

# Integrating Dismounts into Reconnaissance and Security Operations in the Heavy Cavalry Troop

by Captain Jarrod P. Wickline



*“In reconnaissance, every scout makes a difference.”<sup>1</sup>*

We refer to them as just another guy in back or loader. When scanning a modification table of organization and equipment (MTOE) that lists nine M1A1/A2s, thirteen M3A2/A3s, and two 120mm mortars, it is easy to put them on the back burner and train them only on reloading the tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided (TOW) missile or 25mm Bushmaster. At gunnery, they are gate guards and ammo detail. At a combat training center, they are great for keeping the back of the Bradley clean, even if they clutter the vehicle with their equipment. They are the first to go on borrowed military manpower taskings and the last position filled on crew rosters.

Yes, I am referring to the dismounts. In the heavy cavalry world, our training focus is often centered on qualifying crews for gunnery and maneuvering integrated scout/tank teams. As a result, we often forget about the 19D10s bouncing around in the backs of Bradleys. I propose we are wasting one of our greatest assets — an intelligent, thinking human being with a radio, capable of executing the commander’s intent and maximizing the advantage that technology offers. The M1A1 has a

3-kilometer range, which is worthless if destroyed seeking targets instead of being walked on by a scout forward with eyes on.

Restrictive terrain, particularly built-up areas, an increasingly common setting for combat in our modern world, demands the integration of dismounted scouts for the successful employment of tanks and Bradleys.

## Planning Factors for Reconnaissance Operations

During reconnaissance operations, as in most offensive operations, time is the key factor in planning. The critical tasks for zone reconnaissance are:

- Find and report all enemy forces within the zone.
- Reconnoiter all terrain within the zone.
- Inspect and classify all bridges within the zone.
- Locate fords or crossing sites near all bridges in the zone.
- Inspect and classify all overpasses, underpasses, and culverts.
- Locate and clear all mines, obstacles, and barriers in the zone.

- Locate bypasses around built-up areas, obstacles, and contaminated areas.

- Report all reconnaissance information.<sup>2</sup>

The cavalry commander narrows the focus of these tasks in his concept of the operation, where he specifies the tempo and focus of the reconnaissance. In an aggressive, enemy oriented reconnaissance, the focus is on locating and destroying enemy forces within the cavalry unit’s capabilities. Conversely, in a deliberate, terrain oriented reconnaissance, the pace and focus of the operation is on learning all military aspects of the terrain within the zone. Dismounted operations are time consuming by their nature and seem most applicable to deliberate reconnaissance operations. However, aggressive reconnaissance affords many opportunities for using dismounted scouts.

## Integrating Dismounts in Planning and Execution

**Aggressive reconnaissance.** The first fundamental of reconnaissance is “maximum reconnaissance force forward.”<sup>3</sup> During aggressive reconnaissance, leaving dismounts to reload the M3 weapons systems is a violation of this fundamen-

tal. U.S. Army Field Manual (FM 17-95), *Cavalry Operations*, deems dismounted reconnaissance techniques appropriate when:

- Intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) indicates close proximity to enemy positions.
- Enemy contact is expected or has been achieved.
- Restrictive terrain is encountered.<sup>4</sup>

Proximity to the enemy or gaining contact with the enemy demands the use of dismounted scouts. Making contact with Bradleys most often means direct fire contact, and when the fighting begins, reconnaissance ceases. Making contact with dismounts allows the cavalry commander to retain the initiative and decide whether or not to commit his combat power, rather than reacting to enemy direct fire. The dismounted scout's stealth allows him to close with the enemy with a much smaller engagement risk. The trained scout can then facilitate unhindered and informed mounted maneuver to the enemy's flank and rear. If he determines the enemy's strength to be more than the unit is capable of handling, he can prevent the premature commitment of combat power.

Restrictive terrain enhances the dismounted scout's stealth. A head peeking over an intervisibility (IV) line presents a much more difficult target than cresting an entire cavalry fighting vehicle (CFV). Thickly wooded areas are ideal locations for both mounted and dismounted anti-tank guided missile ambush positions. A dismounted scout, supported by his mounted element, mitigates the risk presented by

wood lines and allows for a more thorough reconnaissance of restrictive terrain.

Using dismounts requires little more than stopping short of restrictive terrain or a templated enemy location, dropping the ramp, and dismounting your scouts. Primarily, they move with the mounted element and are dismounted as needed. The dismounting vehicles provide casualty evacuation (CASEVAC) and direct fire support. This should be nothing more than a battle drill, executed at the individual vehicle level. Overall, dismounting scouts slow vehicle or section maneuver, but maximize the unit's ability to avoid decisive engagement and maintain freedom to maneuver.

**Deliberate reconnaissance.** As mentioned earlier, deliberate reconnaissance operations afford more opportunities to use dismounted scouts. Typically, more time is available, and more detailed reconnaissance information is required. Dismounted reconnaissance patrols are often required and must be planned in detail prior to crossing the line of departure. CASEVAC and direct fire support responsibility must be assigned. It is often necessary to combine dismounts from several vehicles or sections to form a patrol; dismount points must be identified during the planning process. FM 7-8, *Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad*, and FM 17-98, *Scout Platoon*, offer great techniques for conducting dismounted reconnaissance patrols.<sup>5</sup> Dismounted patrols are effective for obtaining detailed information of pieces of key terrain within the zone and classification of bridges, overpasses, underpasses, and culverts.

## Security Operations Planning Factors


The critical tasks for security operations are:

- Maintain continuous surveillance of all battalion-sized avenues of approach into the sector under all visibility conditions.
- Destroy or repel all reconnaissance elements within capabilities.
- Locate the lead company of each suspected advance guard battalion and determine its direction of movement.
- Maintain contact with the lead company of the advance guard battalion while displacing, and report its activity.<sup>6</sup>

The key planning factor for security operations, as well as the most often overlooked, is depth. Often, when given a phase line to screen, platoon leaders and commanders become fixated on the screen "line." Lining vehicle OPs along a phase line creates a screen easily penetrated and provides limited security for the protected force. Depth allows an enemy contact to be passed from one element of the screen to another without displacing. FM 17-95 states that depth is advantageous to:

- Destroy an enemy reconnaissance patrol without compromising critical OPs.
- Prevent the enemy from penetrating the screen line too easily.
- Prevent gaps from occurring when OPs displace or are lost.<sup>7</sup>

FM 17-95 goes on to explain that, "Depth is achieved primarily by the positioning of OPs, particularly where there are limited



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avenues of approach.”<sup>8</sup> Integrating dismounted scouts increases the number of OPs available along these avenues of approach and is essential in creating depth.

### **Integrating Dismounts in Planning/Execution**

The roles of dismounts change during security operations. Visibility conditions have the greatest impact on whether OPs are the primary observers of their sectors or are used as listening posts, local security, or for patrolling dismounted avenues of approach. Dismounted OPs act as primary observers during daylight hours and allow vehicles to set in hide positions, eliminating on-screen vehicle signatures. Rotating scouts on OP duty is essential. Individual scouts should not observe for more than 20 minutes every hour, so planning OP manning and personnel rotation is critical to maintaining vigilance on the screen. Maps with complete graphics, binoculars, mini-eyesafe laser infrared observation sets (MELIOS), and precision lightweight global positioning system receivers are essential tools in the dismounted OP. Leader involvement is also key. Squad and section leaders should be present in the OP at all times, and platoon leaders and platoon sergeants should visit OPs to ensure proper orientation and manning. OPs should relocate at random times to avoid being compromised or destroyed; alternate and subsequent positions must be developed either during planning or after occupying the screen. Critical OPs must be identified and a re-seeding plan established. Ideally, during daylight hours, dismounted OPs should

hand off targets directly to the tanks in support behind the screen.

Limited visibility operations change the nature of dismounted OPs. PVS-7s and PAS-11s are not sufficient for dismounted OPs to remain the primary observers. The integrated sight unit on the Bradley must be used to maintain surveillance during hours of limited visibility. The transition from dismounted OPs to mounted OPs must be planned and executed prior to nightfall to ensure continuous surveillance of the assigned sector. During limited visibility periods, dismounted scouts are employed as local security for mounted OPs. Patrols should be organized to cover gaps between mounted OPs and establish security in dismounted avenues of approach. Platoon leaders and commanders must ensure patrolling is conducted to maintain security during limited visibility periods.

Given the rapid nature of heavy cavalry operations, it is easy to understand how dismounts are often overlooked during both the troop and platoon planning process. Dismounts are looked at as a liability, particularly in terms of operational tempo. Without a doubt, there are situations where speed is the primary concern and using dismounted scouts is just not feasible. However, this article illustrates that only in the most unusual circumstances are dismounts best used as loaders. Dismounts provide early, stealthy detection in the offense and allow calculated and deliberate commitment of combat power during reconnaissance operations. During security operations, dismounts are

a vital component of depth and prevent mounted elements from compromising the screen during daylight hours. During periods of limited visibility, they provide local security through patrols that cover gaps between OPs, particularly along dismounted avenues of approach. Dismounted cavalry scouts are assets that each commander and platoon leader must factor in his planning process to ensure “max eyes forward.”



### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup>U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 17-95, *Cavalry Operations*, U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO), Washington, D.C., p. 3-3.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 3-15.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 3-3.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 3-5.

<sup>5</sup>FM 7-8, *Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad*, GPO, Washington, D.C., 22 April 1992, Change 1, 1 March 2001; and FM 17-98, *Scout Platoon*, GPO, Washington, D.C., 10 April 1999.

<sup>6</sup>FM 17-95, p. 4-7.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 4-6.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

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