

# Breaking the Reconnaissance Code

by Captain Eric B. Shaw

*Recent articles about the optimum design for cavalry vehicles — big or small, wheeled or tracked, heavily armed or stealthy — are fine questions, but for today's scouts who must fight with what they have, irrelevant ones, this author's emphasis is on the functions of scouting. — Ed.*

Scouting is an art form that is developed and honed into a finely tuned instrument over a period of time. Also, I believe that the most obvious is being overlooked. We are asking ourselves the wrong question. "What vehicle design and make-up does a scout need to accomplish his mission?"

As leaders, I think we should be asking ourselves how can we get more out of the scout platoon as it is currently designed with its organic equipment.

Presently, our scouting techniques and methods are very good. The platforms that carry our scouts into battle are some of the best in the world. While we are not in dire need of a new scout vehicle, we are in dire need of our leaders being properly trained to employ the present vehicles in an austere environment. Over the past 15 years, the armor community has fought within itself to decide what is best, the Bradley-based Cavalry Fighting Vehicle (CFV) or the High Mobility Multipurpose Wheel Vehicle (HMMWV). As of today, we are no closer to answering this riddle than we were ten years ago, prior to Desert Storm. As we did in Desert Storm, we will do the same for the next big conflict — fight with what we've got. More than likely, the design for a new scout vehicle will not be approved prior to the next war. Therefore, let's not hinder ourselves by discussing the design flaws and inadequacies of our present platforms and ask instead how we can better accomplish our mission with the tools at hand.

Looking at ARTEP 17-57-10-MTP, Mission Training Plan For The Scout Platoon, the missions of the HMMWV and CFV scout platoons are the same. Depth, frontages, duration of observation posts, and other collective tasks are the same. The expectations of a 19D, Skill Level 1 through Skill Level 4, remains the same no matter what type vehicle he is assigned. So why do scouts

in HMMWVs have trouble meeting their reconnaissance requirements at the National Training Center while scouts mounted in CFVs tend to do a lot better, and vice versa, at the Combat Maneuver Training Center in Hohenfels, Germany? It all comes down to three areas: training, terrain, and time.

**Terrain.** A scout platoon's mission, enemy focus, troops available for the operation, and time to complete all necessary tasks are the same. The terrain is the only element of METT-T that has a significant impact on the outcome of a scout platoon's mission. While assigned to the 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment (OPFOR) in Hohenfels, Germany as a scout platoon leader, I saw first-hand how the terrain impacted on wheeled and tracked reconnaissance vehicles.

HMMWV scout platoons were able to maneuver through the heavily vegetated areas. They could move along small trails very rapidly and stay off the main tank trails. With their winches, HMMWVs could self-recover and continue the mission. This allowed the HMMWV scouts the opportunity to maneuver closer to their assigned objective.

CFVs, on the other hand, would remain mired until another like vehicle recovered them or until they died. Bradley scouts could not conduct adequate reconnaissance within the maneuver box and would die before the main battle began. The CFV was too large to get too far off the main tank trails; scouts would remain mounted on the vehicle, bump into an obstacle and die, or stumble around throughout the night looking for a bypass. With our great ability to turn night into day, the ideal time to conduct reconnaissance is at night. Thermal capabilities gives the CFV a distinct advantage over the HMMWV, but this advantage is neutralized by the vehicle's noise. As a scout on an OP, I did not need to see a CFV at night but only listen for its roar as it struggled to traverse the wooded terrain of Germany. Bottom line: in heavily vegetated terrain, the CFV scout has difficulty conducting mounted reconnaissance.

In a totally different environment (NTC), the tables are turned; the Brad-

ley scouts are very adept at conducting reconnaissance and security operations. The open terrain at the National Training Center is more user-friendly to CFVs than the more confined terrain of Germany. At the NTC, and in similar terrain, the mounted cavalry scout with his 42-ton monster is more likely to survive than his counterpart in the HMMWV. The desert offers limited areas for scouts to hide their vehicles. In the desert, HMMWV scouts spend more time running from the OPFOR than conducting reconnaissance and security operations. Because of the desert's limited concealment, vehicle survivability is highly essential. The thin skin of the scout HMMWV makes it a lucrative target of opportunity for the OPFOR. The CFV, on the other hand, has the ability to take a hit, return effective fire, and continue the mission, so the CFV performs better as a desert environment scout platform.

**Training.** After comparing the performance of the two vehicles designed for identical missions, training levels become a factor. BLUFOR scouts tend to die early and often at the Combat Training Centers. The reason I emphasize BLUFOR is because OPFOR scouts tend to survive on the battlefield. We all know that they live in that environment and know all the best places to hide. That's the advantage of playing in your own backyard. I doubt the United States Army will fight a conventional war in Pinyon Canyon or on any other piece of real estate within our borders anytime in the near future. So let's move on to what we do know. The next time scouts are deployed into combat will more than likely be in a foreign country and very few of the scouts will have any combat experience. Fighting in someone else's hometown is our business.

The one critical component that separates a dead scout from a live breathing one is **technique**. OPFOR and BLUFOR scouts are trained at the same school. They are all 19Ds and their missions are the same, reconnaissance and security. So why do OPFOR scouts seem to perform their missions so much more effectively? The answer to this is simple, *they are afraid to die*. The OPFOR scout is outgunned and his night-fighting capability is limited. So as an

OPFOR scout, he is forced to use skills learned at the Armor Center. Instead of using his platform as a reconnaissance vehicle, it is used more as a battle chariot. The OPFOR uses the vehicle to get him to the desired location, which is normally out of listening range of the BLUFOR, where he then dismounts and begins his reconnaissance. Our BLUFOR scouts tend to ride their vehicles to their death. Our scouts have PLGRs, improved thermal sights, better weapon systems, and a myriad of intelligence support from higher. What they lack is the will to wage war and do their job the proper way. They become creatures of comfort. Instead of dismounting and calling the vehicle forward after the bend in road is cleared, our scouts would prefer to drive around the bend only to discover a BMP at the ready.

Training and repetition is what makes the OPFOR so good. Each rotation for the OPFOR scouts at the CTCs is another opportunity to hone their already sharpened skills. This is a huge advantage that our BLUFOR scouts only get once a year, or twice if they are lucky. While stationed at CMTC as a scout platoon leader for the OPFOR, everything was kept very simple. There was never anything fancy about the way we conducted business in the field. The goal was to sneak, peek, report, and not be seen. I think we can all agree that, in a nutshell, that is what all scouts should do. With the assistance of the battalion commander and his staff, the majority of our scout platoons are highly trained. The skills that will assist the platoon in surviving at the CTCs and in combat will rely heavily on the platoon leader and the ability of the senior NCOs to effectively teach and train the proper techniques of reconnaissance.

**Time.** As we all know, conducting reconnaissance is a slow and methodical process. Scouts must be provided the time to accomplish their mission. Many of our scouts die prior to the main body crossing the line of departure because we, as leaders, did not provide them with enough time to accomplish their mission. In order to provide the necessary time leaders must have a good understanding of what a reconnaissance or security mission requires. A good scout will tell you that he can clear a zone at a rate of one kilometer per hour, which is good walking speed. An injustice is served when the zone is 5km wide and 10km deep and the platoon has only 4 hours to complete the task. The platoon leader is forced into a situation that decreases the chance of

## Scout Training Plan

The following 10-day training plan is a simple guideline that will help leaders focus on the essential elements needed on the battlefield. This training plan can be conducted in any sequence. Simplicity is the key.

### **DAY ONE:** Map reading

Training should initially focus on basic map reading skills, then progress to more advanced skills, i.e., orienteering and polar plots.

### **DAY TWO:** Land Navigation

Training should focus on both mounted and dismounted navigational skills with day and night iteration.

### **DAY THREE:** Patrol Techniques

Training should focus on two- and three-man buddy team techniques. Training should conclude with scouts conducting dismounted recon of an objective (night).

### **DAY FOUR:** Radio Procedures

Training should focus on proper radio net procedures, SOI usage, secure net operations as well as frequency hopping.

### **DAY FIVE:** Buddy Aid

Training should focus on immediate buddy aid that scouts may need to perform under limited supervision (sprains, small cuts, insect bites, dehydration, MEDEVAC procedures, marking LZs).

### **DAY SIX:** Observation Posts

The focus should be on identifying and establishing proper OP positions. Scouts should understand the importance of NFAs.

### **DAY SEVEN:** Call for Fire

This training event works well when combined with mortar or artillery live fire exercises. Scouts learn to call for and adjust fire on enemy targets.

### **DAY EIGHT through TEN:** AA procedures, TLP, maintenance, load plans, weapons qualification, and retraining.

These three days can be used in a variety of ways. The first seven days focused primarily on dismounted operations and procedures, the last three training days are focused more on platoon-level tasks.

\* Each day should conclude with a test of the material covered and time should be planned to retrain personnel.

the platoon's survival. Many commanders say that the side that wins the recon/counterrecon fight will win the battle the next day. Nine times out of ten this is true. So, if the success or failure of the recon effort determines the fight, commanders may want to focus more attention and assets on reconnaissance and security operations.

In conclusion, scouts are combat multipliers that we treasure dearly. They are also men we send into battle to determine the enemy's disposition. They are the young lieutenants, old platoon sergeants, and fiery young soldiers who try to do the best job they can each and every time they cross the LD. As leaders, we must be aware that they cannot accomplish their mission by themselves. It takes a team effort to prove to the world class OPFOR, and the world

itself, that our scouts are the best at what they do.

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