPS and digitally linked with the IVIS, complete the system that possesses the capabilities our scouts need on the battlefield. Increased acquisition, reporting, and navigational capabilities, combined with information-sharing systems, are needed to remain effective in the future as we digitize our Army. The costs of acquisition are far outweighed by the capabilities our scouts need now and will possess as a result.

The key element is that the task force commander must be personally involved in training the scout platoon. He must work directly with that scout platoon leader to ensure that the platoon leader clearly understands the necessary training focus dictated by PIRs, and that he has the resources to execute demanding, realistic training. The scout platoon leader must, in turn, be relentless in his approach to training the platoon. Our soldiers deserve top-notch training, and our mission success depends on it.

Lieutenant Colonel Rick Lynch is a 1977 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy. He is a graduate of EOBC, AOAC, CAS<sup>3</sup>, CGSC, and the U.S. Army War College. He served as the squadron S3 of 1st Squadron, 11th ACR and as the regimental executive officer of the 11th ACR. He commanded the 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division from May 93 to May 95. He is currently assigned to the EXFOR Coordination Cell (ECC) at the 4th Infantry Division, Fort Hood, Texas.

Captain Stephen M. Cichocki enlisted in the U.S. Army on 9 March 1983. As an enlisted soldier, he rose to the rank of sergeant first class and attended both the Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course and the M1/M1A1 Master Gunner Course. He was commissioned from the Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning on 30 Jan 92. He served as a tank platoon leader and battalion scout platoon leader in 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division. He is a graduate of the Armor Officer Basic Course and the Scout Platoon Leaders Course. He is currently a student at the Armor Officer Advanced Course.