

ARMOR

Mounted Maneuver Journal
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A CAVALRY PROFILE

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Departments

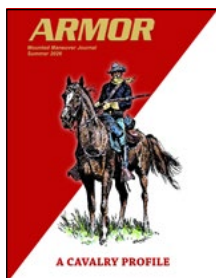
- 1 **Chief of Armor's Hatch** by BG Chad C. Chalfont
- 3 **From the Gunner's Seat** by CSM Ryan W. Roush
- 4 **From the Boresight Line** by SFC Mark T. Backer
- 6 **From the Doctrine Corner** by MAJ Conlan Kastanias
- 7 **CSM Bolyard Memorial Scholarship** by (Retired) SGM Carl Johnson
- 64 **Featured Unit:** 69th Armor Regiment

Features

- 8 **How to Fight the Cavalry Squadron and Win!**
by LTC John Albert
- 12 **The Fight To See: A Future for the U.S. Army Cavalry**
by MAJ R. Atticus Blair
- 18 **Cavalry as a Fighting Force...Not a Spineless Adjunct!**
by Robert Cameron, Ph.D.
- 26 **The Illusion of Transparency**
by LTC Scott Dawe and LTC Alan Hastings
- 30 **"Whoever Saw Cavalry?"**
by LTC David Devine and MAJ Zachary Newman
- 38 **The Cav Forever: R&S for Emerging Formations**
by CPT Christopher Jordan
- 43 **DINOCAVE: Train Forms of Contact to Build Combined Arms and Multi-Domain Warfighters**
by LTC Gary M. Klein
- 48 **Economy of Force: The 2d Dragoons at Lunéville, September 1944**
by CPT Connor McLeod
- 52 **Inform, Protect, and Fight: A Cavalry Prospectus**
LTC Matthew B. Schardt
- 59 **U.S. Army Cavalry Leader's Course: Experience Attending as a German Soldier**
Mastersergeant (Officer Candidate) Jobst Hinrich Selaff

FRONT COVER:

The cover art for the Summer issue of **ARMOR** pays homage to the early years of the journal. Old Bill serves as the Cavalry mascot and first appeared on the cover in 1903.



BACK COVER:

U.S. Soldiers assigned to 2nd Bn, 70th Armor Regiment, 2nd ABCT, 1st ID maneuver a M1 Abrams MBT at the NTC, April 08, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by SPC Christopher Ortiz-Salcedo)



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CHIEF OF ARMOR'S HATCH

BG Chad C. Chalfont
55th Chief of Armor



Unlocking Maneuver Through Combined Arms

In past articles, I have offered some thoughts on how we fight: training standards, the Armor Force Fundamentals, why our leaders are built different, and our doctrine. In my last Hatch article, I would like to offer a final thought for our Armor Branch and its leaders: stay focused on training and driving readiness in the Armored Combined Arms Team.

The Armor Branch maintains a long-standing commitment to training and fighting the Combined Arms Team. We recognize the combat potential that comes with building a team that fights with all components of combat power – from the forward scout to the logistical trains. Fighting as a Combined Arms Team puts formations in the best position to force the enemy to fight in multiple directions and against multiple forms of contact. Our experience in training and combat drives us to impose our will on the enemy by combining arms – and win by doing so. The Distinctive Unit Insignia of the Armor School (and the National Training Center) shows not just the hallmarks of our branch – the lightning bolt, track, and cannon – but also the colors of the Infantry, Artillery, and Armor, which constitute core components of the Combined Arms Team. The culture of our Armor Branch embraces high tempo, mission command, and

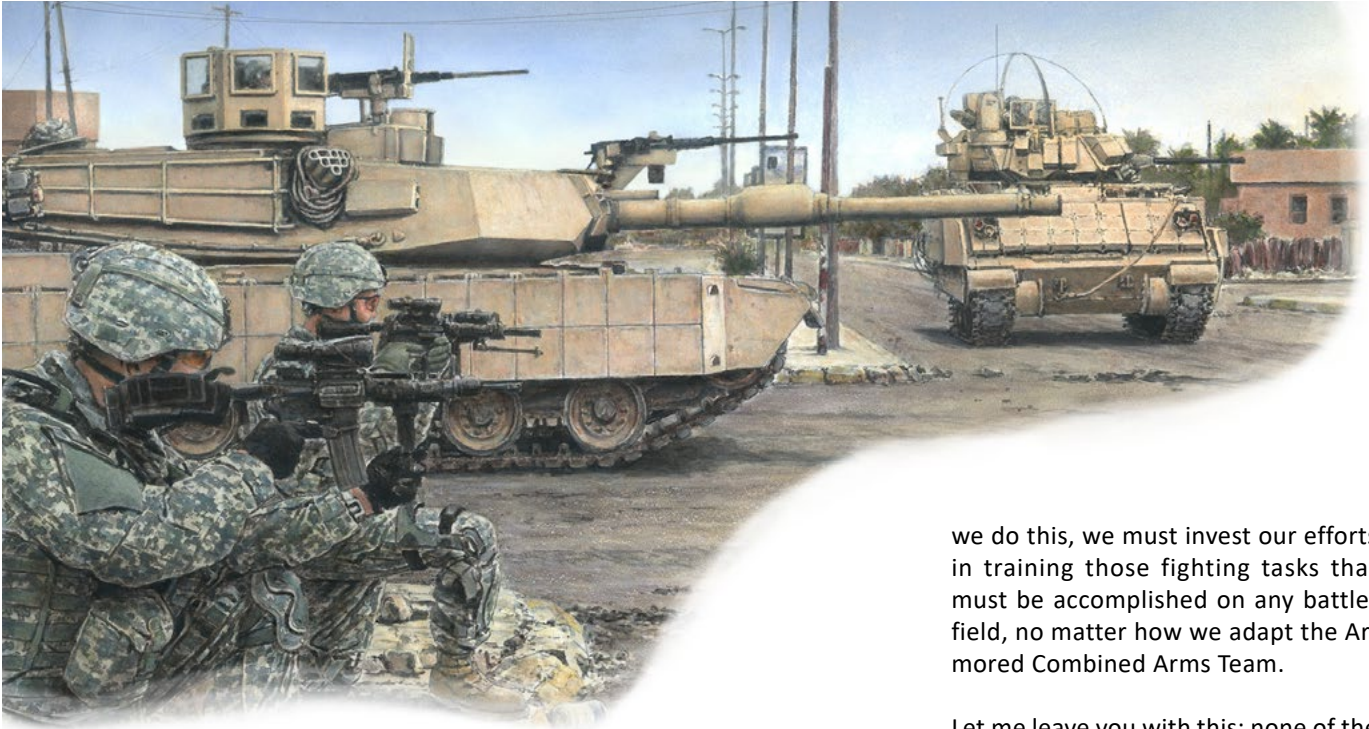
organizational flexibility to adjust to continuously changing tactical situations.

Immediately after World War II, armor and cavalry leaders gathered to chart the course of the Armor and Cavalry. Their efforts resulted in the establishment of the Armor Branch that embraced both armor and cavalry mounted elements. While they created an association to promote and protect Armor Branch interests and heritage, these World War II leaders and their successors unanimously embraced the Combined Arms Team. If the Armor Branch is the Combat Arm of Decision, it is only because it fights as the Armored Combined Arms Team. Our branch always has and always will embrace fighting by combined arms.

More importantly, the Armored Combined Arms Team puts us in the best position to innovate and solve an enduring feature of warfare: new technologies – and their disruptive influence on the battlefield. During World War I and into the dawn of World War II, the Armored Combined Arms Team (with an emphasis on mechanization) restored maneuver to the battlefield by solving the positional warfare problem created by machine guns, barbed wire, and massed artillery. During the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the Armored Combined Arms Team (with an

emphasis on infantry, armor, and mobile short-range air defense) retained maneuver by solving the problem of anti-tank guided missiles and attack aircraft. During the 1990s, Armored Combined Arms Teams spearheaded the Force XXI initiatives that drove the ways we fight today (sensor proliferation, long-range precision fires, and distributed operations). Today, our Army rightly sees a future battlefield characterized by persistent observation, extended distances, and extreme lethality – including high volumes of relatively cheap unmanned systems. In my view, the U.S. Army will turn to the Armored Combined Arms Team to solve this problem: not just to survive on the battlefield, but to retain the ability to maneuver and win decisively.

As we adapt and transform our formations to meet the challenges of the next battlefield, we must retain the wide field of view – anchored on the Combined Arms Team. A narrow field of view risks developing solutions to a specific problem, only to miss the bigger opportunity for long-lasting battlefield effectiveness. For example, in the 1930s France built heavily armed and armored tanks, but they lacked a broader framework for their effective employment. Harnessed to a doctrine of linear operations and a deliberate pace of operations, French tank organizations in 1940 struggled against



German Panzer divisions. Although the Germans were equipped with lighter and less powerful platforms, they employed combined arms tactics under broader doctrinal principles of mission command, rapid operations, and deep penetrations of enemy defenses. Constrained by a narrow field of view, French armored units struggled to seize and retain the initiative at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels, even when they enjoyed local successes. The French Army took a narrow view of a new technology (the tank) with disastrous results. For us today, the question cannot be narrow. It is not, “how will the tank and infantry fighting vehicle survive against drones?” Instead, we must take the wide field of view and ask, “how will we adapt the Armored Combined Arms Team so that it can maneuver to achieve decision on the battlefield?”

Our Armor Branch and its leaders will continue to adapt how we think about fighting the Combined Arms Team. While armor, infantry, and artillery formed the core of the Combined Arms Team decades ago, we also saw the need to integrate all capabilities into the fight: engineers, air defense, military intelligence, and logistics. As new capabilities come online, we must put the full weight of our branch behind integrating capabilities like unmanned systems, loitering munitions, artificial intelligence, and whatever comes next. This means we need to understand the strengths and weaknesses of every new capability and determine how to bring it onto the Armored Combined Arms Team. We need to think about fighting with vigor while reinforcing our branch’s culture of teamwork. We should expect the ideas on this important work to come not just from the top-down, but from the bottom-up. As

we do this, we must invest our efforts in training those fighting tasks that must be accomplished on any battlefield, no matter how we adapt the Armored Combined Arms Team.

Let me leave you with this: none of the theory, the doctrine, or the talk about the Armored Combined Arms Team means much if we do not commit to training it and making it ready. We see great drive across the Armored Force every single day – in our tougher gunnery standards, our focus on the Armored Force Fundamentals, and the daily grind of our formations. But we cannot stop there. We have more work to do, and it requires the entire team. We must fight for every opportunity to train exactly as we intend to fight: with the Armored Combined Arms Team. Every single training repetition that forces us to combine arms in the close fight will pay off wherever and whenever we fight next. Our Armor Branch, our leaders, our Soldiers – we achieve decision by maneuver. We have always been the spearhead of the Combined Arms Team. We will be the ones who train it, make it ready, and lead it into the next fight.

Forge the Thunderbolt!

FROM THE GUNNER'S SEAT

CSM Ryan W. Roush
Command Sergeant Major
U.S. Army Armor School



Cavalry's Role in the Multi-Domain Battlefield

As we look across the current and future operating environments, one reality is glaringly clear: the modern battlefield is increasingly transparent, lethal, and unforgiving. To survive and win in large-scale combat operations (LSCO), the need for modern cavalry forces dedicated to informing, protecting, and fighting for the main body is more critical than ever.

As you read through the exceptional articles in this quarter's **ARMOR** magazine, you will see our branch reckoning with how we fight in this era as well as the next. But before we dive into the tactical weeds of drones, formations, and technology, let me be absolutely clear on a foundational truth: informing, protecting, and fighting for a supported force—reconnaissance and security (R&S)—is a mission, not simply a military occupational specialty (MOS) or a vocation.

This means R&S is a unit responsibility at every echelon, not just something tasked to cavalry formations. We must apply the same logic to R&S as we do to local security; it is a baseline, 10-level task that must be woven into the cultural fabric of our entire force.

With the proliferation of sensors and unmanned systems, R&S are as critical today as they have ever been. However, the distinction between the two is correspondingly important. Drones provide surveillance capability, but human scouts provide reconnaissance understanding. Today's scouts must realize their operational aperture has widened. You are no longer just

forward observers (FOs) for indirect fire. You are the FOs for all multi-domain effects. Scouts must master the relationship between "sense and strike" as a fighting technique, directing everything from electronic warfare to observing for long-range anti-tank systems, operating seamlessly across all domains—particularly where those domains intersect.

This brings us to a harsh cultural reality. With the post-ARSTRUC (Army Structure) deactivation of our light and medium scout formations, our remaining cavalry units bear an even heavier burden. Moving forward, cavalry formations must understand the increased emphasis on closing with and destroying the enemy in support of the main body. We cannot rely solely on stealth. We must exhibit a deliberate, aggressive cultural willingness to fight for information and physically secure the maneuver space.

To accomplish this, we must remember that the Cavalry does not fight in isolation; our enduring strength lies in the Armored Combined Arms Team. By synchronizing every component of combat power—from the forward scout and unmanned systems to artillery, engineers, air defense, and our logistics trains—we force the enemy to fight in multiple directions and against multiple forms of contact. Throughout history, the Combined Arms Team has been our answer to new technological disruptions. Today, as we face the challenges of persistent observation and lethal drones, it is this rigorous integration of emergent capabilities with our traditional arms that will allow us to

retain maneuver and win decisively.

While the means of R&S continue to evolve through emergent organizations, concepts, and technology, their nature and purpose endure. The fundamentals of reconnaissance remain absolutely vital to tactical and operational success. Effective reconnaissance is not solely about having the newest drone or a specific formation; it is fundamentally about sound execution in developing timely and accurate situational understanding to inform the commander.

Likewise, as the battlefield becomes more transparent, the need for layered protection—expressed in the fundamentals of security—is paramount. Security is not just a function of equipment. It requires the deliberate actions necessary to provide early warning, reaction time, and maneuver space. As our forces adapt, the continued integration of these enduring fundamentals with our evolving capabilities will be critical to mission success. This is how we create and retain an asymmetric advantage.

I challenge every leader to read this edition closely. Internalize these lessons. Train your Soldiers on the fundamentals, integrate our new capabilities, and build a culture that is lethal, adaptive, and ready to fight.

Forge the Thunderbolt!

Scouts Out!

Student Preparedness for Abrams Master Gunner School



by SFC Mark T. Backer

The Abrams Master Gunner Course (AMG) at Fort Benning is one of the U.S. Army's most demanding technical programs, producing noncommissioned officers (NCOs) who serve as subject matter experts in tank gunnery, fire control systems, and crew level training management. Since 1974, Master Gunners have played a critical role in strengthening armored formations by planning, coordinating, and executing training that directly improves crew performance and lethality. Preparing Soldiers for this course requires deliberate effort, and units play a central role in identifying and developing candidates who are ready to succeed.

Successful AMG candidates typically demonstrate a combination of operational experience, demonstrated gunnery proficiency, cognitive aptitude, and deliberate foundational preparatory training. Time as a tank commander (TC) remains one of the strongest indicators of readiness because it gives Soldiers the tactical and technical context needed to understand how the fire control system functions in real conditions. Candidates with meaningful TC experience can walk through an engagement from detection to impact, identify fire control and crew errors during after action reviews, and apply training doctrine without hesitation. This background allows them to absorb advanced material quickly and connect

course concepts to real world application.

Recent gunnery proficiency contributes significantly to student success. A current Table VI qualification shows that a Soldier remains sharp on the fundamentals and understands the pace, coordination, and decision making required during gunnery. Candidates who consistently perform at a high level, understand how engagements are scored, and can identify platform issues with the confidence and technical foundation needed for the course's advanced instruction.

Foundational certifications further strengthen a candidate's readiness. Certifications such as the Vehicle Crew Evaluator (VCE), the Advanced Gunnery Training System (AGTS) instructor/operator (I/O), and the Master Gunner Pre Assessment Course (MGPAC) provide the baseline knowledge for candidates to build from to be successful at AMG. These certifications reinforce gunnery standards, introduce students to the pace of technical instruction, and build familiarity with topics that often challenge new candidates. Soldiers who complete these programs begin the course with a solid understanding of fire control logic, degraded mode operations, and the analytical skills required to troubleshoot complex systems.

Cognitive aptitude is another

important factor. It is recommended a candidate have general technical (GT) and combat (CO) scores of 110 and 105 respectively. These scores align with the analytical and mechanical reasoning skills needed to master the Abrams fire control system. Candidates who perform well during gunnery, MGPAC, VCE, and AGTS I/O tend to adapt well to the course's fast pace and academic demands. These Soldiers demonstrate the mental agility required to process complex information under time constraints.

Units have several opportunities to strengthen candidate readiness by building on existing talent and reinforcing proven development practices. Many formations are already improving mentorship by pairing potential candidates with experienced Master Gunners who can guide their technical growth and help them build the analytical skills the course requires. Readiness also increases when units incorporate structured pre course training, such as the MGPAC, into their training calendars. MGPAC gives Soldiers the baseline knowledge and confidence needed to start strong and helps units assess individual strengths before sending candidates to the course. Clear communication about AMG's pace and expectations further supports

preparation by helping Soldiers understand how to study, what to focus on, and how to manage the course's workload effectively. Identifying high potential Soldiers early in their careers allows leaders to develop a deliberate, long term pipeline of future Master Gunners. When these efforts are applied consistently, candidates arrive with the experience, knowledge, and confidence necessary to succeed.

Ideal candidates share several common traits. They are self motivated, capable of independent problem solving, and comfortable advising commanders on gunnery and fire control matters. They communicate confidently, support maintenance teams with troubleshooting, and demonstrate a commitment to mastering complex technical systems. These attributes not only support course success but also ensure graduates can effectively serve their formations upon return.

Master Gunners play a vital role in sustaining the U.S. Army's long term readiness. Graduates return to their units prepared to mentor future candidates, conduct MGPAC, and reinforce the technical standards critical to armored training. Their ability to train others ensures a continuous flow of well prepared Soldiers who are ready to take on the responsibilities of the course and the demands of the role.

The AMG remains a cornerstone of armored readiness. By focusing on operational experience, recent gunnery proficiency, foundational certifications, cognitive aptitude, and structured preparatory training, units can reliably identify Soldiers who are ready to succeed. A deliberate, positive approach to candidate development ensures the U.S. Army continues to field Master Gunners capable of maintaining the highest standards of technical excellence and driving gunnery proficiency across the force.

Sergeant First Class Mark T. Backer is an Abrams Master Gunner assigned to the Transformation and Lessons Learned Manager-Armor (TLLM-AR) at Fort Benning, Georgia. His previous assignments include Abrams Master Gunner Senior Instructor with M-TRP, 3-16 CAV at Fort Benning; Platoon Sergeant with 4-10 CAV at Fort Carson, Colorado; and Company Master Gunner with 3-66 AR at Fort Carson. His military education includes the Battle Staff Course, Maneuver Leaders Maintenance Course, Abrams Master Gunner Course, Master Gunner Common Core, Senior Leader Course, and Advanced Leaders Course. He is pursuing an associate of science in diesel technology from Wyo-tech and a bachelor of science in organizational leadership from the University of Charleston. He is a recipient of the Order of Saint George - Bronze Medallion.



"ABE"
CREIGHTON W. ABRAMS
 COMMANDER, 37TH TANK BATTALION
 RELIEF OF BASTOGNE
 CLOCHIMONT HILL, BELGIUM
 26 DECEMBER 1944
 AWARDED THE DISTINGUISHED SERVICE CROSS
 CHIEF OF STAFF, UNITED STATES ARMY
 1972-1974



Shaping the Fight: A Preview of Emerging Doctrine

by MAJ Conlan Kastanias

The Cavalry Branch doctrine development team continuously works to modernize the foundational texts that guide our cavalry and scout units and how the U.S. Army conducts reconnaissance and security operations. As the operational environment evolves and the U.S. Army adapts to threats, our tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) must keep pace. To keep the force informed on the direction of these efforts, this update provides a preview of the upcoming revision to Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 3-20.98, *Scout Platoon*, and outlines our next objective: a major revision of Field Manual (FM) 3-98, *Reconnaissance and Security Operations*.

The Close Fight: ATP 3-20.98, *Scout Platoon*

Currently, our primary focus is finalizing the revision of ATP 3-20.98, *Scout Platoon*. Scheduled for publication in early fiscal year (FY) 2027, the new manual is restructured to complement the recently finalized ATP 3-20.96, *Cavalry Squadron*. The most notable change is a contextual shift. The 2019 version of the manual treated reconnaissance and security somewhat in isolation. This upcoming revision reframes the platoon's core identity around a central concept: how a scout platoon's operations enable the main body. This shift is clearly reflected in the manual's updated organization.

While it retains foundational chapters on the Role of the Scout Platoon, Command and Control, Reconnaissance, and Security, much of the book will reflect the contextual shift of the platoon as a part of a larger fight.

While the new manual retains all the critical "bread-and-butter" instructions on how a platoon executes reconnaissance or security operations, the revision explicitly places those tasks into a broader tactical context, such as in new chapters for Supporting the Offense and Supporting the Defense. The doctrine now deliberately describes how the scout platoon works in tandem with the tank platoon. It provides actionable frameworks for how scouts set the conditions for armored lethality, clear intervisibility lines, and seamlessly hand over the battle to the main body's heavy hitters. Furthermore, the 2026 revision delivers a much-needed modernization of how a platoon plans for and integrates unmanned aerial systems (UAS), counter-UAS (CUAS) capabilities, and electromagnetic warfare (EW) assets to survive and win in large-scale combat operations (LSCO).

The Deep Fight: FM 3-98, *Reconnaissance and Security Operations*

With the Cavalry Squadron manual

finalized and the Scout Platoon manual well underway, our team is simultaneously turning its attention to our capstone manual: FM 3-98, *Reconnaissance and Security Operations*. The upcoming revision of FM 3-98 will codify recent organizational force structure changes, integrate lessons from current operational environments, and institutionalize the tactical innovations currently being tested through the U.S. Army's Transformation in Contact (TiC) experimentation.

As we drive these critical updates forward, doctrine cannot be written in a vacuum. The lifeblood of effective doctrine is the feedback we receive from the force. When you receive a staffing draft of ATP 3-20.98 or FM 3-98, we ask that you take the time to review it with your noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and junior officers. Challenge the assumptions, validate the TTPs, and send us your feedback. Your input is a critical part of the doctrine development process, ensuring our publications stay grounded and the Armor Branch remains the most lethal force on the battlefield.



Honoring a Legacy: The 2026 CSM Timothy Bolyard Memorial Scholarship Awards

By (Retired) Sergeant Major Carl Johnson, President Thunderbolt Chapter, U.S. Cavalry and Armor Association

Each year, the Thunderbolt Chapter of the U.S. Cavalry and Armor Association gathers to honor the future leaders of our community while paying deep respect to a fallen hero. The 2026 Command Sergeant Major Timothy Bolyard Memorial Scholarship awards continue this proud tradition, recognizing outstanding academic excellence, leadership, and dedication to service among our military families.

CSM Bolyard was a highly decorated combat veteran who dedicated his life to the United States, serving with distinction in the 1st Squadron, 38th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB). His tragic loss in 2018 left a profound impact on the Cavalry and Armor community. Today, his legacy of selfless service and steadfast leadership lives on through the bright young minds supported by his name-sake scholarship.



Celebrating The 2026 Scholarship Recipients

This year, the scholarship selection committee reviewed numerous applications from highly qualified dependents of our Cavalry and Armor Association members, as well as esteemed veterans. The 2026 awardees reflect the resilience, intelligence, and community spirit that CSM Bolyard championed throughout his distinguished career. We are incredibly proud to present this year's scholarship winners:

Recipient Name	Award Amount	Academic Institution	Field of Study
(Retired) SSG Michael Bassett	\$5,000	University of Maryland	Business Administration
Mr. John Dente	\$3,000	Ohio State University	Pharmaceutical Sciences
Mr. Colten McLean	\$3,000	Kansas State University	History
Ms. Delaney Donahoe	\$1,000	Georgia Technical College	Journalism and Communication
Ms. Marissa Kinard	\$1,000	College of Charleston	Business
Mr. Frederick Dente	\$500	Texas A&M University	Graphic Information Science and Technology

A Heartfelt Thanks

The CSM Timothy Bolyard Memorial Scholarship would not be possible without the immense generosity and unwavering support of our donors. Their contributions directly impact the educational readiness of our military families, lifting the financial burden of college and empowering the next generation of American professionals.

For more information on how to apply for the 2027 scholarship or to become a donor, please visit the U.S. Cavalry and Armor Association website or contact the Thunderbolt Chapter directly at thunderboltchapter@gmail.com.

How to Fight the Cavalry Squadron and Win!

by LTC John Albert

Tactically speaking, cavalry squadrons have had it rough over the past fifteen years at the National Training Center (NTC). Since at least the return of the Decisive Action Training Environment (DATE) in the early- 2010s and the U.S. Army's pivot toward large-scale combat operations (LSCO), cavalry squadrons have been expected to do the incredibly difficult task of collapsing the enemy's prepared defensive security zone, across a brigade frontage, while providing sufficiently timely reconnaissance to enable the brigade scheme of maneuver. A daunting task, made more so by the economy of force nature of cavalry operations, the preeminence of the defense in the current character of warfare, the inexperience of troop commanders and platoon leaders in their first real (simulated) fight, a shortage of trained dismount teams, and a host of other factors challenging all U.S. Army units from personnel turnover to equipment maintenance. The result is that the squadron deploys

three troops on-line with the tank company in depth, if it has not been designated as the brigade reserve, with an eye toward application at a to be determined decisive point. The opposing force (OPFOR) use terrain well, winning many crew vs. crew fights. Attempting to develop the situation through reconnaissance causes the disruption zone fight to break down. Sections and platoons lose fights in detail. Confused by poor platoon reporting, troop commanders employ their mortars too late and ineffectively. The confused reporting echoes up the chain to the squadron main command post. The armor company is applied too late, too distributed, or at the wrong point. The squadron is defeated. The brigade lurches forward blindly. Nine more training days of leading with the chin. Rinse, Regenerate, Repeat...Rough!

It does not have to be so. Given the consistency with which phenomenal cavalry leaders have endured a similar learning experience to the one described above, it is likely time to examine how we employ the cavalry squadron to yield better battlefield results in environments similar to that replicated at the NTC. Given substantive battlefield challenges, higher echelons must adjust their expectations of squadron operations as the squadron itself adjusts its tactics to remain a relevant and positive battlefield force.

Challenges

First, it is important to acknowledge that the fundamental tactical orientation of armored forces is offensive. Existing to close with and destroy enemy forces in close contact through shock, firepower, and maneuver, the armored brigade combat teams (ABCTs) and heavy divisions exist to set conditions favorably through offensive action. Since all cavalry squadrons now reside in the ABCTs, offensive action is the primary reason for being and its default orientation. If offensive tactics are not successful then the squadron fails its purpose.

Several factors resident in the current character of war inhibit the squadron's ability to fight offensively while using traditional schemes. Foremost, defense appears ascendant. With adversary anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) ranges exceeding 5km from stationary mounted and dismounted positions, the squadron's organic Bradley Fighting Vehicles (BFVs) and tanks struggle to close to direct fire range. When operating more traditionally, dispersed across the brigade frontage, platoons battle beyond supporting range of one another and are unable to gain fire superiority or develop the situation prior to becoming fixed or destroyed. Compounding the squadron's offensive disadvantage, reconnaissance and strike unmanned aerial systems (UAS) range



freely at echelon. More easily detecting forces on the move than those stationary and camouflaged, the defensive force more easily arrays and strikes high payoff targets to counter offensive squadron efforts. Favorable and obvious avenues of approach are slowed with minefields and obstacles canalizing movement and guiding offensive forces into prepared or hasty engagement areas. It is not surprising therefore, that the squadron and mounted offensive forces, more generally struggle in these conditions.

A traditional and historically correct adjustment to tactics sees the squadron employ dismount teams to pull mounted forces into favorable positions. Remaining distributed across a brigade frontage as an economy of force, the squadron largely dismounts to minimize the force with which it makes contact. If given a compliant OPFOR, this works well. But this tactic takes a lot of time. In that time, a less compliant adversary has shifted mid- and long-range fires and targeted his detect and strike UAS, massing effects and effectively countering the threat of a successful ABCT or division offensive.

The squadron is stuck. To offset the

enemy's ability to mass operational and tactical fires, the squadron, and ABCT, must maintain a high tempo; driving it to operate more frequently mounted. But operating more mounted under current direct fire and observation disadvantages while continuing to disperse its strength across a brigade frontage leads to repetitive unfair and losing tactical engagements. Welcome newly minted cavalryman, John Yossarian!

Responses – Brigade and Division

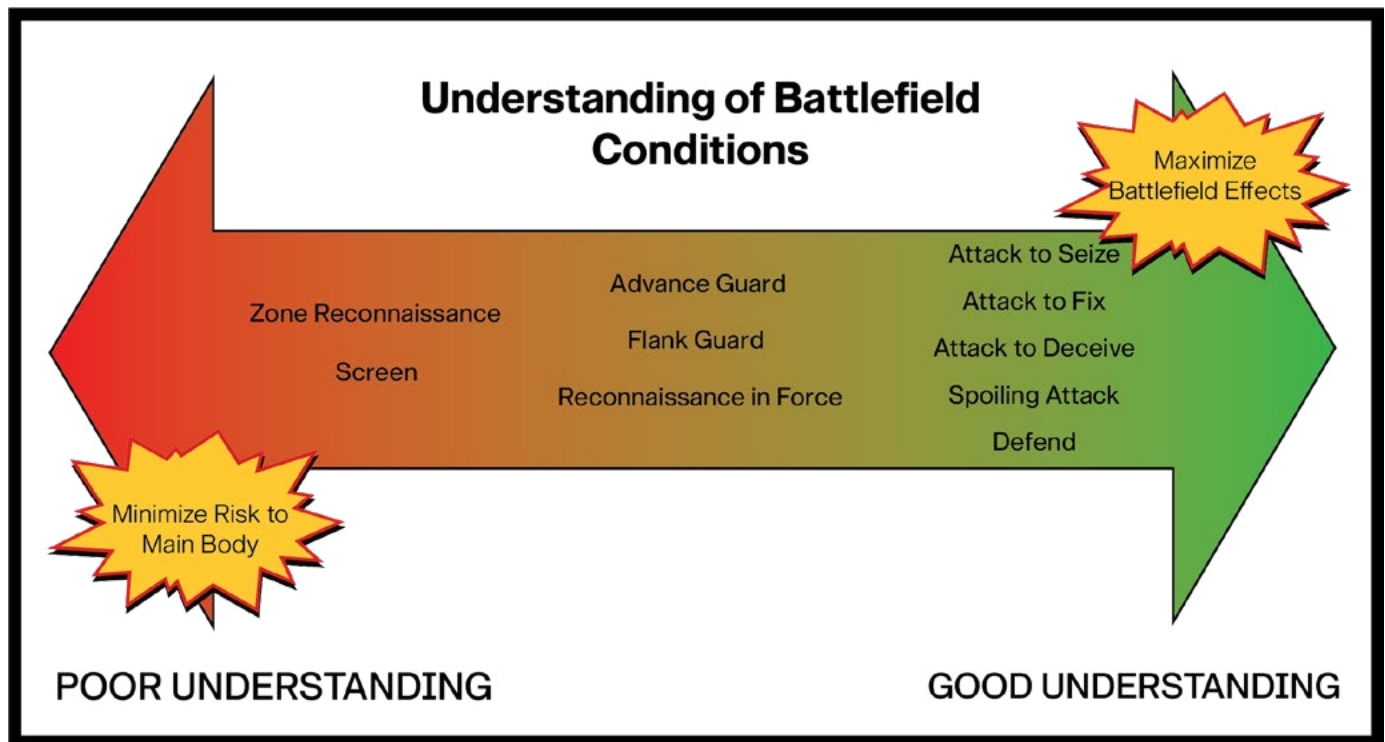
Seriously addressing the reality of improving squadron performance requires changes to how the squadron is employed as a brigade or division element. At the higher level, several adjustments are required. Brigades and divisions must rethink squadron mission tasks, employ the squadron closer in time to main body line of departure (LD), and employ the squadron on narrower frontages to account for current battlefield conditions.

First, choosing the squadron's mission should not be an afterthought or default to "conduct zone reconnaissance." The mission chosen drives the squadron's concept of employment. In

situations where very little battlefield information is known, traditional zone reconnaissance and screen operations are warranted. These missions require the squadron to operate on large frontages. To ensure early warning and answer priority intelligence requirements (PIRs), the squadron spreads its combat power, operating at its most vulnerable for the current battlefield conditions. While these missions do enable the brigade or division to receive early warning and answer at least initial PIRs, they are very likely to lead to a squadron defeated in detail and unable to materially effect the battle. Further, while an enemy has heavy incentives to protect information, how likely is it that the brigade or division commander will be so completely ignorant of the situation as to require these missions to be assigned? Answer: not very likely given the current much more transparent battlefield.

So, a start in rehabbing the squadron's fighting prowess is to take the most assigned missions and turn them into their least assigned missions. Banish squadron screens across a brigade frontage to those infrequent periods where the brigade must be in transition for 24-48 hours. Banish zone reconnaissance and assign specific,

Figure 1. Chart displaying how understanding of battlefield conditions aligns with the appropriate mission task for those conditions.



localized reconnaissance answered as area reconnaissance missions occurring as part of an offensive guard or attack operation. Alternatively assign those missions that produce a meaningful effect on the battlefield. Take advantage of increasing battlefield transparency and assign the squadron greater offensive and defensive guards, reconnaissance-in-force, attacks, and defenses. These missions enable the squadron to better mass effects and set specific, positive conditions for brigade success.

Second, the squadron should be called to operate more closely in time with the main body. Visions of the squadron operating 12 to 18 hours ahead of the brigade main body are not realistic given current battlefield conditions. The early deployment of the cavalry squadron provides information to the enemy commander as to friendly intentions, enabling him to array his forces in advance to counter the main body. Further, it permits the enemy to fight the brigade in detail, battling a quarter of the brigade's maneuver combat power outside of contact with the main body. Likewise, demanding the squadron operate across the entire frontage guarantees it will fight as separated platoons, possibly as troops. Present everywhere, the squadron is very likely to have a meaningful impact nowhere.

Instead, ask the squadron to set conditions in tight coupling with the main body's activity. This permits the squadron to share many of the cross-domain effects synchronized in time to enable the main body. Additionally, it minimizes the time the enemy commander has to understand the intentions of the friendly command and better enables the friendly brigade commander to take advantage of any fleeting opportunities presented.

Third, narrowly focus the squadron's operations on a portion of the brigade's frontage as often as possible. As with tailoring the mission for the squadron, the narrower the frontage a squadron is asked to operate within, the better able it will be to mass effects and achieve the commander's necessary battlefield condition. Asking the squadron to operate across the brigade's frontage guarantees the battle will be decided by section sergeants

and platoon leaders in unfavorable individual engagements.

Responses - Squadron

As the brigade and division shifts their scheme of squadron employment to enable better outcomes, so does the squadron need to shift its tactical scheme. Squadron tactical adjustments seek to achieve one objective – win more tactical engagements. Answering PIRs, providing early warning, or providing the main body a position of advantage - all are contingent upon the ability of the squadron to fight well. Thus, the adjustments to the squadron's tactics take primary aim at optimizing employment of combined arms to overcome the challenge of the current battlefield environment.

First among the changes has been a long time in coming – make unmanned contact first. In the same way that the squadron enables the brigade to make decisive contact from positions of advantage, so does making unmanned contact enable the squadron to develop the situation and fight from positions of advantage. Achieving this requires assigning a dedicated force to operate as an unmanned element as their primary duty. Operating the unmanned system, reporting, and coordinating with other unmanned and manned elements requires

considerable practice. Operators need to practice search and attack methods that move from most likely to least likely enemy locations. Finally, to the extent possible, unmanned elements should concentrate to provide multiple redundant observation and strike assets operating in the same area. A dispersion of unmanned assets provides a feeling of coverage only and diffuses the impact possible.

Second, training and standard operating procedures (SOPs) must be built to standardize actions. Much of the beauty and allure of cavalry doctrine is in its ability to be flexibly applied across many warfighting variables. Commander's reconnaissance and security guidance is an incredibly effective tool at giving capable subordinates the freedom of action to develop the situation in the chaos of combat. However, that very flexibility can become immobilizing to junior leaders developing the situation against a thinking enemy; with all of the friction of realistic battlefield conditions, for the first or second time in their career. Instead of maximizing flexibility, the squadron sets standardized criteria and trains to execute under those conditions. Set engagement criteria, weapons control statuses, and rehearsed actions enable platoons and troops to react more aggressively when in the shock of contact. Platoon,

Figure 2. U.S. Soldiers assigned to 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division prepare ammunition for an M2 Bradley stress shoot training event at Fort Stewart, Georgia, April 30, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by PFC Jesse May)



troop, and even squadron battle drills provide a framework enabling rapid action and a standardized form from which to audible as conditions change. Instead of focusing on all of the possibilities enabled through the elegance of cavalry doctrine, a successful squadron needs to focus on fundamentals and a set of standardized procedures.

Third, the squadron plans to win at and beyond the probable line of contact. While a reconnaissance and security focus does frequently provide a geographical orientation of forces, many cavalry operations lack a clear area where the commander expects combat power to be focused. Focusing the squadron's combat power at the probable line of contact brings together the focus of the combined arms plan to a discernable geographic area of the battlefield. The squadron plans to employ its full capability at the probable line of direct fire contact. The squadron plans to make unmanned contact ahead of the probable line of contact (PLC), employ fires to suppress and finish forces in direct fire range of the PLC, establish support-by-fire and attack-by-fire elements, and pass a decisive maneuver force at the PLC. Focusing on the PLC enables the squadron to be optimally postured to employ combined arms at the location most likely for meaningful contact to occur.

Finally, the squadron masses armor to win direct fire engagements. It may seem odd given the design and purpose of the cavalry squadron to make tanks the central element of squadron success. However, we have yet to invent and deploy a more devastating and overwhelming capability than massed tanks operating with combined arms effect. Thus regardless of the condition that must be set by the squadron, the massing of armor combat power in direct fire range of wherever that condition can be realized is essential. As with using the PLC to focus squadron planning and the massing of combat power, the squadron designates the location or the templated enemy force causing the passage of the armor force prior to making contact. This allows the armor force to be executing a plan while permitting the squadron commander to withhold the passage should conditions not be satisfactory or enemy forces be oriented in other ways than those foreseen.

Conclusion

As the U.S. Army's first Transformation in Contact (TiC) ABCT at NTC rotation 26-02, 2nd ABCT, 1st Cavalry Division "Black Jack" and its organic cavalry squadron, 4th Squadron, 9th Cavalry Regiment "Dark Horse" implemented the above adjustments and saw

definitively positive battlefield and training results. The Squadron was enabled to set conditions which in turn enabled a very high brigade tempo and retention of the initiative. While the unit did receive additional technical equipment including UAS, counter-UAS (CUAS), and command and control (C2) systems for experimentation, the changes called for above and implemented at NTC 26-02 are primarily resource neutral and within the power of every ABCT and cavalry squadron to implement or adjust. It is time to think, operate, and fight a little differently to regain battlefield advantage. It can be done.

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Figure 3. An M2A3 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle assigned to 2nd Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment, engages an unmanned aerial system with its M242 25mm Bushmaster chain gun during Project Flytrap at Pabradė Training Area, Lithuania, May 10, 2026. (U.S. Army Photo by SGT Max Elliott)



THE FIGHT TO SEE

A FUTURE FOR THE U.S. ARMY CAVALRY



by MAJ R. Atticus Blair

For its first 150 years, the U.S. Army fused reconnaissance and shock action into a single branch because both missions required the same platform — the horse.¹ Mechanization inherited the fusion without reexamining it; the tank replaced the horse, and cavalry kept both jobs. That self-induced dichotomy within the Armor branch has forced commanders to fight blind. Observer-controllers at the National Training Center (NTC) and the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) report the same failure decade after decade: cavalry squadrons built like maneuver battalions advance, make contact through direct fire rather than standoff sensing, and fight meeting engagements they should have anticipated.² In the 1990s the diagnosis was poor discipline — scouts fighting instead of reporting.³ In the 2000s and 2010s, two decades of counterinsurgency (COIN) masked the problem by pivoting away from a near-peer adversary capable of punishing bad reconnaissance. When the U.S. Army returned to large-scale combat operations (LSCO) training in the late 2010's, the old failures returned.

Outmanned and outgunned since Russia re-invaded in February 2022, Ukrainian brigades built dedicated drone

companies that fused reconnaissance and strike into compact, low-cost kill chains — collapsing the targeting cycle from hours to seconds, sustaining persistent coverage across a thousand-kilometer front, and killing tens of thousands of Russian soldiers every month.^{4,5} In June 2024, Ukraine became the first country in history to establish a military branch for unmanned systems.⁶ The U.S. Army, by contrast, has \$1.4 billion in congressional appropriations for small unmanned aerial systems (sUAS), a program to field 340,000 attack drones in two years, and no branch to receive them, no school to train their operators, and no career field to retain their expertise.⁷

For the first time since the horse, the U.S. Army can optimize reconnaissance around persistent presence, minimal signature, and expendable sensors — separated entirely from the armored formations built to close with and destroy the enemy. The reconnaissance gap and the unmanned systems gap are one problem: neither function has a branch, a proponent, or a career field. The U.S. Army must create both in a single act — a Cavalry Branch chartered to find the enemy and maintain contact through expendable and autonomous platforms.

This paper examines the reconnaissance problem, the unmanned systems problem, their convergence, and the

institutional architecture required to solve them together.

Equestrians

For four thousand years, cavalry performed two jobs under one name. Reconnaissance required dispersion, patience, and stealth. Shock required mass, speed, and violence.⁸ The two coexisted not because they were compatible, but because both required the same platform: the horse. When the U.S. Army organized mounted forces, they bundled divergent functions into a single branch — the defining skill was not scouting or charging, but horsemanship.⁹

The tank took the horse's place, but the U.S. Army never separated the functions the horse had carried. The structural consequences have compounded for nine decades. A cavalry squadron fielding Bradley Fighting Vehicles (BFVs) and Abrams tanks carries roughly the same maintenance burden, fuel demand, and electromagnetic signature as the combined arms battalion it is supposed to precede — the punishing maintenance burden defeats the one thing reconnaissance demands above all else: maintain a persistent presence. Equipping reconnaissance formations with maneuver platforms forces commanders to hold reconnaissance assets back, to fix them. When reconnaissance units are built like

maneuver battalions, they fight like maneuver battalions, and the institution rewards them for it. BG Lee Quintas, the 48th Chief of Armor, assessed directly whether the cavalry squadron could accomplish its reconnaissance and security missions. His answer was “NO.”¹⁰

The Battle of 73 Easting illustrates how the fusion played out. In February 1991, 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment led VII Corps into Iraq as a covering force, executing a security mission, not a reconnaissance mission. Eagle Troop, commanded by CPT H.R. McMaster, made contact with the Tawakalna Division of the Republican Guard through direct fire, not standoff sensing. CPT McMaster’s Troop destroyed dozens of Iraqi tanks in minutes. Two M3 BFVs, reconnaissance platforms by designation, killed five T-72s. The regiment succeeded because it was equipped and tasked as a maneuver formation, and it fought like one. The U.S. Army celebrated 73 Easting as confirmation of the cavalry’s value as a fighting force — and it was. But as Brian Steed argues in *Battle Analysis: The Battle of 73 Easting*, Operation Desert Storm was an aberration, not a model: an outmatched opponent, in open desert, blind beyond eight hundred meters, against a force that could kill at three times that range.¹¹ The institutional lesson the U.S. Army drew — that cavalry’s primary contribution is combat power — left reconnaissance without a champion. If your reconnaissance force is indistinguishable from your maneuver force, same platforms, same signature, same sustainment tail, then it is redundant. Army Structure (ARSTRUC) proved the U.S. Army agreed. The maneuver formations absorb the security missions of the cut squadrons. No formation in the current force structure is designed to see the enemy before making contact with him.¹²

Two decades of brigade-centric COIN delayed the reckoning. When the U.S. Army returned to division-level operations, it tested the reconnaissance problem head-on at NTC Rotation 20-10 — the first division-level rotation in the center’s history. The 1st Infantry Division fielded a cavalry squadron reinforced with aviation, artillery, and support elements to provide the



Figure 1. MG Douglas A. Sims II, the 1st Infantry Division’s Commanding General, goes on a battlefield circulation via Blackhawk Helicopter during NTC rotation 20-10. (U.S. Army Photo by SPC Brandon Bruer)

division’s reconnaissance and security. The hope was that a squadron could cover a division’s frontage. By the end of the rotation, the squadron had been reinforced to the point that it resembled another maneuver brigade — one that required the same sustainment tail and was constrained by the same maintenance tempo.¹³ No such formation has emerged from the experiment.

The 2024 ARSTRUC made the cut explicit. In a fixed end-strength environment, the Army eliminated fourteen light cavalry squadrons from infantry and Stryker brigade combat teams (BCTs), freeing roughly ten thousand billets for Multi-Domain Task Forces.¹⁴ The Armor School called the loss “not ideal.”¹⁵ LTC Amos Fox was blunter: the U.S. Army was replacing close-combat reconnaissance with theater-level sensor organizations that cannot control terrain — the same substitution that produced the Battlefield Surveillance Brigades of the mid-2000s, quietly shuttered within a decade after proving operationally hollow.¹⁶ The squadrons were not cut because reconnaissance was unimportant. They were cut because squadrons built like maneuver formations were expensive and redundant — they were the easiest billets to take. Brigades have responded by standing up multifunctional reconnaissance companies (MFRCs) from

existing billets — units without a proponent, a training pipeline, or dedicated personnel, staffed by soldiers whose primary military occupational specialty (MOS) development suffers for the assignment. Every MFRC is different; no doctrinal publication defines their employment. The improvisation validates the requirement. It does not solve it.¹⁷ A 2016 United States Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) study warned that reconnaissance expertise takes generations to build and can be lost in a decade or less. That decade started in 2024.¹⁸

The underlying problem is not training, equipment, or doctrine. It is institutional identity. Reconnaissance has never had its own branch, proponent, school, or career field.¹⁹ It has always been a secondary mission inside organizations whose primary identity, and whose officers’ career incentives, pointed toward direct combat. Until that changes, the reconnaissance problem will reproduce itself in every war, every restructuring, and every round of cuts. Reconnaissance needs an institutional home. The question is what that home should look like.

Experts

Ukraine has been outmanned and out-gunned since February 2022. The entire war is an economy-of-force



Figure 2. Ukrainian soldier operating a DJI Mavic unmanned aerial system.
(Image sourced from *armyinform.com.ua*)

operation sustained for years against a numerically superior adversary. Russia attacked across a thousand-kilometer front with more artillery, more tanks, and more soldiers. That disparity forced Ukraine to find the most efficient way to guard the line at the lowest cost in blood and treasure. The answer was dedicated formations flying persistent, cheap, expendable drones.²⁰

Ukraine institutionalized what combat taught it. In June 2024, it became the first country in history to establish a military branch dedicated to unmanned systems.²¹ By December 2025, Ukrainian drones were killing an estimated thirty-three thousand Russian soldiers per month.²² The 25th Sicheslavka Brigade shows what this looks like at unit level: a UAS company built around reconnaissance and first-person view (FPV) strike platoons, operating in dispersed two-pilot cells, with concealed headquarters handling maintenance and resupply from urban cover. Paired with artillery and encrypted targeting applications, FPV teams collapsed the kill chain from hours to seconds.²³ These FPV teams

have evolved to fill the security function—the fight to see is no longer confined to the ground; both sides are fighting to control the sky above the front line, where success sets the conditions for maneuver, and failure leaves commanders blind.²⁴

The U.S. Army, meanwhile, is experimenting. The Transformation in Contact (TiC) initiative pushes commercially available drones into select brigades under a “buy, give, inform” model — the U.S. Army fields systems, observes what works, and adjusts.²⁵ The 3rd Infantry Division now operates over 150 drones and is developing what it hopes will become the Army-wide qualification course for sUAS.²⁶ The results are promising. They are not institutional. Every TiC brigade bought different drones.²⁷ There is no single authority deciding which systems a given echelon needs, no common training tables, and no career field for the soldiers operating them. The Unmanned Advanced Lethality Course at Fort Rucker trains twenty-eight students per three-week iteration, drawn from four different branches. Its course director built the curriculum in ninety days and

called it plainly: catch-up.²⁸ Twenty-eight students is not a pipeline. It is an additional skill identifier.

The institutional logic behind this diffusion is that drones should be organic to every formation at every echelon — that the U.S. Army does not need drone specialists because every soldier will be a drone operator.²⁹ The logic is appealing but wrong. It assumes latent capacity exists within formations and that assumption has been proven false. Three independent experiments confirm this. The British Army’s Defense Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL) Urban Phalanx study found that infantry section commanders in urban combat could not simultaneously command their sections and process digital sensor information; the solution was a dedicated systems operator billet and a restructured section built around reducing cognitive load on junior leaders.³⁰ The U.S. Marine Corps reached the same conclusion independently, creating a squad systems operator whose primary task is managing the squad’s drone and digital systems so the squad leader can focus on the fight.³¹ At JMRC, even U.S. cavalry squadrons that retained their scouts after ARSTRUC struggled to absorb UAS — reconnaissance experts, handed drones, could not fly them and maneuver BFVs at the same time.³²

A soldier manipulating a controller is not manipulating a rifle, a mortar tube, or a helicopter. A squad leader processing a drone feed is not commanding his squad. The generalist model forces a dilemma that the technology does not require. A drone operator’s sensor is airborne. There is no reason to put the operator at the point of contact when a covered position hundreds of meters back provides the same capability with none of the dilemma. Specialization does not remove unmanned systems from the rest of the force. It makes them work.

Congress recognized the gap before the U.S. Army did. In June 2024, the House Armed Services Committee proposed a Drone Corps as a basic branch responsible for Groups 1 through 3 UAS and counter-UAS (CUAS).³³ The U.S. Army opposed it. Under Secretary Gabe Camarillo called it “premature.”

The Administration called it “an unwarranted degree of specialization.”³⁴ The provision was stripped from the final legislation. The word “premature” has a history. It was premature to separate the Aviation Branch from the Transportation Corps — until 1983, when the U.S. Army acknowledged it had wasted critical human capital distributing aviation assets without a dedicated proponent. It was premature to create the Cyber Branch — until 2014, when growth under the Signal Branch proved inadequate. It was premature to establish Special Forces — until 1987. In every case, the capability stagnated under someone else’s roof until it got its own.³⁵

The money is already flowing. The U.S. Army has \$1.4 billion in congressional appropriations for sUAS industrial base expansion, a Drone Dominance program fielding 340,000 attack drones over two years, and a Secretary of War directing every division to be equipped with unmanned systems by the end of 2026.³⁶ What it does not have is a branch to receive these systems, a school to train their operators, a proponent to write their doctrine, or a career field to retain their expertise. The institutional architecture to spend that money well does not exist. Unmanned effects need an institutional owner. The question is who.

Charter

Two problems, one solution. The capability that unmanned systems perform best — persistent, low-signature, expendable sensing and strike — is the capability that reconnaissance has always required but never had the platform to deliver. Drones do not tire. They can be lost without losing a crew. They can loiter for hours over a named area of interest that a mounted patrol must pass through in minutes. For nine decades, reconnaissance needed persistent presence at acceptable cost and risk. Unmanned systems provide exactly that. The branch that owns reconnaissance should own unmanned effects — binding them — not because the missions are adjacent, but because they are the same. The battlefield forced Ukraine to converge reconnaissance and unmanned effects. The question for the U.S. Army is not



Figure 3. A Soldier assigned to F Co, 1-82 Attack Battalion, 82nd Airborne Division Combat Aviation Brigade releases a drone. (U.S. Army Image by SPC Nicole Miller)

whether this works — Ukraine has answered that — but whether it will make the institutional decision deliberately or wait for a war to impose it.

The forward observer precedent makes the logic explicit. The First World War created the three-dimensional battlefield; from the trenches emerged the forward observer, a dedicated career that made indirect fires work for the whole force.³⁷ In the century since, the forward observer has survived every technological transition — from visual observation to laser designation to digital fire networks — because the function requires the expert. Forward observers create a persistent presence by embedding into supported units; other artillery formations deliver fires into the deep area.³⁸ Unmanned systems should work the same way: specialists who attach to every commander who needs them, while dedicated UAS formations handle the security zone via reconnaissance and strike. Every combat arms soldier today can call for fire in extremis, but the U.S. Army does not pretend that every infantryman is a fire supporter. The same principle applies to drones. Baseline unmanned literacy belongs in every combat arms and combat support training pipeline

— but mastery requires a dedicated career field, just as it does for artillery.

The cavalry squadron is the conversion vehicle. The doctrinal tasks transfer cleanly: screen, area reconnaissance, maintain contact.³⁹ These are descriptions of what drones already do in Ukraine.⁴⁰ The fourteen squadrons cut under ARSTRUC provide the billets.⁴¹ Positions currently filled by Bradley mechanics and vehicle crew members convert to drone operators, firmware technicians, and electronic warfare adaptation specialists. The organizational architecture — headquarters troop, forward support company, command relationship to the brigade — remains intact. Technical skills change; mission, structure, and tactical expertise do not.

This proposal does not diminish the Armor branch. It liberates Armor from a self-induced dichotomy — mass, speed, and violence against dispersion, patience, and stealth — by giving the quiet half its own home. The U.S. Army’s deepest identity is combined arms: the strength of the U.S. Army is that we can take two hundred civilians off the street and six months later execute a combined arms live fire. Each

soldier masters one function. Combined, they become the most lethal tactical formation on the planet. A Cavalry Branch adds an arm to the combination — an arm, worth mastering.

The branch charter should read: reconnaissance, unmanned effects, and counter-unmanned effects across all domains and echelons. Not a drone branch. Not an FPV branch. A branch defined by the function of finding the enemy, maintaining contact, and delivering effects through expendable platforms — while denying the enemy the ability to do the same. This charter gives every brigade commander a reason to demand the capability and every division commander a reason to resource it. For the first time since the horse, reconnaissance and its enabling platform share a single institutional home.

The U.S. Army should establish the Cavalry Branch at the Maneuver Center of Excellence, Fort Benning. Proximity to Infantry and Armor — the primary supported branches — ensures combined arms integration from the start. The first commandant should be a combat arms officer with operational UAS experience, selected at brigadier general, charged with standing up the branch school, writing initial doctrine, and managing the career field within twenty-four months of authorization.

Sourcing begins with conversion, not creation. The fourteen cavalry squadrons cut under ARSTRUC provide the billets.⁴² The first unit to convert should be an armored BCT (ABCT) cavalry squadron — a formation that retains its organizational architecture and reconnaissance mission — equipped with systems already entering the force through TiC. One squadron converts within twelve months of branch authorization as proof of concept. One squadron per brigade combat team within five years achieves initial operating capability across the force.⁴³

The MOS structure requires three tracks. First, an operator track for UAS pilots and sensor operators across Groups 1 through 3, with initial training built around the twenty-to-twenty-five-hour simulator proficiency threshold already validated by the Unmanned Advanced Lethality Course and Ukrainian training data.⁴⁴ Second, a maintainer and electronic warfare technician track responsible for field repair, firmware management, frequency adaptation, and cUAS operation — the sustainment depth that no additional-duty model can provide. Third, a warrant officer technical integrator track modeled on the 390A Robotics Technician warrant officer that U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USA-SOC) established in 2025: a career-long specialist bridging tactical employment

and system acquisition, ensuring operational feedback reaches program managers and doctrinal updates reach operators.⁴⁵ All three tracks feed a single proponent, eliminating the fragmentation that currently spreads UAS responsibility across the Aviation Branch, the Military Intelligence Branch, and individual brigade initiatives.⁴⁶

The risks are real. In a fixed end-strength environment, every billet assigned to the new branch comes from somewhere else. The deeper concern is that the U.S. Army sinks institutional energy, facilities, and personnel into a branch that becomes obsolete. The character of war will change, but it will not regress from unmanned systems — and the uncertainty that defines the nature of war will always force commanders to demand to see their enemy before they fight him. The Aviation Branch, the Cyber Branch, and Special Forces faced every one of these risks at establishment. All three survived because the capability they owned was too important to leave as someone else's secondary mission.⁴⁷

Decision

The U.S. Army has the money, the technology, and the operational evidence. What it lacks is the institutional decision to put them together. Make it.

Figure 4. A modernized M2A4 Bradley Fighting Vehicle crew assigned to the “Spartan Brigade,” 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, maneuvers the desert the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, California, March 7, 2023. (U.S. Army photo by SGT Dre Stout)



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By Robert Cameron, Ph.D.

The title takes its inspiration from an article published in 1938. The author, COL Charles L. Scott, served in the 7th Cavalry Brigade (Mechanized) and proved a shaping influence upon that unit's reconnaissance doctrine. His article marked a response to a proposal to remove armor protection from reconnaissance vehicles to boost off-road mobility, discourage scouts from combat, and encourage a focus upon information collection.¹ COL Scott considered this "go light or go home" view ridiculous. In his rebuttal article, he observed that "...a scout that is not trained and equipped to fight but on the contrary told to avoid combat under all conditions will always be a spineless adjunct to the regiment."²

COL Scott's view reflected his cavalry background and his developmental work with an all-vehicle cavalry force. In the 1930s the Cavalry mission set included:

- Reconnaissance and counterreconnaissance
- Security

- Pursuit and exploitation of a breakthrough
- Delaying action
- Seizing or holding important terrain until arrival of less mobile forces
- Covering the withdrawal of other forces
- Providing liaison between large units
- Raids
- Convoy escort
- Mobile reserve for other forces
- Offensive and defensive combat³

Cavalry's significance derived from the actions it performed on behalf of its parent organization, which were not limited to information collection. The execution of these missions and the ability to seamlessly transition among them required survivable combat power. Undetected reconnaissance remained the ideal, but when precluded by insufficient time, sudden contact, or the need to wrest critical information by force, cavalry possessed the organic means to fight. This capability enabled cavalry to inform, protect, and

facilitate the operations of the supported formation.

These basic concepts constituted the essence of American cavalry since its origins during the Revolutionary War. In that conflict, the Continental Army relied upon dragoon regiments. These units faced shortfalls in recruits, equipment, and mounts yet managed to perform reconnaissance, screen larger forces, and conduct raids. The most famous action by this early mounted force occurred at the Battle of Cowpens, where a well-timed charge by LTC William Washington's Continental Light Dragoons contributed to the decisive defeat of LTC Banastre Tarleton's British Legion. In the subsequent Battle of Guildford Courthouse, American dragoons threatened the flanks of LTG Charles Cornwallis' army, neutralized the danger posed by British mounted troops, and discouraged pursuit when GEN Nathaniel Greene's army retreated from the field. These limited beginnings established a heritage of cavalry that fought for and protected its parent organization, while further facilitating its operation through reconnaissance and the execution of raids to discomfit the enemy.

The Civil War marked a significant expansion in the size of cavalry forces employed in all theaters of operation. Cavalry again demonstrated its tactical prowess on the battlefield, and its ability to conduct raids sometimes impacted army level operations. GEN Earl Van Dorn's attack upon GEN Ulysses S. Grant's supply depot at Holly Springs, Mississippi, for example, forced a delay in the U.S. Army's efforts to capture Vicksburg and open the Mississippi River. However, the most important contributions of cavalry in the war lay in their ability to shape campaigns, using their combination of mobility and combat power to protect their parent armies and create favorable conditions for battle.

In October 1862, for example, MG Don Carlos Buell's Army of the Ohio maneuvered to defeat and expel GEN Braxton Bragg's Army of the Mississippi from Kentucky. With GEN Bragg's forces scattered across the central part of the state, MG Buell used a cavalry column as a feint toward the state capital at Frankfurt to confuse Confederate leaders regarding his intent. His main body advanced from Louisville upon a smaller enemy force near Bardstown, screened by cavalry that kept Confederate mounted troops from determining their strength and intent. The Confederates in Bardstown withdrew but were forced to stand and fight at Perryville before they could link up with the rest of GEN Bragg's formations. MG Buell's cavalry thus enabled Buell to concentrate his entire army against a smaller Confederate force. Moreover, thanks to the aggressive action of his cavalry, the Confederates lacked accurate and timely information regarding the size, location, and intent of MG Buell's army. When GEN Bragg opted to fight at Perryville, he did so unaware that he was outnumbered by three to one and risked annihilation. The failure of MG Buell's Army of the Ohio to gain a decisive victory in the resultant engagement reflected an ineffective command structure, a poor command climate, and a large percentage of green troops rather than a failing on the part of his cavalry.

The better known actions of BG John Buford's cavalry division in 1863 shaped the outcome of the Gettysburg



Figure 1. SGT Brian Haiku, Company C, 1st Battalion, 9th Cavalry Regiment, scans his sector during a reconnaissance mission on Haifa Street in Baghdad, Iraq. (Photo by SGT Christina Rockhill)

campaign. The Union cavalry reconnoitered on behalf of GEN George G. Meade's Army of the Potomac, finally occupying the town of Gettysburg with its critical road junction and commanding heights. He secured both and conducted a delaying action against arriving Confederate forces. BG Buford's actions enabled the Army of the Potomac to occupy the surrounding high ground, leaving Confederate GEN Robert E. Lee with the option of either attacking in unfavorable circumstances or ceding the battlespace to GEN Meade. GEN Lee opted to attack and suffered a resounding defeat. It was a decisive battle fought in conditions shaped by a cavalry force capable of gaining critical information, securing key terrain, and fighting when required. The absence of a similar Confederate capability in the days prior to the battle simply lengthened the odds against a Southern victory and underscored the vulnerability of a formation without cavalry.

In the wake of the Civil War, the missions of cavalry became codified in doctrine, resulting in the mission set referenced above that established how cavalry organizations enabled and protected their parent formations with the expectation that such actions would entail combat. These ideas

shaped cavalry developments early in World War II, but they were largely jettisoned following the creation of U.S. Army Ground Forces in March 1942. This new command possessed authority over the combat arms, and under LTG Lesley J. McNair's leadership it accelerated the mechanization of horse cavalry units and narrowed the mission set of the new mechanized cavalry troops, squadrons, and groups to reconnaissance. These units were not expected to fight on behalf of their parent formation. Indeed, "the cavalry reconnaissance squadron, mechanized, is organized, equipped, and trained to perform reconnaissance missions. Other type missions are given only in furtherance of a reconnaissance mission unless no other troops are available for other type operations for the division or larger unit."⁴ In training this emphasis was reinforced by penalizing unit personnel who sought to execute a broader mission set. Consequently, the unofficial motto of at least one such unit was "sneak, peak, and retreat."⁵

Even before implementation of these changes the experience of mechanized cavalry in North Africa indicated a problem. When lightly armed scouts could reach an observation point undetected, they could observe enemy activity and direct air and artillery

strikes upon it to good effect.⁶ However, the following command observation indicates the limitations of light reconnaissance forces lacking lethality and survivability:

Weak reconnaissance can get nowhere on its mission against this much stronger opposition. On the other hand, on many occasions it will be overrun and destroyed before it can obtain any information of value. Also, on occasions in the desert, it was not even possible for weak reconnaissance to pause long enough to send in valuable information that had been collected, and it was not unusual to see light, long distance reconnaissance piling pell mell back on the main body just ahead of a strong surprise attack. In this day and age, long distance reconnaissance must be organized to fight in execution of its mission, to fight for time to send information in, and to fight for time for the main body to properly utilize the information sent in⁷.

Facing an adaptive enemy acclimated to their environment and employing

strong counterreconnaissance, mechanized cavalry found combat power necessary.

In Europe, away from the deserts of North Africa, the same realization occurred but for different reasons. Field commanders receiving mechanized cavalry units, largely ignored the recon-only emphasis of their doctrine, and employed them as needed. Hence, mechanized cavalry performed the full range of traditional cavalry missions to satisfy field command requirements. This reality reflected a flaw in the thinking underpinning the recon-only emphasis: if cavalry only performs reconnaissance, who assumes responsibility for the rest of the mission set? There was no good answer then or now. Therefore, mechanized cavalry units found themselves employed in a much broader range of activities than intended. Fortunately, despite the doctrinal winnowing, these units possessed sufficient organic assets to adapt to their expanded role.

Postwar analysis of mechanized cavalry found that the most common types of missions performed at the division and higher level lay in the category of

security.⁸ Moreover, such missions generally entailed combat or the probability of combat, underscoring the need for a cavalry force able to fight. Consequently, in the immediate postwar years, cavalry doctrine reverted to a broader mission set and more aggressive tone. Organizational changes resulted in cavalry organizations restructured for versatility and combat. The platoon constituted the basic organizational building block, and it now became the smallest combined arms team in the U.S. Army, with a scout section, a light tank section, a mortar team, and an infantry squad.

The test of these changes occurred in the Korean War and largely validated the value of enhanced combat power and versatility. The division reconnaissance company constituted the largest cavalry unit deployed, but the company's combined arms nature and more traditional mission set suited the ever-changing nature of the Korean War, particularly in its first 18 months in which the front moved up and down the peninsula. This period marked the employment of the reconnaissance companies in a variety of traditional cavalry functions, though the mobility

Figure 2. Cavalry scouts with 1st Squadron, 105th Cavalry, 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, stage their Humvees before conducting a route reconnaissance mission. (Photo by SPC Kati Stacy)





Figure 3. 1LT Donald Maloy, 1st Platoon leader, Co. D, 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry Regiment from Fort Carson, Colo., communicates through his radio while a Bradley Armored Personnel Carrier provides security during a joint Iraqi Army and coalition forces clearing operation. (U.S. Army photo by SGT John Crosby)

differential among the unit's tracked and wheeled vehicles complicated operations in mountainous terrain, particularly when the narrow, Korean roads became covered in snow and ice or eroded amid heavy rain. Field commanders posed a different challenge by misusing their cavalry asset. One division commander stripped away the light tanks from his reconnaissance company and employed them as a separate armor element, thereby eroding the capability of the company.⁹

In the 1960s American cavalry organizations found themselves fighting in another conflict on the Asian mainland. The influx of American ground forces into the Republic of South Vietnam that began in 1965 included an armored cavalry regiment, division cavalry squadrons, and smaller reconnaissance organizations. Initially, these organizations possessed no doctrinal guidance for their employment in counterinsurgency (COIN), but their combined arms nature and their array of organic assets provided them with the versatility to adapt to their new

environment and apply doctrinal principals to a unique operational environment.

When American combat forces first arrived in Vietnam, the Viet Cong sought to engage them in pitched battles. This approach failed in the face of overwhelming American firepower and led to an avoidance of combat except under favorable conditions. Too often, American troops made contact with the Viet Cong only to see the latter retire before they could be brought to battle. Cavalry organizations helped to overcome this problem through the conduct of reconnaissance in force. Indeed, an analysis of cavalry operations found that reconnaissance constituted their principal function.¹⁰ However, the reconnaissance missions often entailed the assignment of a search area in which cavalry units operated in a methodical manner to locate enemy forces. Once contact occurred, they did not stop to inform higher and await the arrival of external forces to finish the job. Instead, they possessed the organic means to fix the enemy force in place

long enough for additional combat power to be massed against them. This massing, dubbed "pile-on," involved other ground troops, air strikes, artillery bombardment, and sometimes an air assault. However, when time and circumstances precluded the rapid arrival of additional combat assets, the cavalry utilized its own organic combat power to find, fix, and finish.

Similarly, cavalry found counter ambush operations an effective means to locate and destroy hostile combatants. When the Viet Cong or their North Vietnamese allies triggered an ambush, they revealed their location. If they could be engaged and destroyed before retreating, then their attempted ambush became an opportunity for American forces. Cavalry organizations therefore executed Thunder Runs and Roadrunner operations to trigger ambushes, relying upon their armor to survive initial contact and their firepower to engage the enemy force. The parallel stream of reports they provided to higher headquarters guided the deployment of preplanned blocking

actions to interdict the enemy's retreat. Such tactics gained sophistication over time, involving air cavalry, artillery, air strikes, and the aerial insertion of other ground forces astride likely avenues of retreat. These actions served to discourage further ambushes in the same area—at least for a time—and thereby facilitated the uninterrupted flow of military assets and supplies vital for the continuation of the war effort. These effects derived from the ability of cavalry to fight when necessary.

At the Cold War's height in the 1980s, cavalry organizations constituted a critical component in the defensive plans of American divisions and corps in Central Europe facing a large, mechanized threat capable of large-scale combat operations (LSCO) on short notice. Forward deployed cavalry organizations constituted an early warning in the event of an invasion. Should it occur, cavalry units were expected to conduct retrograde operations and delay the onrushing Warsaw Pact forces, protecting their parent formations' ability to maneuver and mount a counterstroke. Such missions necessitated organizations able to survive on a battlefield dominated by armored systems overwatched by attack aviation and supported by massed artillery.

Although an invasion of Central Europe did not occur, the capabilities of cavalry organizations honed to fight World War III were demonstrated during Operation Desert Storm in 1991. The 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment executed a successful cover mission for the VII Corps in which it located, engaged, and determined the dispositions of Iraqi forces. This action culminated in the Battle of 73 Easting, resulting in widespread destruction of Iraqi armored assets and enabling VII Corps armored formations to pass through the cavalry to complete the destruction of the Iraqi forces before continuing their advance.

Task Force 2-4 Cavalry conducted reconnaissance, screen, and guard missions that enabled its parent 24th Infantry Division (Mechanized) to accelerate operational tempo and exploit opportunity. On 25 February 1991, 2-4 Cavalry conducted a zone reconnaissance forward of the 24th Infantry



Figure 4. U.S. Soldiers assigned to Comanche Troop, 1st Squadron, 2D Cavalry Regiment, assault a compound during a squad level situational training exercise (STX) in Grafenwoehr Training Area, Germany, Jan. 11, 2022. (U.S. Army photo by Kevin Sterling Payne)

Division's main effort. Despite poor weather and limited visibility, this action revealed the lack of Iraqi defenses along the border and identified high mobility corridors—information that permitted the division to hasten its pace and exploit surprise. 2-4 Cavalry continued its forward reconnaissance throughout the day, enabling the division commander to exploit a gap in the Iraqi defenses. 2-4 Cavalry then executed a moving flank guard, and when the division turned eastward, the cavalry screened the formation's northern flank to prevent Iraqi interference as the division closed on its final objectives. It also discovered the presence of a large, impassable bog. Alerted to this mobility obstacle, the division evaded it without dispersion or loss of combat power. Consequently, the 24th Infantry Division moved rapidly eastward toward Basra with 2-4 Cavalry guarding its northern flank until the ceasefire announcement on 28 February.¹¹

Similarly, when the 3rd Infantry Division (Mechanized) led the U.S. Army's march to Baghdad in March-April 2003, it relied upon its organic cavalry

squadron for situational understanding and knowledge of its operational environment. 3-7 Cavalry provided this information initially through the execution of a force-oriented reconnaissance by its air and ground components to ensure the division's freedom of maneuver. Upon reaching As Samawah, 3-7 Cavalry came under attack from waves of attacking Fedayeen, supported by artillery and mortars. The squadron relied upon its organic combat power to repulse these attacks, but the unexpected Iraqi resistance alerted the 3rd Infantry Division to a previously unidentified threat. In response, the formation diverted its 3rd Brigade Combat Team to protect its line of communications from Fedayeen threats as it continued northward. Through its actions, 3-7 Cavalry forced a previously unidentified threat to reveal itself, improved situational understanding, and provided information that enabled the 3rd Infantry Division to make appropriate adjustments to its planned march on Baghdad to mitigate risk.

When the 3rd Infantry Division exited the Karbala Gap and advanced toward

Baghdad, 3-7 Cavalry guarded its flank. The squadron's primary mission lay in preventing Iraqi forces outside the capital interfering with the division's movement. When the 3rd Infantry Division seized a bridge over the Euphrates River, it lay poised to capture Baghdad International Airport and conduct operations into the Iraqi capital. The extent and effectiveness of these operations depended upon the unimpeded ability to concentrate combat power. Hence, 3-7 Cavalry assumed blocking positions as the 3rd Infantry Division brigades advanced, its ground troops executing zone reconnaissance to each new objective and screen line. In the process, they eliminated enemy opposition that included armor and heavy weapons. When the 3rd Infantry Division began operations into central Baghdad, 3-7 Cavalry continued to protect its flanks, defeating Iraqi counterattacks. The squadron also discovered Iraqi armor and mechanized units deployed in ambush positions and facilitated their destruction. Through its actions, 3-7 Cavalry enabled the 3rd Infantry Division to avoid dissipation of its combat power and execute without interference the Thunder Runs into

Baghdad that triggered the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime.¹²

These actions marked the apex of cavalry organizations designed, trained, and configured to inform, protect, and facilitate the operations of supported formations. They culminated a heritage of survivable combat power capable of a unique mission set and able to fight for its parent formation. In the wake of Saddam Hussein's regime collapse, the U.S. Army entered a period of protracted COIN. COIN emphasized surveillance over the screen, guard, and cover missions of cavalry security missions, highlighted the importance of stealthy information collection, and leveraged basic infantry skills rather than scout fieldcraft. In this altered operational setting, cavalry organizations nevertheless demonstrated an ability to adapt their organic capabilities to COIN, exemplified by the actions of the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment at Tal Afar in 2005-2006 that earned it a Valorous Unit Award.

By then, however, such powerful cavalry organizations were on borrowed time. U.S. Army modularity resulted in the elimination of several division and

higher echelon assets to enable the creation of more brigade combat teams. Division cavalry squadrons and ultimately armored cavalry regiments gradually disappeared. The absence of these units also ended their ability to function as finishing schools generating cavalry experts comfortable with air-ground operations in varied operational environments. Instead, the Global War on Terror encouraged the expansion of light forces reliant upon technology to collect information and watch for indicators of insurgent activity. The reconnaissance, surveillance, and target acquisition (RSTA) squadron of the Stryker brigade combat team (SBCT) embodied this emphasis, and RSTA concepts bled over into cavalry doctrine, sparking confusion about the nature and role of cavalry, unresolved by the tendency of the commanders of the small modular brigades to employ their cavalry as a third maneuver element.

The RSTA Squadron originated to build situational awareness for the parent SBCT. By intent it relied upon technology, stealth, and a digital network to accomplish this role. It was not

Figure 5. An M1A2 Abrams Main Battle Tank crew engages targets while providing direct fire support for a reconnaissance element during Hunter-Killer training at the Kuwait Multipurpose Range Complex. (U.S. Army photo by SSG Leah R. Kilpatrick)



designed to perform the range of actions normally performed by a cavalry unit, particularly those that might require combat. The lighter nature of the RSTA Squadron reflected its specialized function in an organization optimized for small-scale contingency rather than LSCO. Yet its reconnaissance and surveillance orientation suited COIN and encouraged the creation of a RSTA Brigade, subsequently renamed the battlefield surveillance brigade (Bfsb), to function in the gray space once dominated by division cavalry squadrons and armored cavalry regiments. This new creation possessed a variety of tools with which to collect information and generate actionable intelligence. However, its minimal combat power forced reliance upon other maneuver elements to exploit this intelligence. It could not and did not replace the capability set or missions of cavalry.

The concepts underpinning RSTA and Bfsb derived from 1990s intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) notions that embraced sensors and technology to gain contact and develop the situation from a safe distance. These ideas briefed well but did not survive contact with reality in the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The surprise Iraqi counterattack at Objective Peach highlighted the danger of overreliance upon sensors and technology to provide timely intelligence in a combat zone. A U.S. Army study further noted, "The ability of the Iraqis to hide, with some success, from the incredible array of technical intelligence available to the coalition may give pause to those advocating that U.S. Army forces will be able to develop the situation out of contact and attack from stand-off distances."¹³

Such cautionary observations were largely forgotten as COIN operations became the principal focus of ground forces. Moreover, the duration of COIN operations—twenty years if Afghanistan is included—generated leaders familiar only with COIN rather than high intensity warfare. The infantry-centric nature of COIN further eroded familiarity with the greater versatility of cavalry and its survivable combat power. Light forces with little combat power and even less survivability but possessing an array of sensors and technology continued to attract attention.

This focus increased after the U.S. Army's force structure decisions of 2024-2025 eliminated cavalry squadrons from infantry and Stryker BCTs. The prevalence and apparent success of drones in the war in Ukraine further encouraged the creation of light, high tech organizations to replace these squadrons.

Infantry organizations could look to the familiar reconnaissance-surveillance emphasis of the Global War on Terror, prior long range surveillance detachments, and even the intelligence and reconnaissance units of the 1940s-1950s as precedents. Such organizations were not without value, but their effectiveness derived from their ability to work with and within a much broader pantheon of organizations and assets at the brigade, division, and corps level. With many of these assets, including division cavalry and armored cavalry regiments, now absent from the U.S. Army's lineup, the ability of multi-function reconnaissance companies and multi-purpose companies to execute roles once performed by cavalry organizations manned by 19-series soldiers remains questionable, particularly since these organizations have yet to validate their effectiveness at

combat training centers.

Advocates who point to the war in Ukraine as justification for such units overendowed with technology but lacking survivable combat power and unable to fight for their parent formation miss the point. Had the Russians captured Kyiv and established a more pliable regime in 2022, the current reliance upon drones in an attritional conflict would likely not have occurred. American doctrine still embraces early, rapid, and decisive actions to prevent the onset of positional warfare, and in the critical opening phases of a conflict, the value of a cavalry force able to shape conditions for its parent formation remains a critical capability. No credible evidence has emerged to demonstrate the obsolescence of such a force or the emergence of a viable replacement. Neither the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict of 2020 nor the ongoing war in Ukraine have witnessed the employment of cavalry with the capability set, organization, and versatility of U.S. cavalry. Indeed, on a lethal, transparent battlefield, the ability of cavalry to survive, operate at a high tempo, and both protect and facilitate the operations of supported formations will likely be a precious and desirable

Figure 6. An M155 Sheridan tank from A Troop, 1st Bn, 1st Cavalry Regiment, Americal Division moves out while on an operation north of Tam Ky. (Photographer unknown)



commodity. Supporters of light forces optimized for surveillance face a survivability problem if they seek to operate beyond the forward line of own troops where cavalry traditionally roamed.

Advocates of organizations built on the premise that new technology and networked lethality coupled with a lack of survivability will be able to replace cavalry would do well to read the upcoming version of ATP 3-20.96, *Cavalry Squadron*, currently in final development. This manual provides a clear depiction of cavalry missions, composition, and manner of operation. Its principal theme embraces the traditional roles of cavalry outlined above: inform, protect, and fight on behalf of the main body. The new manual embraces new technology and changes in the operational environment but not at the expense of historically validated principles. Instead, it explains how properly organized and employed cavalry retains its utility and relevance on the battlefields of today and tomorrow through reconnaissance, security and protection, and economy of force operations that may entail combat. These central tenets reflect both past reality and deliberate analysis of current trends. They underscore cavalry's ability to leverage technology to enhance traditional capabilities and continuously adapt to an evolving operational environment. Readers of the upcoming ATP 3-20.96 will quickly realize that attempting to build a tech-based alternative to the squadron, narrow its mission set, and jettison organic combat power is the surest way to create what COL Scott once called "a spineless adjunct" to the force.

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The Illusion of Transparency

by LTC Scott Dawe and LTC Alan Hastings

As the U.S. Army orients on large-scale combat operations (LSCO), the imperative to win the first fight of the next war has become the driving focus of not only doctrine and training, but of the way we conceive of ourselves. As MG Curtis Taylor argued in a recent *Modern Warfare Institute* (MWI) article, our units must be prepared for a violent, high-stakes initial contact that could determine the trajectory of the entire conflict.¹ This preparation, however, is threatened by a seductive, yet dangerous, illusion: the concept of a “transparent battlefield,” where commanders can see all and know all in real-time. While higher command posts may enjoy a clearer view, for armored formations at the tactical edge, this transparency is a mirage. We argue that preparing to win the first fight requires us to first shed this illusion and embrace the murky, opaque reality of combat at the tactical level.

This does not mean we ignore the underlying technological shift. Again, as noted by MG Taylor, the proliferation of cheap sensors is creating a state of pervasive surveillance that will “render it impossible to hide the presence of any significant military capability.”² Therefore, the winner will not be the side that achieves perfect, persistent transparency, but the one that most effectively masters the fight for

temporary windows of opacity through superior counter-reconnaissance and masking.

Operational approaches on the modern battlefield remain in flux as lessons from the multitude of ongoing conflicts are learned, implemented, and assessed. As such, the Army can be credited with a great degree of successful introspection which has been operationalized through the Army Transformation Initiative (ATI), Transformation in Contact (TiC), as well through professional dialogue. There is a risk, though, of learning some materiel lessons too well at the cost of certain intangibles that will be hard to reproduce once lost. We see cavalry operations as one of those intangible risks. What follows is a breakdown of the problem of turning bulk sensing into actionable knowledge, and then an appeal to the often intangible and unquantifiable abilities afforded by the cavalry scout in the supporting mission sets of reconnaissance and security.

The Limits of Sensing: From Data Glut to Understanding

The sheer number of sensors available to formations today is staggering. Unmanned aerial and ground vehicles provide an unprecedented ability to collect vast amounts of information. However, this torrent of data does not automatically equate to perfect

knowledge. Individually, these sensors provide localized, episodic awareness. Their effectiveness is consistently frustrated by enemy counter-unmanned aerial systems (CUAS), air defense, and electronic warfare (EW), not to mention the simple, timeless limitations of battery life, dense terrain, and foul weather. As a result, perfect situational awareness is fleeting. What we have is truly a snapshot of a specific place at a specific time.

Even more profoundly, we must confront the gap between sensing and sense-making. The proliferation of sensors creates new mountains of information that must be processed, analyzed, and synthesized by already overburdened analysts. This gap is amplified because technology is “too easily fooled by countermeasures and decoys.”³ As observed from experience at the National Training Center (NTC), even sophisticated robotic systems lack the human intuition to develop a situation, quoting one young operator who noted, “Robots don’t have hair on the back of their neck.”⁴ This underscores the irreplaceable role of the human in the loop to translate data into understanding.

Knowing the enemy’s composition and disposition on a map is one thing; knowing their intent to seize or defend a piece of terrain is another. That certainty can only be gained by forcing their hand and actively trying to wrest that terrain from them. At the tactical



Figure 1. PFC Lai Ha, a paratrooper assigned to 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division inspects and deploys an Orqa First Person View drone that will be operated and tested during a live-fire exercise at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana, March, 8, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by SGT Andrew Clark)

level, the battlefield is rarely transparent. It is a shifting landscape of translucent zones, where we have a general idea of the enemy, and opaque zones, where our assessments have yet to be validated. The primary tool to penetrate this opacity remains cavalry formations.

The Scout as the All-Weather Sensor

In this complex sensory environment, one platform remains the commander's most reliable tool for turning uncertainty into opportunity: the cavalry scout. Scouts are the only truly all-weather, all-terrain, 24/7 sensor available. They are the essential human element that bridges the gap between data and understanding. While technology provides the dots on the map, scouts connect them. They provide sustained context, confirming or denying assessments, and ultimately

turning a translucent picture into a transparent, targetable reality. They remain the instruments that answer the commander's critical information requirements (CCIR) in a contested environment where our technological overmatch can no longer be guaranteed. Though reconnaissance and security are but mission sets, at the end of the day, it is also a mindset. "If you are firing your own weapon, you are wrong" is a hard concept for the undisciplined to internalize.

The Enemy Gets a Vote: Counter-Reconnaissance and Masking

We are not the only ones striving for a transparent battlefield. A peer enemy's own sophisticated sensing and sense-making capabilities profoundly challenge our ability to achieve surprise. Coupled with their own long-range

precision fires, this allows them to effectively punish our attempts to concentrate combat power. If we are to successfully penetrate and exploit an enemy's defense, we must not only seek to see but also actively work to become unseen. We must, as John Antal has argued, pay greater attention to the concept of "masking."⁵

The central challenge for armored formations is no longer just finding the enemy, but actively denying the enemy the ability to sense, make sense of, and target our own forces. In an era of pervasive surveillance, formations must "survive by looking unimportant."⁶ This means becoming experts at masking not just physical signatures, but also thermal and electronic signals to blend in with the clutter of the modern world. The critical question becomes: how do we strip the enemy of their sensors and create pockets of opacity on the battlefield at the time and place

of our choosing, allowing us to concentrate combat power without telegraphing our intent? Again, the counter-reconnaissance fight with an economy of force organization is well suited for the cavalry formation.

Preparing to Win the First Fight

The challenge, then, is not merely theoretical; it is a practical problem of readiness. If we are to take seriously the task of preparing our units to win the first fight, we must translate these concepts into tangible actions at the unit level. This means moving beyond a reliance on technological overmatch and building resilience for a contested environment.

First, we must train for opacity. Our home-station training and combat training center rotations must relentlessly challenge our units in environments where sensors are jammed, drones are shot down, and communications are denied. This training must

incorporate the specific adaptations required for modern armored warfare. Following the model proposed by MG Taylor, this includes developing and drilling: (1) robust, layered counter-drone systems; (2) embedded EW to jam enemy systems and protect our own; and (3) the use of our own swarms of simple, attritable robotic systems for breaching and strike missions.⁷ But this is only the initial stage of meeting enemy UAS systems like for like. There must be steps between the UAS fight and the infantry or armored company attack. At least one of those steps remains the human scout.

Second, as you have already noted, winning the first fight is about seizing the initiative. In the context of a near-transparent operational battlefield, the initiative will belong to the side that best masters the counter-reconnaissance fight. Our scouts must not only be experts at finding the enemy but also at destroying and deceiving the enemy's reconnaissance capabilities. Winning the human counter-recon

fight creates the temporary windows of opacity needed to mass combat power at the decisive point, achieving the surprise necessary to win that critical first engagement.

Finally, preparing for the first fight means empowering tactical leaders. The speed and lethality of the future battlefield will not allow for centralized, top-down decision-making. Commanders must underwrite the risk inherent in empowering platoon and company-level leaders to develop the situation and act on their own initiative, guided by intent. This is the essence of turning the scout's situational awareness into immediate, violent action that unbalances the enemy from the start.

Winning in a Murky Reality

Armored formations exist to penetrate the enemy's defense and exploit the breach, but this can only happen if we survive and win the initial contact. As

Figure 2. SPC Demetrius Melendez, a paratrooper assigned to 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, uses Skyzone First Person View goggles to operate the Orqa First Person View drone during a live-fire exercise at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana, March, 8, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by SGT Andrew Clark)



has been stated, the outcome of the next war may well hinge on the first fight. To win it, we must shed the comforting illusion of the transparent battlefield and embrace the murky reality of a contested environment where information is incomplete and fleeting. This requires a renewed investment in our human scouts as the primary tool for forging understanding from chaos. More importantly, it means shifting our focus from simply seeing the enemy to actively preventing the enemy from seeing us. By mastering the art of masking and winning the counter-reconnaissance fight—itself a synthesis of human skill and technological superiority in counter-drone and electronic warfare—we create the temporary, localized windows of opportunity needed to concentrate combat power, achieve surprise, and seize the initiative. Preparing our units to do this is

not just an exercise in improving the use of cavalry; it is the fundamental requirement for winning the first, and decisive, fight of the next war.

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NOTES

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2 Major General Curtis Taylor, “The Coming Blitzkrieg: Adapting Armored Formations for the Future of Warfare,” *Military Review* (Online Exclusive), December 2025, 3.

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4 *Ibid.*

5 John Antal. “The Ten Rules of Masking.” *The Cove*, 10 February 2024.

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“Whoever Saw Cavalry?”

Recommendations for Post-ARSTRUC R&S Formations

by LTC David Devine and MAJ Zachary Newman

In May 1954, *ARMOR* Magazine published an article written by then-MG James Gavin, who had commanded the storied 82nd Airborne Division during the latter part of World War II. In his article – titled “Cavalry, and I Don’t Mean Horses” – MG Gavin addressed the inability of 1950s-era cavalry forces to conduct their reconnaissance and security (R&S) missions. MG Gavin asserted that this deficiency stemmed from a lack of aggressiveness and a so-called mobility differential between cavalry units and mechanized infantry and armored forces, all of which relied on the same heavy tracked vehicles.¹ MG Gavin also contended that the Cavalry of the late 1940s and 1950s represented a “gallant great arm of the U.S. Army, whose soul [had] been traded

for a body” in the form of tanks and tracked vehicles ill-suited to its mission set.² This lack of soul resulted in substantial reconnaissance failures early in the Korean War and the cavalry’s inability to act as the eyes and ears of the great mechanized divisions of the mid-1950s. MG Gavin concluded that U.S. Soldiers of his day could reasonably inquire of this gallant yet ineffective and increasingly marginalized arm: “Whoever saw cavalry?”³

Seventy years later, the Cavalry remains in the same unfortunate state described by MG Gavin in 1954. Despite the considerable technological advances of the last seven decades, we have not gotten our soul back. In fact, with the publication of the 2024 Army Structure (ARSTRUC) and its associated modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) changes, U.S. Army cavalry formations have arguably

become more irrelevant than their historical counterparts from the 1950s. This irrelevance – tacitly acknowledged by the recent inactivation of all Stryker and infantry brigade combat team (BCT) cavalry squadrons – stems not just from a lack of focus on training core cavalry capabilities but from deeply-rooted cultural issues. As a result, cavalry squadrons often fail to perform their core R&S tasks, offering little benefit to their parent BCTs; instead, they act just like any other maneuver unit rather than a specialized information collection formation. Accordingly, even those armored BCT (ABCT) cavalry squadrons who survived the ARSTRUC cuts continue to have a body but no soul.

Yet, MG Gavin’s 1954 article also contained recommendations for restoring the Cavalry’s usefulness and relevancy. Many of these suggestions still ring true, as modern cavalry formations may look different than the Cold War squadrons of MG Gavin’s day but must perform the same four basic tasks. Squadrons must collect information, synchronize and combine arms in the close fight, talk across the battlefield at long range, and self-sustain to the greatest extent possible. The Cavalry’s proficiency in conducting these four core tasks has atrophied at echelon. To regain it, squadrons must today focus



on three priorities related not only to unit training but also to leader development and organizational culture. First, cavalry squadrons must prioritize training the type of holistic tactical mobility born from mastering both new technology and existing systems. Secondly, cavalry commanders must also develop formations that boast improved organizational mobility, the type that results in agile units that can rapidly plan, execute, and assess operations. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, cavalry leaders must re-inculcate the aggressive and independent mindset – one rooted in the tenets of the mission command philosophy – needed to keep scouts out in front at the tactical edge.

The Problem

“Because of our deification of heavy equipment—and the combat practices of late World War II, which deluded us into believing that heavy armor is cavalry...we lost the Cavalry when we mounted it in weighty tanks and trucks, all of which move (if the terrain will allow them to move at all) at exactly the same speed as motorized infantry, if not slower.”⁴

In late 2024, the U.S. Army directed all active-duty continental United States (CONUS) and outside the continental United States (OCONUS) IBCT and SBCT cavalry squadrons to either inactivate or transform into infantry formations. Only ABCT squadrons with their venerable Bradley Fighting Vehicles (BFVs) and tank companies remain. Significant impacts reverberated across the Armor branch almost immediately. Thousands of U.S. cavalry scouts, military occupational specialty (MOS) 19D, have reclassified to MOS 19C – Bradley crewmember. These Soldiers now focus on operating a platform, the maintenance and sustainment of which may arguably take priority over conducting cavalry operations. Newly commissioned lieutenants in the Armor Basic Officer Leader Course (ABOLC) now exclusively train on tanks at the expense of nearly all cavalry instruction – an educational paradigm that the ARSTRUC reinforces. With the cessation of the division cavalry program, all divisions and most BCTs across the U.S. Army now lack a dedicated R&S element to gather information, provide early

warning, or deny an enemy the element of surprise.

Yet, these ARSTRUC changes do not come arbitrarily. The U.S. Army made the difficult decision to modify its force structure and prioritize air defense, fires, and other multi-domain formations critical to the successful conduct of large-scale combat operations (LSCO). Furthermore, Armor leaders would do well to acknowledge that problems existed in the Cavalry community before 2024. Though the ARSTRUC retained all ABCT squadrons, many of these heavy cavalry formations have struggled for years to conduct R&S operations effectively. Much of this difficulty in the heavy squadrons stems from an overreliance on tracked armored vehicles at the expense of dismounted operations and a lack of emphasis on training the four core cavalry tasks mentioned above. In addition, cavalry units often struggle to maintain the organizational agility – in planning, executing, or assessing operations – required to stay ahead of their parent brigades.

As a result, when they arrive at the National Training Center (NTC) these ABCT cavalry squadrons often resemble less capable combined arms battalions. They issue doctrinally incorrect, confusing, or inappropriate tactical tasks to subordinate troops and struggle to provide meaningful commander’s R&S guidance. These cavalry formations tend to misunderstand or disregard information collection fundamentals; they often do not collect information at all or fail to provide it in a timely manner to their higher headquarters. Squadrons also struggle to synchronize and combine arms in the close fight. Accordingly, these formations cannot conduct focused R&S operations and often resort to executing hasty and discombobulated movements to contact. Their screens struggle to protect the main body or provide early warnings, often because the squadron remains out of position and unable to manage transitions during brigade operations. This inability to maintain tempo or manage transitions often stems from difficulties in rapidly sustaining cavalry troops, and these troops compound the problem by eschewing any effort to self-sustain.

Finally, squadrons routinely arrive at the NTC unable to fully employ either those systems they have possessed for years, such as high frequency (HF) radios, or critical newer platforms such as small unmanned aerial systems (sUAS). These training deficiencies result in units that cannot talk over even moderate distances or maintain contact with the enemy.

Solutions

Armor leaders must look inward to address the Cavalry’s training and cultural problems. We must discard parochialism and acknowledge that, though unfortunate for IBCT and SBCT squadrons, recent changes have modified the Armor force without diminishing the need for effective R&S operations on the modern battlefield. We must also resist the urge to squabble over combat platforms or pontificate endlessly about the BFV’s role in cavalry formations. The U.S. Army currently invests significant resources into next-generation platform development, and advocating for a new tracked vehicle lies beyond the scope of this article. Instead, cavalry leaders should focus on improving organizational adaptiveness, inculcating a culture of aggressiveness and initiative, and honing the ability to employ and innovate with those critical technologies currently on hand within our formations. These cultural and organizational problems stand out as arguably even more pressing than the need for new tanks or fighting vehicles. Solving them may also address our enduring collective bewilderment regarding our role in LSCO and ensure that the larger U.S. Army sees the Cavalry and acknowledges its worth.

Fix The Cavalry’s Tactical Mobility Problem

“Cavalry is supposed to be the arm of mobility. It exists and serves a useful purpose because of its mobility differential—the contrast between its mobility and that of other land forces. Without the differential, it is not Cavalry.”⁵

MG Gavin’s original article goes beyond lamenting the tactical mobility difficulties inherent in the cavalry formations of his time. He also writes at

length about the benefits of new technology on the modern battlefield; in MG Gavin's view, such technology could enable future cavalry formations to overcome mobility challenges. MG Gavin described a new type of combat platform for the 1950s – the helicopter – and extolled its virtues in the conduct of R&S operations.⁶ Those new helicopters could quickly move R&S forces to critical points on the battlefield and keep them ahead of both the enemy and their adjacent friendly units, much like the horses of old. MG Gavin contended that "forces so organized and equipped [would] have a predominant influence on future warfare."⁷

Helicopters no longer represent cutting-edge technology, but later conflicts from Vietnam to the Global War on Terror validated many of MG Gavin's assertions. Though cavalry units may still benefit from the mobility provided by rotary wing assets, the last twenty

years have produced new technologies that have changed the very nature of tactical mobility. Accordingly, cavalry leaders must now change how they think about the tactical problems associated with conducting R&S operations, and how technology can benefit their formations in collecting information.

First, our squadrons must expand their tactical mobility, defined by FM 1-02.1, *Operational Terms*, as "the ability of friendly forces to move and maneuver freely on the battlefield relative to the enemy."⁸ To improve such an important ability, cavalry leaders must reconsider many of their most important – and frequently discarded – tools. HF and tactical satellite (TACSAT) radios, anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) systems, 120mm mortar carrier vehicles, and even long-range optics fall into this unfortunate category. Many cavalry units arriving at the NTC lack the training required to employ these systems and

quickly experience a corresponding inability to conduct R&S tasks effectively. Squadrons with HF or TACSAT training deficiencies often do not provide these critical systems to their dismounted scouts, who must then contend with the limited range of very high frequency (VHF) radios in their efforts to report rapidly and accurately. These same units also often experience issues with VHF radios – single channel ground and airborne radio system (SINCGARS). – and squadron primary, alternate, contingency, and emergency (PACE) plans rapidly become untenable and unable to support long-range reporting. These formations learn, or relearn, a hard truth: that units that cannot talk on the battlefield become liabilities, and cavalry squadrons that cannot communicate become travesties.

Dismounted operations in cavalry units also suffer due to the lack of emphasis on Soldier-portable ATGM systems like

Figure 1. Skytroopers of Blue Team, Troop C, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), move into a jungle clearing from a UH-1D helicopter in Bong Son, Vietnam on 2 July 1967. (Photo by SP4 Bruce Montoya)



the Javelin, a weapon system that has proven exceptionally lethal during the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. The resulting ATGM training deficiency produces a “look, don’t touch” mindset amongst dismounted teams that severely hinders tactical mobility, limits possible engagement criteria, and stymies counter-reconnaissance efforts. A corresponding lack of focus on mortar section training and qualification limits the tactical solutions available to commanders at echelon concerning their extremely useful high-angle fires platforms. These training gaps produce squadrons that cannot talk over even moderate distances, fully employ their dismounts, or provide security by engaging the enemy on their terms with direct or indirect fires where appropriate based on engagement criteria. Just as with the over-encumbered scouts of MG Gavin’s day, modern cavalry troopers either do not possess or have neglected the tools necessary to guarantee tactical mobility and freedom of maneuver.

In addition to training on systems they have possessed for decades, cavalry formations must master the employment of newer sUAS platforms and integrate these systems into information collection and reconnaissance management plans. These unmanned platforms should figure just as prominently in squadrons as BFVs. Yet Black Hornets, Skydio RQ-28 quadcopters, or other crucial unmanned systems currently occupy a position in the cavalry somewhere between nuisance and sideshow; units arriving at the NTC either struggle to employ their drones or do not possess them in any significant quantity. If squadrons do come equipped with remotely piloted drones, they routinely struggle to mix or cue with these systems effectively and do not use them to augment mounted or dismounted screen positions. Squadrons often do not fly their unmanned systems, and instead of maximizing drone training across the formation, units also tend to further degrade sUAS effectiveness by restricting pilot training to only a few otherwise busy Soldiers. On the modern battlefield, such limited sUAS proficiency directly translates into reduced tactical mobility.

Cavalry squadrons must enhance their physical mobility by training across the spectrum of reconnaissance methods and employing critical technologies – new and old alike. Squadrons need to focus substantial attention on HF and TACSAT training to enhance dismounted reconnaissance proficiency and long-range communication capabilities. This HF and TACSAT training must occur repeatedly during events as varied as command maintenance, communications exercises, situational training lanes, or gunnery iterations; successful employment of all radio platforms must become the norm. Similarly, dismounted scouts require individual and collective training plans that emphasize killing enemy vehicles with ATGMs according to engagement criteria. Troop mortars must train to fully support R&S operations with timely and accurate high-angle fires, especially given the potential scarcity of field artillery support during LSCO. Commanders cannot simply choose to neglect such critical systems. The inability to use all available radios, ATGM systems (a category that must include all available AGTM systems such as Javelins, AT4s and recoilless rifles), and mortar platforms not only limits a squadron’s mounted and dismounted tactical mobility – it also spells certain death for U.S. Army cavalry troopers on the modern multi-domain battle-

field.

Finally, we must fly drones. Cavalry formations at echelon need to aggressively acquire, maintain, and train on RQ-28s, Black Hornets, and any other available type of sUAS platforms. Units must train all Soldiers – not just headquarters personnel, or first sergeant’s driver, or one person per platoon – to pilot drones to maximize their employment. To this end, cavalry troops must pursue an annual drone pilot certification for each Soldier with the same fervor as current physical fitness or individual weapons qualification requirements. Scouts must fly these systems constantly during individual and collective training events to instill operator confidence and develop the ability to use drones to support R&S operations of all types. The capabilities of modern drones, validated on an almost daily basis over Ukrainian battlefields and elsewhere, can provide scouts with substantial information collection options and enhanced tactical mobility on the battlefield. Conversely, any unit, and especially cavalry formations, that ignores these unmanned systems does so at their own ever-increasing peril.

Fix The Cavalry’s “Organizational Mobility” Problem

“Cavalry is the arm of shock and

Figure 2. 1st Cavalry Division Troopers assigned to 8th Brigade Engineer Battalion, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, train with a drone on Fort Hood, Texas, August 6, 2025. (U.S. Army Photo by SPC David Dumas)



firepower: it is the screen of time and information. It denies the enemy that talisman of success—surprise—while it provides our own forces with the means to achieve that very thing, surprise, and with it destruction of the enemy.”⁹

The lack of organizational mobility – defined here as the collective adaptability and flexibility required to rapidly plan, prepare, execute, and assess operations – also represents a serious problem that we must fix in modern cavalry squadrons. As with the tactical mobility issue, MG Gavin also identified this organizational problem in 1954. In describing the chaotic U.S. Army’s entry into the Korean conflict in the summer of 1950, MG Gavin asserted that the U.S. Army had a dire need at the outset of the war for cavalry forces to conduct R&S tasks. MG Gavin also postulated that well-employed cavalry could have exploited the success of the Inchon Landings later in 1950 as GEN Walton Walker’s X Corps drove north towards the Yalu River. Yet the U.S. Army lacked an adaptive and highly flexible cavalry force to rapidly collect information or provide early warning – and instead employed poorly organized, road-bound task forces to attempt those missions with tragic results.¹⁰

Cavalry formations face similar organizational mobility problems today. These units often fail to develop a culture of mission command suited to the fast pace of modern R&S operations. As a result, squadrons arriving at the NTC often look and act almost identically to their adjacent combined arms battalions. Squadrons at NTC often execute the same deliberate planning processes, conduct the same rigid sustainment procedures, and adhere to the same centralized command and control practices as every other formation in the BCT. Despite organic 120mm mortar capabilities that could provide more suitable options for commanders, cavalry formations frequently wait on the fires battalion for nearly all fire support requirements. Worse still, many squadron staff officers and commanders struggle to operate in ambiguous or fluid environments, despite the cavalry’s stated purpose as a higher headquarters’ eyes and ears.

Cavalry leaders must fix this lack of organizational adaptiveness by holistically addressing systems and processes within their squadrons. Squadron officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) require the ability to operate in a highly decentralized manner, driven primarily by R&S guidance and the commander’s intent. Their planning processes must demonstrate great agility and efficiency; per ATP 3-20.96, *Cavalry Squadron*, traditional military decision-making process (MDMP) often does not suffice.¹¹ Cavalry staffs must master the ability to conduct MDMP – or the rapid decision-making and synchronization process, or a custom-built squadron planning process – with exceptional efficiency and agility. Whatever process a squadron uses, it must produce simple squadron fighting products – including graphics, fire support matrices, and especially information collection synchronization matrices (ICSMs) – that can drive R&S operations. Squadrons must disseminate and rehearse these plans in a similarly efficient and oftentimes decentralized manner. Concise commander’s R&S guidance must lie at the heart of any squadron planning process. Time does not exist for squadrons to produce or consume lengthy or overly detailed orders. Cavalry squadrons exist so that others may enjoy that time.

In addition to retraining how they plan, cavalry units must rethink their sustainment processes. Many squadrons currently resemble combined arms battalions in their predictably timed logistics packages (LOGPACs), lockstep logistics resupply point (LRP) iterations, and lethargic maintenance procedures. Deliberate sustainment and maintenance operations certainly have their place, and units must carefully balance risk and operational requirements based on their sustainment capabilities. But highly centralized and rote processes often prove ill-suited to sustaining cavalry operations on the multi-domain battlefield. Cavalry troops should and usually do fight at night, and these formations rarely have time to wait on poorly timed evening LOGPACs before they move out to begin operations. Furthermore, troops and platoons may need to execute long-duration security operations or extensive zone reconnaissance

missions in restrictive terrain that presents hazards even to light wheeled vehicles, much less heavy expanded mobility tactical truck (HEMTT) fuelers or palletized load system (PLS) trailers. Squadrons often cannot risk resupplying and thus potentially compromising scouts operating in such terrain, or in a prolonged counter-reconnaissance fight with the enemy. Simply put, scouts spend most of their time outside of tactical assembly areas in places where sustainment assets cannot go, and troops do not have the luxury of abandoning their positions at the forward line of troops to conduct resupply. Finally, LSCO considerations may limit commodities across the BCT, causing brigade-level leaders to focus sustainment efforts on their main efforts at the expense of cavalry units.

Squadrons can begin to address these logistics difficulties by training flexible and agile sustainment processes at the staff and forward support company level. Squadron sustainers must think beyond relying only on predictable and often highly targetable service station or tailgate resupply techniques. At the very least, sustainment planners should heed the advice found in FM 3-98, *Reconnaissance and Security Operations*, and consider an appropriate reduction in these highly centralized LOGPAC operations whenever possible to maintain momentum during cavalry operations. These leaders must recognize that other methods of resupplying forces exist. Supply caches – often talked about but rarely executed – remain a viable sustainment option, as does aerial resupply when available. Squadron sustainment leaders must consider such options and remember that tactical realities and requirements must govern sustainment plans rather than convenience or predictable schedules. After all, cavalry doctrine stresses such flexibility, and ADP 4-0, *Sustainment*, identifies responsiveness and improvisation as two fundamental principles of sustainment. Yet few cavalry squadrons truly take these principles to heart at the NTC under LSCO conditions. Instead, they execute LOGPAC twice daily at 0600 and 1800 using the same LRP each day – business as usual.

Squadrons cannot blame sustainers for all these problems. Leaders should also

place some onus on the sustainment customer – cavalry scouts – and must accordingly train logistical self-sufficiency within cavalry troops. Scout platoons must develop the ability to carry as much Class I, III, and V as possible on their organic combat platforms. Leaders must recognize that five days of supply for these commodities on hand within a troop does not lie outside of the realm of possibility. The ability of units to carry additional classes of supply and self-sustain for at least 48 to 72 hours, a planning factor supported by cavalry doctrine, enables overburdened forward support companies to further enhance flexibility and responsiveness. To that end, scouts can take simple measures to improve self-sufficiency, such as modifying vehicles to safely hold as many additional water and fuel cans as needed. Every nook and cranny on a vehicle can also potentially provide space for additional food or ammunition.

For inspiration, modern cavalry units could turn to units like the World War II-era British Special Air Service (SAS) or their Long Range Desert Group (LRDG) counterparts that conducted reconnaissance missions in the deserts of North Africa in the early 1940s. Photographs exist of specially-modified SAS and LRDG trucks and jeeps festooned with supplies, including a standard load of up to 100 gallons of fuel

per vehicle – proof that such self-sufficiency has firm historical roots. ABCT cavalry squadrons cannot expect to completely self-sustain for extended lengths of time, as fuel resupply and the availability of repair parts remain constant issues. But engendering the appropriate Cavalry mindset requires scouts and squadron sustainers alike to embrace self-sufficiency, adaptability, and hardiness. Restoring this mindset across all war-fighting functions must represent a critical training objective for modern cavalry formations.

Fix The Cavalry's Mindset

“What we needed...was a closer integration with the inheritors of the Cavalry role, the armored forces, without loss to the highly mobile and aggressive character of the airborne forces, the “lean and mean” philosophy.”¹²

Perhaps the most subtle problem currently faced by our squadrons revolves around the erosion of the Cavalry mindset. MG Gavin expressed concerns about the erosion of this mindset in the 1950s and encouraged the Cavalry's Armor branch custodians to emulate the Airborne community's dynamic and aggressive mentality more closely.¹³ That the wartime commanding general of the 82nd Airborne Division would suggest this comes as no

surprise and arguably smacks of parochialism, but MG Gavin's advice has merit. The U.S. Cavalry has produced officers such as LTC George Custer, GEN Phillip Sheridan, MG John Buford, GEN John Pershing, MG Terry de la Mesa Allen, GEN George Patton, LTG Hal Moore, and LTG H.R. McMaster. Like their Airborne counterparts such as MG Gavin, these leaders knew how to exercise initiative, provide clear intent, and trust competent subordinates. They also demonstrated aggressiveness and a willingness to assume risk – all tenets not only of the mission command philosophy but of the historic Cavalry mindset. These officers ensured that their formations emulated their behavior, and their troopers did their jobs well and won on the battlefield. Few who served alongside these leaders and Soldiers had reason to wonder: “where was the Cavalry?”

This Cavalry mindset has unfortunately atrophied over the past decade, perhaps due to uncertainty stemming from the return to large scale combat operations. Deficiencies in preparing leaders for service in squadrons compound this cultural issue. Modern Armor officers no longer begin their careers training on cavalry tactics in the basic course, and many do not have an opportunity to attend the Scout Leader Course (SLC) before they leave Fort Benning. Instead, Armor lieutenants that wind up in a cavalry squadron do so by accident when they arrive at their units and receive pinpoint orders; the gaining squadron receives a body rather than a specially trained or uniquely suited cavalry leader. Even officers who excel while serving in a squadron during their initial assignment may never return to one. Worse yet, Armor officers graduating from the career course have no requirement to attend the Cavalry Leader's Course (CLC) at Fort Benning – a crucial school that arguably represents the most important institutional training a cavalry leader can experience.

But the mindset problem goes beyond the confines of the Armor branch, as squadrons are comprised of many diverse military occupational specialties besides 19-series personnel. These infantry, intelligence, signal, sustainment, maintenance, fires, adjutant

Figure 3. Some of the real-life members of the SAS, pictured on patrol in North Africa, 2 September 1944. Original members Paddy Mayne and David Stirling are on the right (Image originally published in Illustrated London News)



general, and chemical corps officers and NCOs serving in cavalry squadrons must also embrace the unique mindset, culture, and purpose of their units. Unfortunately, this assimilation often proves difficult, with many squadron intelligence, fires, sustainment, and signal personnel failing to demonstrate the initiative, adaptiveness, and mental agility demanded of cavalry leaders. Like Armor officers, those representing other war-fighting functions often report to squadrons out of the blue, and few “low-density” MOS personnel ever receive the opportunity to attend schools like SLC or CLC. For non-Armor leaders serving in squadrons, collective training events may not require these personnel to incorporate cavalry doctrine or change their methods to better suit R&S formations. These “low-density” leaders – just as much cavalry troopers as any Armor officer – fail because we do not train them how to succeed under ambiguous conditions or how to contribute to cavalry operations. As a result, fires planning, sustainment, intelligence, and signal support activities proceed as they would in any other unit, agnostic of the squadron’s unique mission set.

Spur rides and Stetsons alone cannot fix this problem. Cavalry leaders of all branches and MOSs must address the culture and mindset atrophy present in their formations. SLC and CLC – both of which must now modify their programs of instruction based on the loss of IBCT and SBCT squadrons – must not shorten or dilute their course schedules. Both courses must instead expand to address critical knowledge and capability gaps. SLC must incorporate additional practical exercises focused on sUAS employment, HF proficiency, ATGM utilization, and especially leader initiative and mission command at the platoon level. The U.S. Army must mandate this course for all platoon leaders and platoon-level NCOs serving in cavalry squadrons – including officers and NCOs who lead distribution and chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) reconnaissance platoons.

CLC should similarly fill its current curriculum void with exercises emphasizing rapid, innovative, and adaptive planning processes. This course must

produce squadron leaders who have mastered the critical staff skills required to collaborate with higher headquarters while remaining one step ahead through disciplined initiative and shared understanding. As with SLC, the U.S. Army must mandate CLC for troop commanders, first sergeants, and all squadron staff officers and NCOs down to the staff sergeant level – regardless of branch. Sustainment leaders, who so often struggle in squadrons due to an unfamiliarity with cavalry doctrine, represent a crucial demographic who desperately require the lessons learned during CLC. In the same way that all leaders – including those in so-called “low density” MOSs – must attend Airborne School to serve in an airborne division, we should require leaders to attend foundational cavalry schools as a prerequisite for service in a squadron.

These schools provide great value because they train leaders to think like R&S professionals, but unit collective training must also reinforce institutional learning. Squadron home station training events must emphasize the tenets of the mission command philosophy, such as mutual trust, disciplined initiative, and accepting prudent risk, to prepare leaders for the complexities of cavalry operations. Junior officers and NCOs must know the difficulties and unique considerations associated with conducting extensive zone reconnaissance missions or executing a long-duration screen. Such operations do not require and should not involve extensive micromanagement from higher headquarters. Instead, unit training should force leaders at echelon to develop adaptiveness and agility by enforcing self-sufficiency, emphasizing leader initiative, and allowing empowered leaders to make decisions, all while operating under ambiguous conditions.

Cavalry leaders at the platoon and section level must understand their role in the BCT’s greater information collection enterprise. These leaders should demonstrate a deep-seated understanding of the linkage between priority intelligence requirements (PIRs), indicators, and specific information requirements (SIRs) – the language of R&S operations and the cavalry’s core

focus. These concepts seem simple, but many formations do not train leaders to internalize this unique language and arrive at NTC prepared only to execute movements to contact or sit in static screen positions with nothing to look at. Only by reincorporating this language and the risk inherent in R&S operations into home station training can leaders restore the Cavalry mindset so critical to success and yet so lacking in many squadrons today.

Conclusion

The 2024 ARSTRUC had an immediate and drastic impact on U.S. cavalry formations. For thoughtful Armor and Infantry leaders who serve in such formations, the ARSTRUC changes also reinforced an uncomfortable truth, one long in the making: as the U.S. Army prepares for LSCO on the multi-domain battlefield, the Cavalry stands on the edge of irrelevance. Despite our crucial mission set and thousands of years of proven value on the battlefield, few see us, and we often struggle to see ourselves. Each NTC rotation produces sad evidence of squadrons meeting immediate destruction in the first battle period, or “going to ground” to get out of the way of the main body or perhaps failing to stay ahead of the brigade to provide any reconnaissance or security effect.

Leaders across all branches who call the Cavalry home must fix this unfortunate situation quickly. We must regain relevance in the LSCO fight and the multi-domain operation (MDO) environment. We can accomplish this by improving our squadrons’ tactical mobility through the mastery of critical mainstays such as HF radios and Javelins while embracing crucial new sUAS technology in the conduct of R&S operations. Squadrons must also simultaneously inculcate organizational adaptiveness through training focused on decentralization, adaptiveness, self-sufficiency, and mission command. Perhaps most importantly, cavalry leaders must inspire a younger generation of officers and NCOs to embrace the aggressive mindset that inspired the cavalry troopers of old through institutional education and operational experience.

Instead of bemoaning the ARSTRUC

and its changes, we must now focus on the future by emphasizing the training, technology, and organizational culture required to restore the cavalry's soul. That soul "is not a horse, nor the crossed sabers and yellow scarves."¹⁴ Rather, the soul of the U.S. Cavalry lies in the aggressive leaders and adaptive culture that led MG Gavin to believe "as an enthusiastic supporter of our Cavalry arm...that we will never win another war without it, and that without it we may very likely lose."¹⁵

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a Master of Military Art and Science from CGSC. NOTES

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THE CAV FOREVER

Reconnaissance and Security for Emerging Formations



by CPT Christopher Jordan

The sun beats down on the multifunctional reconnaissance company (MFRC) commander while maneuvering towards the distant ridgeline. The mobile brigade combat team (MBCT), augmented with an armored brigade combat team (ABCT) cavalry squadron, is conducting a movement to contact towards an enemy believed to be conducting an area defense of complex terrain. The MFRC is leveraging launched effects and organic unmanned aerial system (UAS) to identify and prosecute the BCT's high payoff target list (HPTL), destroying air defense artillery (ADA) assets and tube artillery.

Cued from division ground moving target indicator (GMTI) reports, the commander reorients the drones towards the main line of resistance and observes two tank companies deploying to conduct a limited objective attack. Momentarily forgetting about the attached squadron, the commander orders the Javelin teams to occupy hasty fighting positions, to protect as best they can. Meanwhile the commander radios to the brigade commander that the lead battalion will need to occupy hasty defensive positions, disrupting the BCT's tempo.

At the BCT main, the staff begin rapid decision-making and synchronization process (RDSP), generating a branch plan. As they begin working, they hear over the net: "guidons, guidons, guidons, Bengal 6, moving to establish defenses vicinity Phase Line Spur, will defend and report." Several tense minutes later the radio crackles again: "Brigade X-Ray, Bengal 6, engaged and destroyed 9 tanks, remaining companies retrograding at this time." The MFRC commander confirms the retrograde and then continues the mission, but cannot help but wonder what would have been different without the squadron attached...

Over the past two years, the U.S. Army Transformation Initiative (ATI) has spurred significant structural changes across the Joint Force's land component. These changes have ranged from the consolidation of major headquarters and enablers, as well as a momentous divestment of formations deemed to be outdated.¹ The BCTs have lost significant organic combat power, a change that is not without controversy.² Moreover, MBCTs and Stryker BCTs (SBCTs) lost their organic cavalry squadrons. With the loss of the squadrons, the MBCT and SBCT lost their dedicated, trained and equipped all-weather, reconnaissance and security (R&S) assets.

The newly designed BCTs need to learn to do more with less by replicating their squadron's capabilities. MBCTs and SBCTs must temper the expectations of their R&S formations significantly from plans based around the modular BCT structure. The new BCTs must do the same missions without the robustness of an organic cavalry squadron. Instead, R&S must be conducted by a mixture of dynamically organized task forces, MFRCs, and multi-purpose companies (MPCs). Future formations will blend emerging capabilities with existing systems to achieve a solution likely to succeed. As units Transform in Contact (TiC), the role the cavalry once filled remains essential to unit success. The purpose of this article is to create shared understanding of what gaps exist in the emerging formations and provide lines of effort to enable units to close those gaps.

Recon and Security: The Mechanisms that Enable Informing and Protecting

To understand the gaps left with the inactivation of the cavalry squadrons, it is important to answer two fundamental questions: What did the squadrons provide, and how? What did the Cavalry provide? Foundationally, the cavalry squadron provided an all-weather combat formation which informs, protects, and fights for the main body. The cavalry is not simply a formation of observers, instead the squadron shapes the battlefield. This role is



Figure 1. A Soldier inspects a UAS carrying a grenade capable of being dropped. (U.S. Army photo by SGT Collin Mackall)

inherently active, and impossible to replace solely through sensors or battlefield transparency.

The cavalry provides battlefield intelligence about the threat and operational environment (OE) which enables the commander to maneuver their forces.³ Similarly, the cavalry protects not merely through systematic observation. Instead, they report threats and actively prevent the enemy from influencing the main body, enabling commanders to marshal their forces for commitment at the optimal time and place.⁴ Finally, the cavalry squadron fights for the main body. Troopers are part of a combined arms force which shapes the battlefield. They perform offensive and defensive tasks as necessary to accomplish assigned missions, often to a flank or as an economy of force to avoid early commitment of the main body.

The second question to clarify: What is the major mechanism that enables the cavalry to inform and protect the main body? R&S operations are the mechanisms. As doctrine states: "Reconnaissance and Security operations are essential to the execution of offensive, defensive, and stability operations" because they "provide a continuous flow of combat information and intelligence that assist commanders with uncertainty, make contact under favorable conditions, identify opportunities, prevent surprise, and make timely

decisions. R&S operations provide BCT commanders with freedom of movement and action to create advantageous conditions for future operations to seize, retain, and exploit initiative."⁵

The actions of MG John Buford's division provide a concrete example of how R&S protects and informs the main body. In the initial stage of the battle, MG Buford's Troopers conducted reconnaissance to find the Army of Northern Virginia. By finding the enemy location and scheme of maneuver, MG Buford's reconnaissance informed the commander and enabled his decision to deploy on advantageous terrain overlooking Gettysburg. Once the reconnaissance enabled the decision, MG Buford transitioned into a security operation to protect the main body. His division deployed as a cover. In the cover they fought the Confederate vanguard. Over the course of several hours MG Buford's cover force engaged in security, as well as offensive and defensive operations within the security operation to protect the main body.⁶ The security operation, the cover, was the mechanism through which the cavalry protected MG George Meade's army, providing the main body with the time necessary to deploy in defensive positions.

Cavalry Leaders Course (CLC) instructors boil it down to a simple phrase: "The Cavalry primarily inform and protect the main body by conducting R&S.



Figure 2. One Station Unit Training with Copperhead Troop, 2nd Squadron, 15th Cavalry Regiment, 194th Armored Brigade participates in the Thunder Run at Harmony Church, June 26, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by CPT Stephanie Snyder)

R&S enables timely decision-making to achieve positions of relative advantage.”⁷ Reconnaissance drives understanding to inform commanders about the OE. Security to protect the main body from observation and direct fire. During both, the cavalry answer priority intelligence requirements (PIRs) to drive decisions. Operating as a combined arms team gives the cavalry the combat power to fight for the main body. As BCTs seek to replace the cavalry, one cannot focus on some components at the expense of understanding the entire gap.⁸ Instead, units must understand the effects of the cavalry’s absence. Understanding the new limitations and constraints enables BCT staffs to create a better picture for what other formations must now be prepared to execute.

Technology: Silver Bullet or Silver-Tongued Devil?

The fundamental problem for emerging formations to solve is then:

Without the squadron, who will inform, protect, and fight for the main body, and how will one do so? Many units are seeking to answer this question as they TIC. One of the most common denominators in these answers is the ubiquitous quest for more drones.⁹ However, drones and technology are not a panacea, they are tools to integrate. Doctrine already tells us that “complex terrain, adverse weather, enemy air defense systems, and deception and countermeasures degrade the effectiveness of aerial reconnaissance.”¹⁰ Drones can be fooled, and you cannot always fly. As CSM Garret O’Keefe wrote on developing new assets, high end technology “require specialized training, logistical support, and substantial investment.”¹¹ Over-reliance on only one tool will limit a BCT’s flexibility in a large-scale combat operation (LSCO) environment, as well as creating new potential vulnerabilities for detection by enemy forces. Drones are extremely capable sensors but create new signatures that need to be mitigated, especially in the electro-

magnetic spectrum.

The proliferation of capabilities such as the low-altitude stalking and striking ordnance (LASSO), long-range reconnaissance (LRR), medium-range reconnaissance (MRR), and short-range reconnaissance (SRR) systems promise incredible advances in the ability of Soldiers to understand and shape the battlefield at heretofore unheard-of ranges.¹² These capabilities need to be integrated into a doctrinally based, tactics, techniques, and procedure (TTP) tested, coherent vision of how a new BCT will conduct R&S to inform and protect.

The organization tasked to protect and inform BCTs will be novel, based on each BCT’s mix of personnel and assets. However, one need not fixate on novelty. Evolving technology enables the creation of new TTPs but does not necessitate the reinvention of R&S fundamentals. Instead, commanders and staffs have new tools with which to apply the existing fundamentals creatively.

Guidons Change, the Job Remains: Informing and Protecting on the Modern Battlefield

If technology is not the silver bullet, what lines of effort can BCTs pursue to effectively protect and inform the main body through timely decision-making in order to achieve positions of relative advantage? Line of effort one is for the BCTs to create a clear and cogent vision for how their specific BCT will fight. For example, a BCT that focuses on long, dismounted movement through complex terrain will have a different battlefield framework than one that prioritizes rapid advances and high tactical mobility. Included in this vision for how the BCT fights must be deliberate discussions of when and where the commander plans to focus targeting and shaping the deep fight, and when the priority of collection shifts to enable decision making for the upcoming close fight.

With a concrete vision of how the brigade fights, the next line of effort is to integrate the new R&S formations. The loss of a squadron means that the dedicated replacement by necessity must trade mass for efficiency. Today, organizations like the MBCT's MFRC, with its tactical unmanned aircraft system (TUAS), scout, and electronic warfare (EW) platoon, leverage new technologies, but lack the manpower as compared to the squadron. As a basis to employ the MFRC, history provides us with a template to build from.

Historical force structures provide a template to help define the MFRC's role. Prior to BCT modularization, R&S was done at the BCT level by a brigade reconnaissance troop (BRT). BRTs consisted of a headquarters, with two scout platoons, and were generally augmented with specialized equipment and observers.¹³ Like the MFRC, the BRT cannot be seen as a one-for-one replacement for the capabilities and expertise of the cavalry squadron. A staff cannot simply find and replace "squadron" with "MFRC" and move on to the next step.

The MFRC is capable and provides options, but it alone cannot answer all of

a BCT's questions, enable targeting, and protect the main body. Instead, the staff must use mission analysis to understand gaps and leverage the MFRC. The BCT must consider how it can dynamically man and resource a security zone capable of protecting the main body to avoid premature commitment or provide time for the main body to maneuver to positions of advantage, such as occupying an alternate battle position. The staff must also consider how the MFRC or a larger task force might inform all of the commander's priorities across the entirety of the BCT frontage.

Line of effort three is to inculcate organic subject matter expertise. Besides the loss of personnel and equipment, BCTs without squadrons lost the existing repository of R&S expertise. The loss includes both operational expertise from the squadron, but also information collection expertise with the loss of the military intelligence company (MICO). For the MFRC to effectively replace a squadron as the organic subject matter experts, leaders must relearn and maintain a doctrinal foundation. MFRCs, squadrons, and other organizations cannot balkanize, with each organization applying competing fundamentals.¹⁴

To ensure a common foundation, leaders should attend the appropriate courses for their level to gain the base knowledge and ensure a commonality of language and concepts. Courses such as Scout Leader Course (SLC), CLC, and Reconnaissance and Surveillance Leaders Course (RSLC) provide Soldiers and leaders doctrine-based knowledge and expertise. After graduation, Soldiers should train relentlessly so that all echelons can conduct operations in accordance with the fundamentals of reconnaissance and security. Soldiers trained by such courses will understand that PIRs should be their north star, decisions their *raison d'être*. Leaders at echelon must be true professionals, able to turn information gained through all nine forms of contact into intelligence while understanding how the indicators observed enable higher commanders to act.

In addition to sending leaders to schools, units can leverage Field Manual (FM) 3-98, *Reconnaissance and*

Security, Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 3-20.96, *Cavalry Squadron*, FM 3-96, *Brigade Combat Team* (Chapters 4 and 5), and FM 3-90, *Tactics* (Chapters 1, 12, and 13) to develop robust, effective products and processes. Tough, realistic training will foster a cadre of leaders that understand how to integrate assets to accomplish the desired. Moreover, these leaders can then disseminate the knowledge gained to sister units tasked to support the BCT's information enabling and protection missions. Training focused on singular capabilities will ossify units as the battlefield continues to evolve. If an organization becomes wrapped around the asset, not the result, it will be ineffectual and unable to teach other supporting organizations that lack the same technology mix.

The final line of effort focuses on enabling staff success. The integration of new formations, technologies, constraints, and capabilities enable staff to create new solutions to complex problems. To achieve the most success the staff must be familiar with the former role of the Cavalry to build new solutions while mitigating gaps. As important as the formations' skill in execution is the staff's capacity to plan. If BCT headquarters staff trained to focus, resource and enable R&S efforts, then the organization conducting these tasks are set to fail. A well-trained brigade reconnaissance cell is essential to optimize how the BCT uses R&S to shape the battlefield.

So What?

The new BCT structures face an old problem: without a dedicated cavalry squadron, who is my MG Buford? Who will inform my understanding and protect my main body? The full answer is yet to be determined, with the U.S. Army continuing to transform. The common denominator for all of these organizations is that they need not develop in a vacuum. Whatever the details of these organizations, be it a MFRC, a multifunctional strike troop, a MPC, or a regimental observer collection troop (ROC-T), BCTs require units to inform and protect the main body by conducting R&S. These operations enable decision making so the line companies and battalions can win. To succeed, units should build on the

doctrine and legacy of the organizations that preceded them. From Paul Revere alerting the Minutemen, to the BRTs leading the way into Iraq in 2003, the information and protection the Cavalry provide are essential. In the SBCT and MBCTs, cavalry squadrons are currently inactive. However, their role is eternal. Long live the Cav.

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DINOCAVE

Train Forms of Contact to Build Combined Arms and Multi-domain Warfighters



Photo by SPC Jeffrey Garland

by LTC Gary M. Klein

What does effective training on combined arms proficiency and multi-domain operations look like at echelon to achieve warfighting excellence? What tools exist to guide commanders when planning training? Field Manual (FM) 7-0, *Training* lists

“train as a combined arms team” as one of its nine principles of training, emphasizing that leaders must “plan and coordinate training to account for as many elements and domains as possible.”¹ While FM 7-0 focuses on elements (e.g. different units) and domains, another potentially useful framework for training combined arms and multi-domain operations (MDO) at

the battalion-level and below is through the forms of contact.

The U.S. Army officially recognizes nine forms of contact in FM 3-90, *Tactics* – direct; indirect; non-hostile; obstacle; chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN); aerial; visual; electromagnetic; and influence (DINOCAVE-I) – which units must develop battle drills to react to and/or employ.² When designing training events, battalion and company commanders should use the forms of contact (DINOCAVE) as a guide and measuring stick to assess the combined arms and multi-domain nature of their training.³

Figure 1. An M2A3 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, uses a twin-tube, turret-mounted launcher to fire a BGM-71 Tube-launched, Optically-tracked, Wireless-guided (TOW) anti-tank missile, Feb. 25, 2026, on Novo Selo Training Area, Bulgaria. (U.S. Army photo by SPC Brandi Frizzell)



Note: This paper focuses on battalion-level and below training, so it will emphasize the more traditional eight forms of contact (DINOCAVE), excluding influence, since influence requires a more robust training environment that is usually only created for brigade-level and above training events.

Commanders at different echelons have different tools available to build combined arms and multi-domain proficiency, but the forms of contact are a concrete way of accounting for the various dimensions. Before delving into the “how,” it is worth considering that combined arms and multi-domain operations are simply the synchronized



Figure 2. Long Knife Troopers from 5th Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment “Long Knife” employing 120mm mortars during Danger Gauntlet IV (DGIV). (Photo by author)

Figure 3. Long Knife Troopers from 5th Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment executing operational decontamination using an M26 decontamination system following platoon LFX. (Photo by author)





Figure 4. Long Knife Troopers from 5th Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment employing camouflage systems during DGIV at Fort Riley, KS. (Photo by author)

Figure 5. Long Knife Troopers from 5th Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment employing RQ-28 UAS during troop combined arms LFXs. (Photo by author)



Form of Contact (DINOCAVE)	Employment (How We Fight / Combined Arms)	React To (Multidomain Environment)
Direct Fire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combat platforms (e.g. M1s, M2s) • Anti-tank weapon systems (e.g. Javelins and TOWs) • Individual and crew served weapons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combat platforms (e.g. M1s, M2s) • Anti-tank weapon systems (e.g. Javelins and TOWs) • Individual and crew served weapons
Indirect Fire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field artillery and mortars 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field artillery and mortars
Non-Hostile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civilians on the battlefield • No-fire areas (NFAs)
Obstacle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tactical obstacles (deliberate or situational) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and report • Bypass • Reduce (organic plows and rollers; and engineer breaching vehicles)
CBRN: Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detect CBRN agents • Fight dirty • Immediate and operational decontamination • MOPP gear exchange
Aerial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employ sUAS • Integrate AH64s, UH60s, & CH47s 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employ stingers • React to UAS (e.g. C-sUAS)
Visual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Binoculars and long-range advanced scout surveillance systems (LRAS3) • LLDRs (PED-1) and LTLM (PED-7) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employ camouflage • Vehicle smoke grenades • Dispersion
Electromagnetic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EW platoon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PACE plan • Directional HF radios

Figure 6: Training Forms of Contact. Units must consider employing all forms of contact (fighting as a combined arms team) and reacting to all forms of contact (fighting in a multi-domain operational environment) throughout their collective training.

(simultaneous or sequential) employment of different forms of contact. Whether that characterization is useful or not, the forms of contact are a useful framework for commanders to use when designing and assessing the combined arms and multi-domain nature of training events.

Training Forms of Contact

At the brigade-level and higher, commanders have a larger range of pooled special troops and enabling units that they can task organize to enable combined arms proficiency.⁴ Commanders at the battalion-level and below do not have as many organic task organization options, but they can still design training events that require units and subject matter experts to employ and react to the various forms of contact. Of note, not all training events will incorporate all forms of contact, and some forms of contact are easier to incorporate than others. Additionally, commanders may elect to integrate less forms of contact early in a unit's training progression so that they can focus

on fundamental skills and wait to incorporate additional forms of contact later.

For example, it may not be advisable to have a tank or scout platoon react to CBRN or electromagnetic jamming during its first situational training exercise (STX) or live-fire exercise (LFX). However, commanders can employ the crawl-walk-run methodology by requiring that same platoon to conduct a CBRN decontamination or react to jamming lane training immediately after their STX or LFX lane. Having maneuver platoons train these forms of contact as separate lane training enables crawl-level training for the maneuver platoon, while achieving walk-level training for the low-density subject matter experts who train and deliver these proficiencies to combat arms Soldiers. As the battalion's training progresses, commanders will progressively incorporate more forms of contact into integrated STX or LFX training. This will ensure nothing and no one is left at rest and all low-density military occupational specialties (MOSs) are trained and ready.

Incorporating the Different Forms of Contact

It is relatively easy to incorporate direct, indirect, and visual contact into all training events, but the others will likely require more deliberate coordination. Exercise designers may incorporate non-hostile contact by incorporating civil considerations or by employing non-hostile actors in the training event. For example, leaders can task scout platoons to determine whether a templated friendly urban area has enemy forces in it. Regarding obstacles, units contend with natural obstacles during all training events, but exercise designers may coordinate to add tactical obstacles to force maneuver units to identify, report, and react to these forms of obstacles as well. This can be as simple as emplacing concertina wire obstacles in the training area, or you may coordinate with an engineer battalion to create more advanced counter-mobility or survivability obstacles.

When considering CBRN contact, it is simple enough to require training units to don mission oriented protective posture (MOPP) gear during part of their training, but it's also prudent to train battalion chemical officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) on their ability to conduct operational decontamination. The battalion's M26 decontamination team trains by having companies or platoons go through a vehicle decontamination and MOPP gear exchange training lane as they re-deploy from the field. Headquarters elements can conduct crawl-level rehearsals with these subject matter expert teams concurrent with maneuver training and then progress to walk-level training lanes by having maneuver units execute them during redeployment. Battalions can execute a similar training progression for having maneuver units react to electromagnetic jamming.

With the proliferation of small unmanned aerial systems (sUAS) commanders must ensure squads, platoons, and companies build muscle memory in employing and reacting to sUAS contact in their collective training. It is easy to track and focus on

individual sUAS operator proficiency and flight currency, but commanders must incorporate UAS into collective maneuver training to enable proficiency in the combined arms integration of these capabilities.⁵ Units must develop standard operating procedures (SOPs) to efficiently and effectively store UAS systems, recharge and manage batteries, quickly launch and recover UAS systems, execute information collection plans mixing manned and unmanned sensors, disseminate collected information, etc. Units must test these SOPs during company and platoon STX and LFXs to test the feasibility and optimize combined arms efficiencies and effectiveness.

In addition to employing UAS contact, units must develop wholistic “air-mindedness” by building collective muscle memory in actively protecting against and reacting to aerial contact. When and how quickly are your units able to employ passive measures such as camouflage nets and dispersion? How are units training on active counter-UAS measures such as Dronebusters, Smart Shooters, Titan Manpacks, etc? Access to these systems is limited at many installations, so commanders should prioritize sending Soldiers to attend the various counter-sUAS (C-sUAS) courses at the Joint C-sUAS University at Fort Sill.

Training for large scale combat operations has brought renewed attention on another form of contact as well: electromagnetic contact. It is important to develop and train primary, alternate, contingency, and emergency (PACE) communication plans to react to and overcome electromagnetic jamming, but it is equally important to employ active and passive techniques to prevent jamming. Have units installed coffee cans around GPS antenna to shield from horizontal / terrestrial electronic jamming? Are units placing command post (CP) Joint Battle Command-Platform (JBCP) antennas in holes dug near the CP to shield from terrestrial jamming? How proficient are units using high-frequency (HF) radios, which are more resistant to jamming than traditional FM radios?

This article shared recommendations and questions about training forms of contact, but it is by no means

exclusive. Table 1 compiles forms of contact that commanders should consider having their units employ or react to when designing comprehensive training events. This list was developed from the perspective of an armored cavalry squadron, so commanders of other units will likely need to adjust this list based on their unit’s particular requirements. Once commanders develop a list of the forms of contact most relevant to their unit, they should deliberately decide which forms of contact their units will train to employ or react to, and when, during their training progression.

Commanders are responsible for delivering formations ready to fight and win our nation’s wars. This has many dimensions – personnel, supply, maintenance, and training readiness; combined arms readiness; readiness to fight and win in an anticipated multidomain operational environment, etc. – and doctrine has frameworks for how to think about these dimensions. This article presented using the forms of contact as a framework to assess how our training is preparing us to fight as combined arms teams in multidomain operations.

Commanders and leaders should use forms of contact (DINOCAVE) as a guide and measuring stick to assess the combined arms and multi-domain nature of their training events. Not all training events will include all forms of contact, but commanders should have a plan to deliberately incorporate and react to all forms of contact through battle drills pertinent to their units. Training forms of contact trains combined arms maneuver, which is the U.S. Army’s decisive advantage in warfare.

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4 Pooling is an old Army doctrinal concept from FM 100-5 (1968), p.4-4 that refers to when a headquarters consolidates forces required for specific tasks or for limited periods of time. Pooling assets enables commanders to allocate limited resources to where they can achieve the greatest effect. Additionally, it concentrates low-density Soldiers and leaders to enabling training and other tasks.

5 The author recommends that battalion S2 shops oversee and facilitate UAS training. Specifically, the S2 shop can track the status of operators’ flight currency and individual-level training, then develop training plans to maintain individual operator currency and coordinate to incorporate UAS into all collective training.



Economy of Force

The 2d Dragoons at Lunéville, September 1944



by CPT Connor McLeod

One of the U.S. Army Cavalry's principal roles is to "preserve combat power and achieve economy of force" for successful operations of higher headquarters.¹ Economy of force, as defined in Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Campaigns and Operations*, is "the employment and distribution of forces to allocate the maximum possible combat power on primary efforts."² At the Battle of Lunéville in September 1944, the prelude to the Battle of Arracourt, the 2d Mechanized Cavalry Group (MCG; now known as the 2d Cavalry Regiment, "Dragoons") performed an economy of force mission, trading space for time against German armored forces in support of XII Corps' primary efforts. The operation enabled XII Corps to envelop and seize Nancy and reposition Combat Commands of the 4th Armored Division (AD) to defend Lunéville. This set conditions for the U.S. Army's victory at Arracourt, considered one of the critical battles of the Lorraine

Campaign.³ Today's armor and cavalry officers and Soldiers should heed the exploits of the 2d MCG as a reconnaissance and security (R & S) organization because they exemplified the timeless nature of the Cavalry. Aggressive action, rapid reporting, and disciplined initiative oriented on the protected force, among other attributes, transcend mounted platforms and battlefields. The Dragoons' fight for information (reconnaissance) and for its life while oriented on the protected force (security) showed what cavalry enables – and what it costs; it is not merely an extension of the main body.

On the heels of the Normandy Campaign and the beachhead breakout, LTG George Patton's Third Army and its four divisions passed into the fight on 1 August 1944 to turn the flank of the German Seventh Army.⁴ MG Manton Eddy, commander of XII Corps, subordinate to Third Army, had the mission to liberate Nancy and enable further offensive operations across the Rhine River into Germany.⁵ The 2d MCG, eyes and ears of XII Corps and Third Army, conducted zone reconnaissance east of

the Moselle River toward the town of Lunéville in support of the advance on Nancy. Its mission was to determine the disposition and composition of German forces in the area, then establish a screen along XII Corps' flank to maintain contact with XV Corps.⁶

The 2d MCG's maneuver elements consisted of the 2d and 42d Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadrons (CRS). Each squadron consisted of three mechanized troops (A, B, and C Troops) equipped with M8 "Greyhound" Armored Cars, Jeeps, and 60mm mortars. An M8 75mm Assault Gun Troop (E Troop) and an M5A1-equipped Light Tank Troop (F Troop) supported the mechanized troops.⁷ This task organization was an output of hard lessons learned in the North African Campaign of 1942-43 and represented an emphasis on "an aggressive doctrine which emphasized reconnaissance through a combination of stealth, fire, and maneuver."⁸

Approaching Lunéville in mid-September, the 42d CRS identified enemy positions after it encountered German

anti-tank fire and lost several M8 Armored Cars. The 42d CRS regrouped, reported this information to higher headquarters, and called forward the main body.⁹ Infantry and armor forces from 4AD, under the command of MG John Wood, passed through the 42d CRS and seized Lunéville by 17 September 1944.¹⁰

Combat Command Reserve (CCR)/4AD assumed control of Lunéville, enabling the 2d MCG to posture near the Forêt de Mondon and conduct a screen, oriented south and southeast, on forests and mounted avenues of approach to Lunéville. A Troop/42d CRS positioned itself in a forest while B Troop screened along roads entering Lunéville from the south.¹¹ The 2d MCG deployed to the east in vicinity of Forêt Dom de Parroy for additional flank security of 4AD.¹²

On the morning of 19 September 1944, the 111th Panzer Brigade, composed of two Panther and Panzer Mark IV-manned tank battalions and a motorized infantry battalion, initiated its attack on Lunéville.¹³ The town was

critical to the Germans because it held an “apex position at the head of a river complex, [which] funneled the main roads leading across the [Marne-Rhine] canal.”¹⁴ The 111th’s purpose was to enable the crossing of the Marne-Rhine Canal by the Fifth Panzer Army to threaten the flank of 4AD. A Troop/42d CRS observed the attack from its observation posts (OPs) and reported the situation to both the 2d MCG commander, COL Charles H. Reed, and the 42d CRS commander, MAJ James H. Pitman. The two commanders moved forward with C and E Troops to establish an anti-armor ambush east of Moncel. While the ambush surprised the German lead elements, the 75mm assault guns could not effectively engage the more heavily armored German tanks. E Troop recorded a mobility kill on a single tank at the cost of three assault guns. C Troop’s scouts fought dismounted against German infantry, forcing them to deploy then retrograde after sustaining casualties.

Unfortunately for C and E Troops, German forces massed on their positions

and destroyed U.S. Army vehicles with impunity, severely wounding COL Reed and killing MAJ Pitman. C Troop lost an armored car and two Jeeps before the Germans withdrew their tanks, now vulnerable without infantry support. During this time, A Troop made direct fire contact with German infantry in the Forêt Dom de Mondon. C and E Troops’ ill-fated ambush provided enough time for the remainder of the 2d MCG’s combat power to move east into positions in and around Lunéville.

At the last moment before being encircled, the 42d CRS executive officer, CPT W.E. Potts, withdrew the squadron from Moncel and Forêt Dom de Mondon into Lunéville. By this point, COL Wendell Blanchard, the CCR/4AD commander, received notice of the German attack and began preparation for commitment from its positions north of the Sonon River. As CCR/4AD stabilized the line, MG Eddy dispatched the 603d Tank Destroyer Battalion, supported by the efforts of two field artillery battalions, to counterattack and break the 111th Panzer Brigade’s momentum,

Figure 1. The German offensive thrust toward the spearhead of GEN George Patton’s Third Army and attacked the 4th Armored Division from north and south. (Image courtesy of www.warfarehistorynetwork.com)

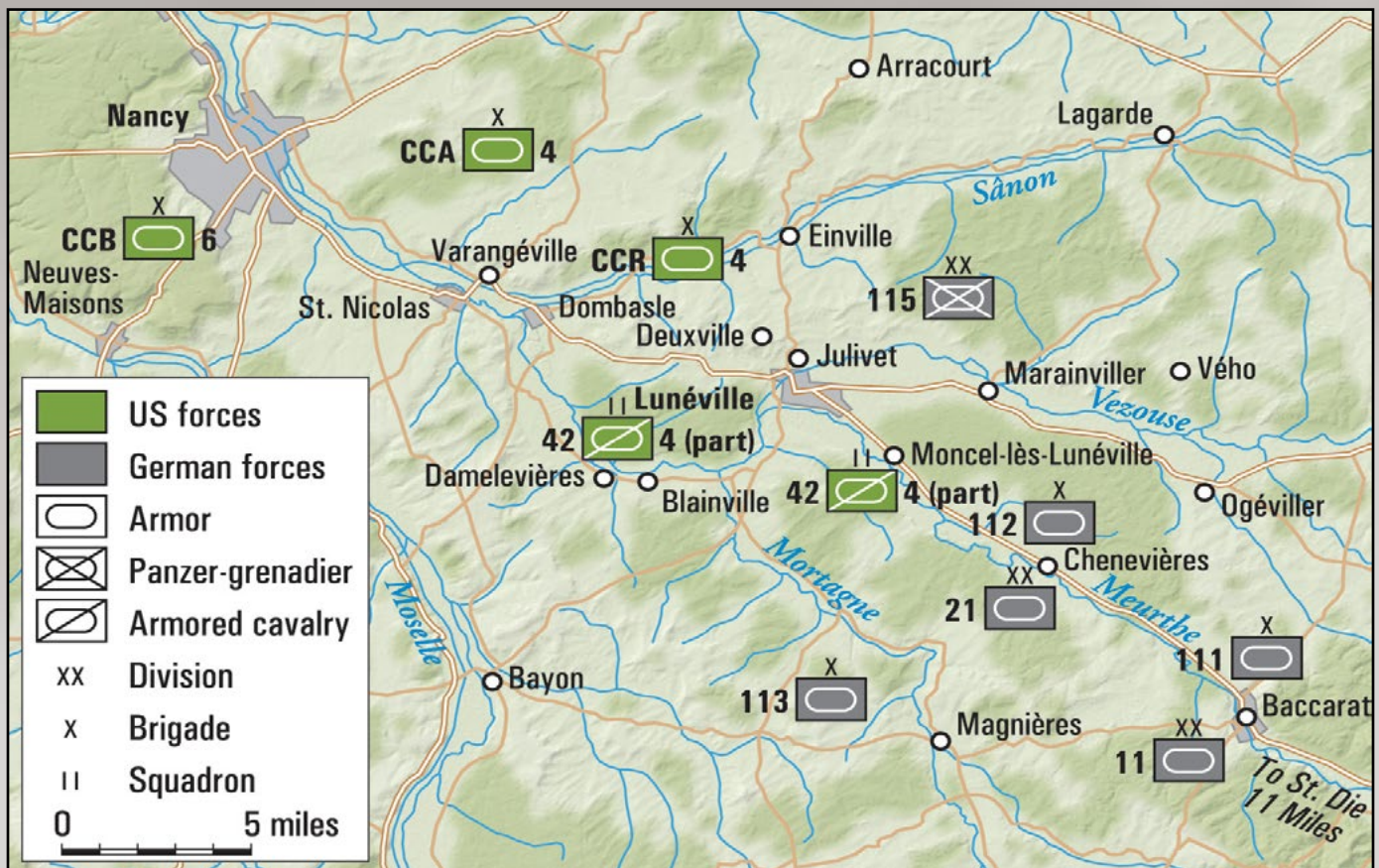




Figure 2. M18 Hellcat tank destroyer of the U.S. 603rd Tand Destroyer Battalion has taken up a defensive position in the streets of Luneville on September 18, 1944. (Photo courtesy of www.warfarehistorynetwork.com)

forcing it south of Lunéville across a set of railroad tracks. Upon the German withdrawal, 4AD positioned its units 12 miles southeast near Arracourt, in accordance with MG Wood's orders to attack toward Saarbrücken.¹⁵

The 2d MCG's actions at Lunéville, assisted by reinforcements from 4AD, "absorbed the blow that would have otherwise fallen upon the main body of the 4th AD [sic]...to allow the corps commander to react and develop the situation under his own terms."¹⁶ The delay also directed the German attack away from the more vulnerable Lunéville axis and into the jaws of Combat Command-A and Combat Command-B at Arracourt, resulting in one of the largest tank battles in the European Theatre and the destruction of over 280 German tanks by U.S. Army armor and air support. COL Reed received the Distinguished Service Cross for his leadership at Lunéville and MAJ Pitman posthumously received the Silver Star.^{17,18}

As noted previously, economy of force is "the employment and distribution of

forces to allocate the maximum possible combat power on primary efforts."¹⁹ During this phase of the war, XII Corps' primary effort was to envelop and seize Nancy. MG Eddy and his staff realized the threat of German interference from east of the Moselle River. Positioning the 2d MCG on XII Corps' flank allowed the cavalry to use its mobility and skillsets to patrol a significant portion of the corps' area of operations and maintain contact with the adjacent XV Corps, freeing up XII Corps' divisions to focus on Nancy.²⁰ Fighting a superior force while 4AD repositioned its Combat Commands was in fact the 2d MCG executing the definition of economy of force by conducting a shaping operation as a reciprocal of mass.²¹ The 2d MCG achieved the task of determining the enemy situation and subsequently conducting a security operation to delay until the friendly main body, the protected force, was in a position of advantage relative to the enemy.²² The culminating outputs of cavalry operations in the Lunéville area were that XII Corps achieved its primary effort of seizing

Nancy while the 2d MCG fought on its flank at Lunéville; the 2d MCG's shaping operation in turn set the conditions for 4AD's impromptu re-positioning and defense at Arracourt.

The battle offers lessons and historical context to Armor leaders and enthusiasts alike about the significance of cavalry forces that can yield significant operational dividends when correctly employed in one of the cavalry's principal roles on the battlefield, economy of force. The last time the U.S. Army fought in large-scale combat operations (LSCO)-like conditions was arguably in World War II and some stages of the Korean War. While U.S. Army cavalry no longer rides into battle in M8s and Jeeps, today's Armor and Cavalry leaders are cut from the same cloth as those who duelled with German Panzers in 1944 and were the eyes and ears of Corps and Army-level formations. Well-trained cavalry formations in LSCO enable commanders to make informed decisions and maneuver their forces to positions of advantage relative to the enemy. In a LSCO

scenario, cavalry will fight through just as much ambiguity as their forefathers and must still deliver results. Lunéville is not a historical footnote; it is a warning for those who discount cavalry in the modern era and argue that contemporary maneuver units or ad hoc formations can fill the role. Armor and cavalry leaders must understand and train to Lunéville's realities and shape the first battle of the next war in defense of the nation.

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Inform, Protect, And Fight



A Cavalry Prospectus

by LTC Matthew B. Schardt

Combat power is the coin of the realm in war. Commanders without combat power are desperate to generate it. Those with available combat power wish to conserve it. If combat power is expended, leaders hope that their investment yields a positive return.

Commanders value combat power because it represents the ability of their unit to fight. Combat power is the total means of destructive and disruptive forces that a military unit or formation can apply against an enemy at a given time.¹ Combat power is a function of five dynamics – leadership, firepower, information, mobility, and survivability

– that can be blended into an infinite number of derivatives, technologies, organizations, and tactics to overwhelm enemy forces, create friendly momentum, and win.²

Since antiquity, commanders have prized cavalry formations for their ability to preserve and assist in the delivery of maximum combat power to the decisive point. Today, despite some calls to the contrary, cavalry units remain valuable.

However, the U.S. Army's cavalry formations must change in response to a changing world if they wish to remain relevant. Many of those changes are underway. Significant U.S. Army force structure changes have already changed the cavalry formations within

the U.S. Army. At the combat training centers rotational training units continue to experiment with new organizations, fighting concepts, and technologies. New and updated cavalry doctrine is being staffed and prepared for publication.

Amidst this change, leaders of today's cavalry formations must be critical thinkers who understand their formation's history, purpose, vulnerabilities, and emerging trends. As wise military professionals know – past performance does not guarantee future results.

This paper serves as a prospectus for the U.S. Cavalry. Its purpose is to inform and recommend. It describes the U.S. cavalry's purpose, limitations, and historic performance. It concludes by



offering recommendations for the future employment of cavalry formations.

While the paper's primary audience is leaders within the U.S. Army's armored brigade combat teams (ABCTs), it will be of interest to all military professionals interested in the preservation, generation, and application of combat power.

U.S. Cavalry Purpose

U.S. Cavalry units exist to enable the success of other formations by providing understanding, security, and flexibility.³ Cavalry formations are experts in providing commanders with an improved understanding. They prevent surprise. They enable maneuver and exploit opportunities. Cavalry formations allow a main body commander to preserve combat power and apply combat power at the time and place of his choosing. In sum, cavalry units inform, protect, and fight so that their parent unit may win.

Cavalry units are not the only units that do this. Many other specialties, including engineers, artilleryists, intelligence analysts, and logisticians, exist to serve the main body. Nor are they the only units that inform, protect, and fight for the main body. Again, other units and specialties share this responsibility.

Yet, no other unit or specialty has

historically done this better. The Cavalry's unique combination of information, firepower, mobility, survivability, and leadership maximizes the owning commander's tactical outcomes and minimizes his risks. Commanders without cavalry units are forced to outsource their requirements for understanding, security, and flexibility from experts to generalists.

U.S. Cavalry Limitations

To be sure, cavalry formations are not without limitations.⁴ When arrayed against an armored threat, cavalry formations lack the direct fire standoff and lethality of combined arms battalions. Because they lack the manpower, firepower, and survivability of traditional maneuver units, cavalry formations often require augmentation for independent tasks. If employed too widely, cavalry squadrons are vulnerable to concentrated enemy attacks. Further, limited assigned sustainment assets and a tendency to operate over extended distances can leave squadrons vulnerable to sustainment challenges. Finally, some have criticized cavalry leaders as resistant to necessary doctrinal and organizational change, a resistance that constrains battlefield effectiveness.⁵

Historic U.S. Cavalry Performance and Roles

Cavalry In the Age of the Horse – The Origins of Inform, Protect, and Fight for the Main Body

Since man first clenched a spear and domesticated the horse, the cavalry has been an asset to any military arsenal.⁶ Depending on mission, armament, and the weight of its mounts, three distinctive types of mounted units emerged in the age of horse: heavy cavalry, light cavalry, and dragoons. In all cases, the purpose of these mounted formations was clear – inform, protect, and fight.

For example, the mounted warriors of the ancient world provided information to their higher headquarters. Light cavalry formations conducted reconnaissance, serving as the "eyes and ears" of the army and its commander. Light cavalry units also facilitated command and control by carrying messages, orders, and directives across battlefields.

Light cavalry units also executed security tasks. From ancient times through World War I, mounted light cavalry and dragoons protected the main body from surprise, screened main body movement, provided early warning of enemy intentions, and served as rear guards.

Figure 1. 3rd Squadron, 1st Cavalry Division, December 10, 1903, unknown location. (Photo from National Archives)



Mounted units also fought. Heavy cavalry formations developed to provide a shock effect. Heavy forces conducted mounted assaults designed penetrate enemy defensive positions. Once penetrated, cavalry formations pursued fleeing and disorganized enemy forces with the aim of destroying it.

Light cavalry and dragoons also fought in the age of the horse. These units frequently served as skirmishers, fighting and harassing enemy forces at a distance from the main body in order force the enemy into unfavorable terrain, disadvantageous tactics, or otherwise disrupt them. In other cases, cavalry formations raided behind enemy lines to capture resources or destroy capabilities. In doing so, light cavalry forces sought to shape enemy thinking and actions, thereby buying the protected force time, space, or early warning.

Cavalry In the Age of the Motor – The Birth of the Armor Force

The emergence of the combustible engine brought change to mounted formations.⁷ As tanks and other motorized vehicles emerged as solutions to the problem of attritional warfare of World War I, the roles of cavalry formations began to change. Many armies, including the U.S. Army, began distinguishing between armor and cavalry formations. Armor formations, heavily weighted with tanks, were no longer a supporting force to the main body. Armored formations became the main body. Like the heavy cavalry during the age of horse, heavy armored formations leveraged the firepower, protection, and mobility of tanks to break through enemy lines, destroy enemy armor, and seize objectives. When on the offense, armor formations conducted movements to contact, attacks, exploitation, and pursuit. On the defense, armored formations sought to create conditions to return to the offense.

On the other hand, light cavalry formations, although oftentimes equipped with tanks and aerial assets, remained a supporting force that continued to inform, protect, and fight for the main body.⁸ When light cavalry formations fought, they operated in economy of force roles. Motorized cavalry

formations continued to provide security for their protected force through screens, guards, and spoiling attacks. Finally, cavalry units continued to conduct reconnaissance to inform their higher headquarters and continued to serve as the main body's "eyes and ears."

Cavalry In the Age of Terrorism – Modularity and a Preference for Reconnaissance

The attacks of September 11th, 2001, brought another period of change to U.S. cavalry formations. In late 2003, the U.S. Army began the process of converting itself into a modular, brigade-based force. The brigade combat teams (BCTs) that emerged were smaller and more flexible than the force structure that predated them. These compact forces were not only expected to conduct large-scale combat operations, but also missions of all sizes. Eventually, the U.S. Army settled on three categories of brigade combat teams: heavy (armored), Stryker, and infantry. Whatever the BCT type, however, a cavalry squadron was subordinate to each brigade combat team. Whether equipped with wheeled trucks, Strykers, or tracked vehicles, cavalry squadrons were expected to fulfill the historic cavalry roles – informing, protecting, and fighting for the main body.⁹

However, in practice, BCT cavalry squadrons during the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), like most U.S. Army units of the time, conducted counterinsurgency operations. Cavalry squadrons, aside from minor differences in available personnel and equipment, looked and operated similarly to their sister armor and infantry battalions. Squadron commanders owned battle space, interacted with the local population, and sought to "clear, hold, and build" in partnership with host-nation governments and security forces.

During GWOT, cavalry squadrons were typically employed as independent entities. Whether in Iraq or Afghanistan, squadrons, as battle space owners, were frequently self-contained and operated independently of the BCT. While cavalry squadrons were subordinate to BCT commanders, the BCT commander did not require the

squadrons to fight or protect the brigade in any meaningful sense. Enemy forces in Iraq or Afghanistan rarely posed a serious tactical threat to a BCT. Cavalry formations assigned to provide wide-area security focused on protecting populations and infrastructure, not the brigade. As a result, the traditional security and economy of force roles of the cavalry were neglected.

On the other hand, during GWOT, brigade commanders relied heavily on manned reconnaissance to help locate and ascertain the intentions of an elusive enemy. Despite this emphasis, cavalry squadrons, alongside the rest of the U.S. Army, struggled to identify the insurgents, terrorists, bomb makers, and other bad actors contesting the U.S. Army's counterinsurgency strategy.

Not surprisingly, as the U.S. Army struggled to find its foe, higher headquarters across the force demanded greater information from subordinates about the enemy and the terrain. Reconnaissance tasks became ascendant. Disparate organizations and branches began to innovate, train, equip, and employ tactics in the effort to "find the enemy."¹⁰ The Armor Branch did the same. Doctrine, tactics, training, and education evolved to prioritize reconnaissance over the cavalry's traditional purposes.¹¹

Consequently, as the U.S. Army moved on from the counterinsurgency campaigns of the early 2000s, a generation of cavalry leaders emerged with a preference for reconnaissance and were unaccustomed to protecting and fighting on behalf of the main body.

Cavalry In the Age of Automation – Change Is Coming

As the U.S. Army's commitments to counterinsurgency campaigns in the Middle East eased, its focus on large combat operations grew. In October 2022, the U.S. Army released an updated Field Manual (FM) 3-0: *Operations* that marked a definitive shift away from the counterinsurgency and stability operations that dominated U.S. Army doctrine and thinking since the early 2000s.¹²

Two years later, in 2024, the U.S. Army concluded that its ability to shoot,



Figure 2. A U.S. Army Abrams M1A2 System Enhancement Package version 3 (SEPV3), with the 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division (1-7 CAV), drives off a firing range at Fort Hood, Texas, Feb. 23, 2026. (U.S. Army Reserve Photo by SGT Addison Shinn)

move, and survive in the future would be tested.¹³ The U.S. Army identified twelve conditions expected to influence future combat and training. Such conditions include the proliferation of unmanned systems, an increasingly transparent and lethal battlefield, challenges to movement and maneuver, and increased sustainment demands.

In response to a renewed focus on large scale operations and the changing threat environment, the U.S. Army initiated dramatic changes to its cavalry formations in February 2024. The Army Structure (ARSTRUC) 25-29 initiated the most significant force structure change in decades. ARSTRUC 25-29 sought to transform the U.S. Army into a more capable force able to dominate large scale combat operations. Notably, because of ARSTRUC, cavalry squadrons within infantry and Stryker brigades were inactivated. Other units and capabilities, such as indirect fires, electronic warfare, and unmanned systems, were activated or saw growth.¹⁴

Despite the inactivation of the U.S. Army's light and Stryker cavalry squadrons, the U.S. Army acknowledged that close combat formations could not divest themselves of the requirement for all-weather reconnaissance, security, and surveillance.¹⁵ Consequently, a

robust period of debate and experimentation emerged within the Cavalry community following ARSTRUC 25-29.

The debate continues today. For example, leaders outside of the armored force are thinking and writing about the future of reconnaissance and security formations.¹⁶ Cavalry trainers at the Joint Multinational Training Center (JMRC) continue to observe and gather best practices for units operating in Europe in a post-ARSTRUC environment.¹⁷ In the wake of this experimentation, multi-functional reconnaissance companies and multi-purpose companies are now established across the U.S. Army's mobile brigade combat teams (MBCT).¹⁸

Debate and experimentation about the future of cavalry formations is no less robust within the U.S. Army's armored formations. The 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR), at the National Training Center (NTC), is experimenting with future organization, capabilities, and processes monthly.¹⁹ Armor brigades, even though they retained their cavalry squadrons following ARSTRUC, are also experimenting. Brigades from the 1st Armored Division and the 1st Cavalry Division have all experimented with new organizations, warfighting concepts, and technologies during

training rotations at NTC in 2025. The 1st and 3rd Infantry Divisions will continue experimentation in 2026. The Armor Branch has or is expected to release updated doctrine in the coming months.²⁰

Recommendations For Future U.S. Cavalry Employment

Obviously, the U.S. cavalry has yet to emerge from the age of automation. Much thought, experimentation, and work remain if cavalry leaders are to stay ahead of adversaries and before historians can pass judgment on the era. Yet, observations from the NTC indicate the U.S. cavalry squadron ought to be employed differently in the age of artificial intelligence and automation. Several recommendations for future employment are described below.

Think In Terms of Purpose – Inform, Protect, And Fight for the Main Body

First, U.S. cavalry formations should adjust how they think of themselves. Currently, cavalry leaders view themselves as an organization within the BCT that performs reconnaissance. Being task-focused, cavalry leaders focus on measures of performance and

minutiae. For example, leaders fret about word choice in their commander's reconnaissance and security guidance rather than communicating in a language the youngest trooper can understand. Cavalry leaders debate how many priority intelligence requirements (PIR) are needed to be considered "complete" when developing PIR. Too often, leaders simply copy PIR from the last operation without critical thought about what the brigade commander needs to understand about the terrain and enemy to enable maneuver. Further, cavalry formations are frequently observed waiting on the brigade and are hesitant to operate without direct guidance from the brigade commander. This "checklist" mentality creates a formation that loses sight of its purpose and frequently delivers irrelevant results.

Cavalry formations should move away from this task obsession mentality. Instead of solely thinking in terms of "what," cavalry leaders should devote increased time to the "why" and "how" behind their given missions. U.S. cavalry formations should think of themselves as an organization designed, equipped, and trained to inform, protect, and fight for the main body. Thinking in this way offers a broader conceptual framework that frees leaders to plan and execute toward a tactical outcome rather than a checkmark. Moreover, this framework enables the initiative, aggression, and tempo needed by cavalry squadrons remain relevant to the U.S. Army's armored formations. Finally, these are the traditional roles of U.S. cavalry formations. These roles have delivered victory throughout history.

Seek Balance Across Historic Cavalry Purposes

Second, the Cavalry should find balance across its historic purposes. Too often, cavalry squadrons focus on manned reconnaissance at the expense of their other historic purposes. "Stealthy and deliberate" reconnaissance, even amongst cavalry squadrons supporting ABCTs, is common. So are lengthy infiltrations and long-duration observation posts. Cavalry squadrons cross lines of departure hours, in some cases days, before the main body. In line with current doctrine, it

is not uncommon for cavalry squadrons at NTC to operate across a frontage of 15-45 kilometers.²¹ In planning, equipping, and execution the casual observer could be forgiven for mistaking ABCT cavalry squadrons as special operations forces preparing to execute special reconnaissance.

The cavalry squadron's current preference for manned reconnaissance is particularly dangerous on an increasingly lethal and transparent battlefield overwatched by autonomous systems.

At NTC the dangers of manned reconnaissance in the age of autonomy are on display every rotation. Cavalry squadrons consistently conduct manned reconnaissance dispersed, without tempo, and without support from the main body, straight into the heart of the enemy's "unmanned" security zone. The consequences are predictable. Within hours, enemy drones identify the cavalry squadron. Not long after, enemy attack drones and indirect fires assets attrit and neutralize the cavalry squadron, rendering it combat ineffective. Regeneration of squadron combat power becomes the squadron's main effort for the remainder of the rotation. Consequently, almost from the start, the squadron becomes a liability rather than an asset to the brigade. The squadron becomes

a consumer of combat power and organizational energy rather than a producer.

Furthermore, in 2026, the squadron's obsession with manned reconnaissance is not only dangerous but unnecessary. The United States' adversaries are not the only states capable of identifying the composition, disposition, and intent of opposing forces with ubiquitous sensors. The U.S. Army has this capability, too. And the capabilities exist at the tactical level.

In 2026, BCTs have the capabilities to connect intelligence from "orbit to the turret." To an acceptable degree, brigades can, with training and repetition, ascertain the disposition and composition of enemy forces before friendly ground forces cross the line of departure. No longer does the BCT have to rely on its cavalry troopers to conduct the bulk of a brigade's ground reconnaissance. In fact, they should not. Commanders at every level must lead with autonomous systems and demand that sensors do the dangerous work of finding the enemy.

In the limited instances where a BCT commander must lead with his cavalry soldiers to conduct reconnaissance, the reconnaissance ought to be enemy-focused. If the U.S. Army is going to risk the life of a soldier in the age of

Figure 3. First Team Troopers operating an Abrams M1A2 System Enhancement Package version 3, with the 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, drive on to the firing range during gunnery at Fort Hood, Texas, Feb. 26, 2026. (U.S. Army Photo by SPC Julian A. Winston)



autonomy to achieve improved understanding, the commander ought to offset that risk with the potential to erode enemy combat power, seize key terrain, or influence enemy decision making.

Cavalry Squadron Employment in Support of a BCT On the Offense

There are numerous tactical benefits to cavalry squadrons returning to their historic purpose and finding balance across those purposes. Begin with operations in support of a BCT on the offense. A cavalry squadron unburdened from an obsession with reconnaissance can narrow the frontage it is expected to operate across. Rather than fighting dispersed across a 15-45 km frontage, cavalry squadrons can fight more narrowly. Doing so allows squadron commanders to more effectively mass combat power, consolidate gains, and transition onto follow-on operations. Moreover, rebalance allows the squadron to fight under the protection of the main body. No longer should the manned assets of the squadron feel obligated to depart nine to twelve hours before the main body and fight outside of the protection of all but the main body's farthest-reaching weapon systems. Now the squadron's manned assets can depart two to three hours before the main body as part of a reconnaissance in force operation. In each case, the squadron should remain within supporting distance of the brigade's fires assets and follow-on combined arms battalions. Finally, the rebalance gives main body commanders increased flexibility. Commanders may wish to use the squadron to mass an additional maneuver battalion to exploit enemy weakness or seize an opportunity.

Cavalry Squadron Employment in Support of a BCT On the Defense

When the BCT is on defense, the squadron should provide security by interfering with enemy decision making. Or, in other words, a squadron should conduct "offensive security operations" to support the main body's defense.²² Attacks to seize, spoiling attacks, and pursuit should not be considered out of bounds for cavalry squadrons. All these operations achieve a security outcome, such as



Figure 4. A U.S. Army M2A3 Bradley Fighting Vehicle, from the 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, NATO Forward Land Forces Battle Group-Poland, moves off the range during a combined arms live-fire exercise at Bemowo Piskie Training Area, Poland, Mar. 10, 2026. (U.S. Army Reserve photo by SGT Ronald D. Bell)

early warning or increased time, by influencing enemy decision-making. When the BCT is on the defense, a static screen line to the front of the BCT is not the only option for a cavalry squadron. Flank screens are underutilized at NTC. So too is a moving flank screen for the main body on the move. Finally, cavalry squadrons can follow the same engagement area development steps as their combined arms battalion peers. Consequently, BCT commanders may wish to outsource screening actions to unmanned systems in preference for the squadron's indirect and direct fire weapon capabilities being integrated into the BCT's engagement area.

Multifunctional Strike Troops Should Be Assigned to the Squadron

Next, cavalry squadrons should own the training, equipping, and employment of emerging organizations designed to inform, protect, or fight for the main body. Whether called multifunctional reconnaissance troops (MFRT), multi-functional strike troops (MFST), or something else, these incipient organizations should operate under the purview of the squadron. Similar in organization and purpose to the multi-purpose reconnaissance companies (MPRC) recently established within the MBCTs, the MFRTs being experimented with in ABCTs consist of capabilities designed to inform, protect, and fight in support of the BCT.

Consequently, the natural home of the MFST is within the cavalry squadron.

Assigning these organizations to cavalry squadrons offers several benefits. First, cavalry leaders have the training, education, and culture to best employ these emerging organizations. Furthermore, cavalry squadrons are already familiar with sustaining disparate subordinate units across the BCT battlespace. While the squadron may require additional sustainment equipment and personnel to fully support the finalized version of the MFST, for the most part, the equipment and knowledge needed by commanders to maintain unit tempo and sustain across extended distances already exists within the squadron. Finally, assigning emerging MFST units to cavalry squadrons minimizes disruption to the existing BCT force structure and enhances home-station training efficiency.

Be Aggressive

Finally, cavalry squadrons, whether supporting a BCT on the defense or offense, should be employed aggressively. Cavalry formations, like all military units, have weaknesses. Cavalry formations must be employed judiciously. But cavalry formations are not fragile. They can and should fight. Today's cavalry formations descend from ancestors that shaped empires. As part of the Armor Branch, the cavalry possesses the capabilities to close with and destroy the enemy by direct fire. In

2026, warfare remains a violent contest of wills won by the most cunning and aggressive combatants. Commanders who employ their cavalry formations timidly do a disservice to their soldiers and the nation.

Don't Throw the Baby Out With the Bathwater

These recommendations, however, are not a call to upend U.S. cavalry squadron employment. U.S. cavalry doctrine, formations, and leaders are doing much right. For example, there remain times when it is appropriate for cavalry squadrons to conduct manned reconnaissance. While autonomous systems continue to improve, cavalry troopers remain the U.S. Army's sole all-weather reconnaissance capability. Furthermore, the fog of war is enduring. Commanders must still apply their judgment and intuition to make sense of an autonomous system's report of enemy composition and disposition.

Additionally, cavalry formations have real limitations. Consequently, critical thinking and risk assessment must underpin all cavalry squadron employment. Cavalry squadrons should be employed aggressively, never recklessly.

Most importantly, the fundamentals remain essential. FM 3-0, *The Fundamentals of Army Operations and Army Imperatives*, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-90, *Characteristics of the Offense and Defense*, FM 3-98, *The Fundamentals of Security and Reconnaissance*, and Army Techniques Publications (ATP) 3-20.15, *The Armor Force Fundamentals* are foundational to a unit's success at NTC. Units that deviate from those fundamentals incur risk to their mission and their force.

Conclusion

In fine Cavalry tradition, squadron commanders are already aggressively reshaping the force for the age of automation. During recent NTC rotations, the 1st Cavalry Division and the 1st Armored Division successfully tested new concepts for cavalry employment. The hard work and cunning of all the cavalry commanders and troopers who have recently trained at NTC are the inspiration for this paper. These units and soldiers demonstrated

that cavalry formations continue to deliver results for the U.S. Army. Guided by the cavalry's historic purposes and with additional repetitions, updated doctrine, and continued experimentation, the cavalry squadron will remain an asset to any U.S. Army unit it serves.

Lieutenant Colonel Matthew Schardt is currently serving as the Senior Cavalry Trainer ("Cobra 07") at the National Training Center Operations Group at Fort Irwin, California. LTC Schardt previously served as Squadron Commander for the 3rd Squadron, 71st Cavalry Regiment at Fort Drum, New York. LTC Schardt's staff experience includes serving as the Brigade Operations Officer for 2nd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division and as the Squadron Operations Officer for 5th Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment at Fort Riley, Kansas. Additionally, he was a maneuver OC/T ("Warhog 02") at the Joint Multinational Training Center at Hohenfels, Germany. LTC Schardt holds a bachelor of science degree in geography from The United States Military Academy at West Point, New York and a master's of professional studies in legislative affairs from The George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

NOTES

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- 2 U.S. Department of the Army, "FM 3-0, Operations," (Washington, DC: Army Publishing Directorate, March 2025), p. 27.
- 3 For the current published role of the cavalry squadron, see U.S. Department of the Army, Army Techniques Publication 3-20.96: Reconnaissance and Cavalry Squadron (Washington, DC: Army Publishing Directorate, May 2016), 1-1. The purposes described here are the author's own based on observation and discussions with leaders within the cavalry community.
- 4 U.S. Department of the Army, ATP 3-20.96, 1-42.
- 5 Heather B. Hayes, "From Horses to Tanks," Army AL&T Magazine, Summer 2025, 64-69.
- 6 Timothy Winegard, *The Horse: A Galloping History of Humanity* (New York: Dutton, 2024) provides an outstanding resource on the role of horse-borne cavalry formations in human and military history.
- 7 Alaric Searle, *Armoured Warfare: A*

Military, Political, and Global History (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017) provides a thorough account of cavalry and armored warfare evolution from 1914-2016.

8 John J. McGrath, *Scouts Out! The Development of Reconnaissance Units in Modern Armies* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2016), 42.

9 William Donnelly, *Transforming an Army at War: Designing the Modular Force 1991-2005* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2007), 3.

10 The January-February 2006 edition of *Infantry* is indicative of the U.S. Army's enemy focus. Articles within this edition of *Infantry* include titles like "Finding the Terrorist: Locating the Enemy," "Finding the Enemy: Bigger than Recon," and "Tactical Questioning: Human Intelligence Key to Counterinsurgency Campaigns."

11 As an example, see Terry Tucker, "The Armor Officer Education System Expands to Include 'Reconnaissance-Centric Training,'" *ARMOR* Magazine, July-August 2005, 3.

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13 U.S. Department of the Army, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-92: *The Operational Environment 2024-2034* (Fort Eustis, VA: Training and Doctrine Command).

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U.S. Army Cavalry Leader's Course

A Report on My Experience as a German Soldier

by **Mastersergeant (Officer Candidate) Jobst Hinrich Sielaff, German Army**

From August 4th to August 22nd, 2025, I finally had the opportunity to participate in the U.S. Army's Cavalry Leader's Course (CLC) at the Maneuver Center of Excellence (MCoE) in Fort Benning, Georgia. My initial interest in participating in the CLC dates back to my time as a reconnaissance patrol leader in the 3rd Armoured Reconnaissance Battalion in Lüneburg, Germany.

First, I would like to explain the composition of the German Cavalry or the *Heeresaufklärungstruppe* [Army Reconnaissance Force] to the American readers as opposed to the original article in "*Der Panzerspähtrupp*" where I provided information for the German audience about the United States Cavalry and its terminology, organization, and restructuring efforts to get that audience on track for the information regarding the CLC.

In the German Army the word cavalry is more of an antiquated relict from the history books. The foremost bearer of the Cavalry's traditions is the *Heeresaufklärungstruppe* which is the successor of the *Panzeraufklärungstruppe* [Armored Reconnaissance Force]. To be fair, quite a few of the traditions in the daily life in the German military can trace its roots to the Cavalry of the past. The *Heeresaufklärung* [Army Reconnaissance] sees itself as the main holder of Cavalry traditions. As cavalry and armor in the German Army had developed differently in comparison to the U.S. Army, the Armor Branch bears pink as the branch color while the

reconnaissance still bears the cavalry yellow.

With the creation of the *Bundeswehr* [German Armed Forces] in 1955, there was discussion from the beginning about the task of the newly created independent armored reconnaissance formations and their role during combat conditions. A dual role was already defined by General Heinz Wilhelm Guderian during the second World War: reconnaissance or combat, or reconnaissance through combat. They were mainly responsible for reconnaissance and surveillance of the attacking enemy formations and to hold close contact with the enemy, which required a certain capability to fight for information and delay the enemy if necessary. The first structure was heavily oriented on the armored reconnaissance formations of the Panzer Divisions from 1944. This ultimately led to the hunter-killer "dream team" with the Luchs wheeled armored vehicle partnered with Leopard 2 main battle tanks (MBTs) supported by ground radar systems on the Fuchs armored transport vehicle and even the Marder infantry fighting vehicle (IFV) in certain battalions during the peak of the Cold War.

The lighter Luchs found the enemies weak spot, the Leopards took advantage of the weakness and tied the enemy and were relieved by the main effort of the Panzerdivision. Until 2001 the reconnaissance battalions had already lost all their MBTs by disbanding the heavy platoons within the companies. By 2008 it was decided that the *Panzeraufklärungstruppe* and the last

Fernspähkompanie [Long Range Reconnaissance Company] would be disbanded and amalgamated with the artillery unmanned aerial system (UAS) reconnaissance forces, field intelligence forces, and form the new *Heeresaufklärungstruppe*.

A reconnaissance battalion of the *Heeresaufklärungstruppe* cannot be compared and does not have much in common with *Panzeraufklärung*.

Instead, it is composed of the following:

- Battalion Headquarters
- Headquarters and Support Company
- Reconnaissance Company with six reconnaissance platoons, each with two reconnaissance patrols, each equipped with two Fennek armored reconnaissance vehicles
- Reconnaissance Company with three field human intelligence (HUMINT) platoons and one light reconnaissance platoon
- Technical Reconnaissance Company with one Luna (reconnaissance

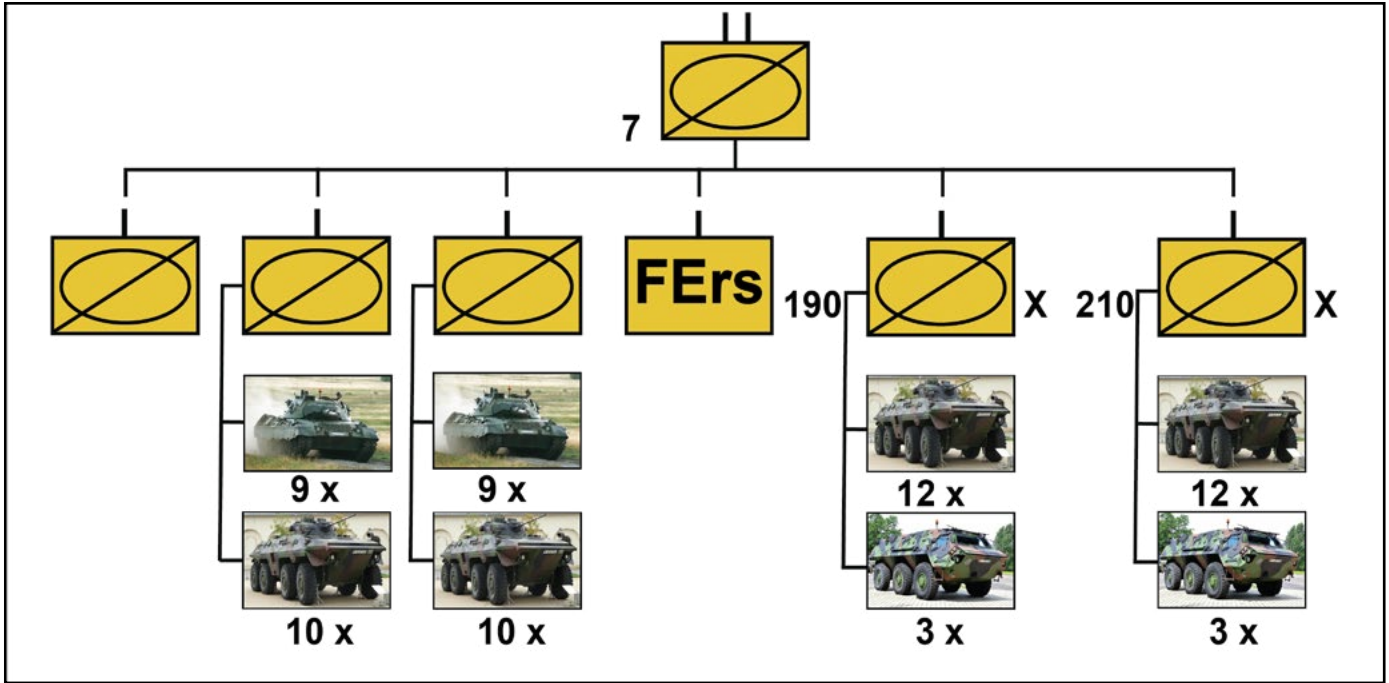


Figure 1. Structure Panzeraufklärungsbataillon mid 1980 with Brigade Reconnaissance Companies attached.

drone) equipped platoon, one KZO (target acquisition drone) equipped platoon, and one radar platoon

Depending on the battalion, an additional company may be attached as a recruit company, reserve unit, or inactive company.

In the event of war, a battalion will form two mixed reconnaissance companies which includes each type of sensor mentioned above. This means a mixed reconnaissance company has three platoons of Fennek reconnaissance vehicles, one squad of dismounted reconnaissance, one platoon UAS, two squads of radar reconnaissance, plus field HUMINT team (FHT) capabilities available to support its higher headquarters, at brigade or division.

Cavalry Leader's Course Structure

Class instructors are captains with company command experience who have been selected as CLC instructors. In addition, there is an exchange cavalry officer from Australia. The course begins with a written evaluation on reconnaissance and security operations. This consists of thirty questions based on the provided pre-reading list but also assumes knowledge of daily troop operations and regulations. It serves to

make an initial assessment and to place course participants into balanced classes. This is followed by a direct debriefing of the evaluation test and a review of the cavalry squadron's mission within the brigade combat team (BCT) system. Homework is assigned each day of the course, except for late-night sessions. This typically consists of technical articles and/or sections from regulations. Duty hours during the course generally run from 0630 to 1730, including physical training, but excluding homework. On late-night days, it is the

responsibility of the course participants to manage their own time, and duty hours can extend well beyond 2000 hours. The entire exercise scenario, Operation Atlantic Resolve, is geographically located in the notional Warmia/Masuria region. In this notional region, the nation of Glasskowski is threatened by its neighbor, Donovia, and is subjected to continuous aggression across the hybrid spectrum, including the open deployment of regular armed forces.

Figure 2. Spahpanzer Luchs Reconnaissance Vehicle (Sourced from Budasarchiv)



Operation Winged Bayonet - Reconnaissance Battalion of an Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT)

The first week involves working with the cavalry squadron of an IBCT. The course structure involves the class representing the staff of a squadron and progressing through the military decision-making process (MDMP) up to wargaming. Each course participant represents a staff section. This begins on the second day of the course with developing the planning basis for the deployment of 1-93 CAV of the fictitious 175th Airborne Brigade. During the IBCT week, reconnaissance and security operations are covered equally. Specifically, this includes zone reconnaissance, area reconnaissance, and screen operations to protect the superior unit. After a successful airborne operation, reconnaissance is conducted from the landing zone to provide the commander of the combat brigade with a situational awareness picture and to position the squadron in the best possible way for the next attack. This constitutes the entire work order for the day, which ideally concludes with wargaming. The day ends with 1-93 CAV transitioning into security and surveillance duties to provide the higher command with the necessary operational leeway. The developments in the situation during the night form the basis for the next day of training. Here, too, the planning principles are developed, and the first graded assessment takes place. This means that from 1730 onwards, the course participants are assigned an area of operations



Figure 4: Fennek (Image provided by author)

within the cavalry squadron and individually develop their operational plan for their troop/company. The participants present this operational plan to their instructor the following day and must then present it to the instructor in a wargaming scenario. The instructor introduces developments in the situation, and participants are expected to react immediately to these developments, according to the principles of reconnaissance and security. A deliberation time of more than one minute is unrealistic. Afterwards, the plan and all the assessment materials are reviewed, and any omissions and inefficiencies are identified. Participants are also expected to recognize shortcomings that originated in the staff

planning phase. Participants are also expected to consider the use of aircraft, combat support, and logistics, and to represent this appropriately using the correct military symbols in accordance with Field Manual (FM) 1-02.2, *Military Symbols*. After completing the exam and debriefing, the training day concludes, except for homework. Following the overview of the course outline, the week concludes with the so-called “Teach Day” on Friday. Here, the fundamentals of reconnaissance and security operations are reviewed and linked to further content through interactive discussions.

Operation Dragoon Strike - Reconnaissance Battalion of a Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT)

In the second week, the area of operations changes, and participants join the cavalry squadron of a SBCT, specifically the fictional 4th Cavalry Regiment (4/4 CR). Here, too, the planning groundwork is laid. Throughout the week, reconnaissance along approach routes, area security operations to protect friendly forces within a defined area, and the transition from zone reconnaissance to a guard operation—to deprive the main force of enemy reconnaissance and firepower—are conducted. The transition from zone reconnaissance to guard is carried out as an ungraded practical exercise. It is evaluated during the lecture. This can be visualized like a chess tournament where

Figure 3. LEOPARD 2A4 Main Battle Tank (Sourced from Bundesarchiv)



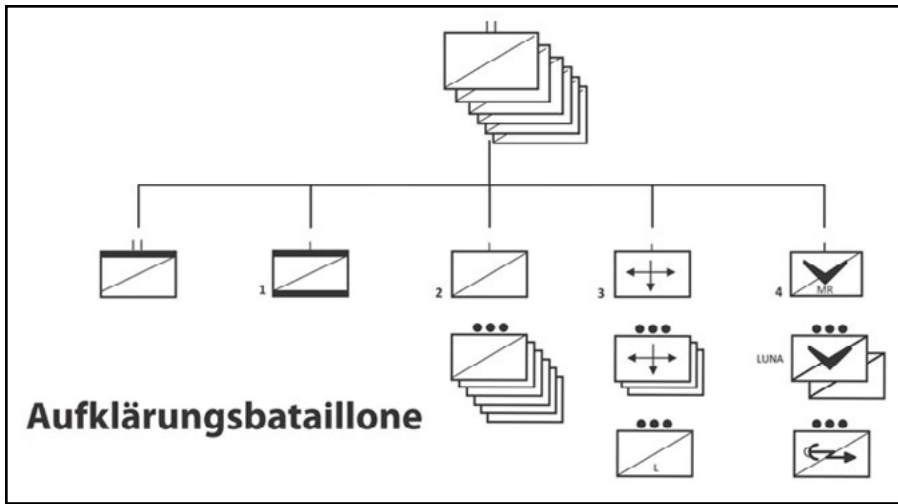


Figure 5. As with the Cavalry in the U.S. Army, the *Heeresaufklärungstruppe* of the Bundeswehr is in the process of restructuring. The structure shown above is the current structure.

the instructor goes from table to table and expects a reaction to the developing situation within under a minute. The SBCT phase concludes with the squadron's deployment as a moving flank guard for the brigade on Thursday. The written assessment, which must be passed with at least 70%, takes place on Friday of this week. The assessment consists of 30 questions covering the entire course content, with a focus on regulation FM 3-98, *Reconnaissance and Security Operations* and, to a lesser extent, Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 2-01, *Collection Management* and ATP 2-01.3, *Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment*, as well as FM 1-02.2, *Military Symbols*. The examination criteria are very strict, and it is required that participants be able to reproduce many sections from FM 3-98 verbatim. Not all participants passed this exam; however, there is an opportunity to retake it on Monday of the third and final week. Should this retake also be failed, the participant will be dropped from the course, and their sending unit will be informed.

Operation Iron Fury - Cavalry Squadron of an Armored Brigade Combat Team (ABCT)

The final week of the course begins with another change of operational area, and participants are now members of a cavalry squadron (1-3 CAV) within the 3rd ABCT, 4th Armored Division (3/4 AD). Here, too, the fundamentals of an ABCT cavalry squadron,

including its structure and equipment, are covered. The class has another opportunity to work on their staff skills. This week's content includes reconnaissance in force and area reconnaissance. These are components of the second graded practical assessment. A combined practical exercise, involving all classes, involves conducting a guard operation for 3/4 AD during a delay in a wargaming scenario. On Tuesday, staff work begins for the second graded tactical decision-making assessment. For this assessment, the class is responsible for assigning their own staff sections. In my class, we had become so well-coordinated by this point that staff work ran smoothly and there were no frictions during the assignment process. Nevertheless, this

Figure 6: Map of the Heeresaufklärungstruppe (source: <https://www.heeresaufklaerungstruppe.de>)



late-night session lived up to its name. On Thursday, the operational plan for the assigned troop was presented. This time, the examiner was one of the instructors from the other classes. After this exam, the day was over except for the homework. As mentioned before, a final practical exercise conducted across classes, followed on Thursday. Half of the course participants formed the staff of a squadron and were provided with most of the necessary documents, as the focus that day was on the rapid decision and synchronization process (RDSP), i.e., reacting quickly to changing situations. Four course participants were assigned as troop commander and were located in an adjacent room.

Communication between the squadron and troops takes place via radio. During the security operation, the cavalry squadron's mission is to delay the enemy for at least three hours. The oral final exam takes place on the last day of the course. Prior to this, each of the three training classes selects one participant to represent their class as an honor graduate during this exam. This means that the selected candidate may take their oral exam in front of all instructors and with less time; in return, these three candidates will be the first to complete their exams. Should the oral exam be failed on this day, a retake is offered one hour later. The oral exam consists of eight questions and has a time limit of 30 minutes. The use of a whiteboard is permitted and recommended during this exam. The

questions are designed to be linked to and related to other course content. After the oral exam, the classrooms are cleaned and the course participant survey is conducted. This survey takes place online via a link on participants' personal mobile phones and lasts approximately 15 minutes. Before the actual graduation ceremony, an informal discussion is held with one of the instructors. In this discussion, the instructor does not speak with their own class, but rather with one of the neighbouring classes. Topics include course content, structure, procedures, and how the class perceived their instructor. Openness is highly valued and encouraged. Instructors, especially those pursuing a long-term career in the U.S. Army, are very interested in receiving feedback on their own potential for improvement. The course concluded with the presentation of the course certificates.

Epilogue

"To Fight or Not to Fight – The Saga Continues" by Robert S. Cameron, Ph.D. was the title of a professional article in **ARMOR** Magazine, and another was titled "Trading the Saber for Stealth".^{3,4} For decades, the U.S. Army has been engaged in a lively debate about the structure of its reconnaissance/cavalry forces. This discussion can be traced back to the motorization of the army in the lead-up to World War II. There have been repeated calls to simplify reconnaissance at the expense of combat power. However, unlike the German Army, this never resulted in a complete abandonment of combat-oriented reconnaissance. Unfortunately, no in-depth discussion of this topic is taking place within the Army's reconnaissance troops, let alone the German Army as a whole yet. Unfortunately, I have not seen a lot of contribution from other parties to the discussion so far. The focus of the German Army's reconnaissance force remains unchanged for now; only the weapon systems are being replaced by successors. If there are differing arguments, they tended to suggest that even the Fennek reconnaissance vehicle, or the future Luchs 2, is too heavy and that much lighter options and capabilities are needed instead. This is to say nothing of the premature dismissal

of combat vehicles. Personally, I have always advocated the opposite view in the reconnaissance workshops at the Army Combat Capabilities Development Command Armaments Center (CCDC-AC) between 2021 and 2024. Yes, I personally believe that clinging to the current approach is a mistake. In my assessment of the situation, disbanding the *Panzeraufklärung* as a whole was an error. There were certainly political pressures to take this path, but it is proving inadequate for future challenges. What would have happened if September 11, 2001, and February 24, 2022, had occurred in reverse order? – The discussion is pointless, as shooting over graves has never been productive. However, given the overall situation, appropriate decisions must now be made. Future ground-based reconnaissance must be designed in conjunction with new technologies, but it must also be capable of duel-based combat in order to conduct operations like the ones I was able to plan during the CLC. The reason lies not in my participation in this valuable and instructive course, but rather in the fact that, after studying the now-defunct German Army Service Regulation 241/100 – *Das Panzeraufklärungsbataillon* [The Armored Reconnaissance Battalion], I could only find comparable content presented in an U.S. Army course. At least German retired readers should still be familiar with this regulation. With the disbandment of the *Panzeraufklärungstruppe*, the German Army has withdrawn from these operations and is now relying on concealment on the battlefield, from where intelligence about the enemy can be gathered. How resilient and undetectable in the electromagnetic spectrum will these reconnaissance patrols be? Probably not for very long, or they are positioned in the wrong places, and above all, there are too few of them. On the battlefield, the result will be that the main forces will have to fight the full force of any attack. The army reconnaissance troops will, if anything, be mere observers of major events. The protection of areas, deployment as a delaying force, and further maneuvering within the command structure of the superior unit are necessary and can only be provided by *Panzeraufklärer* (Cavalry). The

necessity of armoured reconnaissance, incorporating electronic warfare and new technologies such as unmanned systems, is beyond question for me.

The Cavalry squadron conducts reconnaissance operations to develop the situation forward or to the flanks of the main body to prevent the BCT commander from fighting at a disadvantage. (FM 3-98; 1-17)

NOTE: The assessments made in the article reflect the author's opinion and do not represent the views of the German Army or the Federal Ministry of Defence of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Mastersergeant (officer candidate) Jobst Hinrich Sielaff joined the German Army in 2001 and is undergoing training at the Panzertruppenschule, Munster, Germany to be commissioned as an armor officer. His previous assignments were Intel NCO with G2 German Army HQ, Strausberg; Reconnaissance Platoon Leader, Reconnaissance Training Bataillon 3, Lüneburg. His military schooling includes the pre-Armor Basic Leaders Course, Panzertruppenschule, Munster; Cavalry Leader's Course, Maneuver Centre of Excellence, Fort Benning, GA, to name a few. His awards include the German Combat Action Medal, German Deployment Medal International Security Assistance Force Afghanistan bronze and silver, NATO Deployment Medal International Security Assistance Force Afghanistan. He has three combat tours in Afghanistan in 2007, 2008, and 2010.

NOTES

1 FM-3-98 Reconnaissance and Security Operations ff.

2 HDv 241/100 das Panzeraufklärungsbataillon

3 Cameron, Robert: *"To Fight or Not to Fight – The Saga continues"*, in: **ARMOR** Magazine - Fall 2023, S. 8 - 15

4 Taylor, Curtis D. "Trading the Saber for Stealth" in: The Land warfare Papers No.53 September 2005

69th Armor Regiment



The 69th Armor Regiment is an armored regiment of the United States Army. The 69th Armor Regiment is part of the U.S. Army Tegimental System with only two battalions, the 2nd and 3rd Battalion, 69th Armor Regiment, existing in seperate brigades and representing the regiment as a whole. 2-69 AR is currently stationed at Fort Stewart, Georgia as part of the 2nd Armor Brigade Combat Team (Spartans), 3rd Infantry Division and 3-69 AR is stationed at Fort Stewart, Georgia as part of the 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team (Raider), 3rd Infantry Division. Both Battalions have transformed from tank pure battalions into combined arms battalions.

In 2002, 2-69 AR deployed with 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division to Operation Desert Spring in preparation for future combat operations in a six-month training mission. In January 2003, 2-69 AR deployed to Kuwait awaiting orders to begin combat operations. In July 2003, following the downfall of the regime under Saddam Hussein, both battalions were redeployed to Georgia and awarded the Presidential Unit Award.

