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Cavalry in the Movement and Maneuver Warfighting Function

by

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Combined-arms maneuver and wide-area security provide the means for balancing the application of the elements of combat power within tactical actions and tasks associated with offensive, defensive and security operations.¹

Successful execution of maneuver as required to achieve decisive national purpose is the intent of landpower. The United States Army is globally unique as the nation's landpower capability, epitomizing the strengths and unequalled capabilities of America. Among other singular capabilities, we, the United States of America, are the dominant global leader in diversity, with increasing recognition of and opportunities for all citizens—irrespective of race, sex, religion, ethnic origins, languages and organizational or regional practices. America's Army, in terms of full assimilation and multigenerational application of a rigorous learning system, has institutionalized both grouped and distributed Combat Training Center learning models based on the rigor of task, condition and standard for Soldier, team and unit tasks. Superb professional development policies and processes are institutionalized for all leaders—officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs). America's Army trains and performs to established standards.

The combined effects of all of this are multiplied by the flexibility provided by America's Total Force. Army organizations can be federal and national (active Army), state and regional (Army National Guard) or federal and regional (Army Reserve), built across the inherent diversity of a continent. Exceptionally competent mountain state-based National Guard units come to mind, as do supporting technical intelligence-based Reserve units formed to advantage shared commercial industrial technical dominance and other units as may be useful in advancing the effectiveness of execution of maneuver. There appear to be no practical limits to the design characteristics of combinations of maneuver Soldiers, teams and units. These are particularly important national capabilities. How can they be leveraged for improved national security in an increasingly disorderly and uncertain world order as supporting resources diminish?

The dominant cutting edge of landpower is maneuver forces that conduct combined-arms maneuver (CAM) and wide-area security (WAS) as the mission requires. Maneuver units are infantry (dismounted) and tank/infantry (mounted—mobile protected space usually possessing such firepower as direct-fire weapons). All are composed to be combined arms—infantry, armor (tank/mounted infantry) and fires—each trained to support the others. Mutual support provided by these diverse yet complementary capabilities remains the best “insurance” to hedge uncertainties of evolving requirements for global landpower capabilities to execute decisive action.

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To further increase the flexibility of maneuver, special tactical enabling capabilities exist in addition to the traditional combined arms currently organized in the brigade combat teams (infantry, Stryker and heavy). Two important variations have evolved over time to address the current and expanding uncertainties of an increasingly disparate, turbulent world order. It is a complex order influenced by competing nation states, religions, tribes and ideologies, all exacerbated by exploding information technologies and arrays of weapons including nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC). Those variations, themselves evolving continuously in response to increasing uncertainty, are Special Forces and cavalry. A specialty of infantry is Special Forces; a specialty of tank/infantry is cavalry, encompassing the tactical enabling tasks of reconnaissance and security—each much more broadly applicable to and supportive of landpower in these turbulent times.

There is a clear continuing need to adjust the capabilities/adaptability of basic CAM (infantry and tank/infantry) responsive to evolving requirements. However, specialties may be increasing in relative importance because they seem more globally applicable now as they take advantage of national diversity in supporting current national security strategy through complex possible flexible employment combinations of WAS and CAM. Specialties provide a unique national design “capability whole” much greater than the sum of the parts.

Army Special Forces have led the transition of specialties as they evolved from the multi-functional A-team of the Vietnam period embedded in a Special Forces group to composing almost half of the military services’ support of United States Special Operations Command’s (SOCOM’s) current “eleven ‘core operations and activities’: counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, counter-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, foreign internal defense, security force assistance, unconventional warfare, direct action, special reconnaissance, information operations, military information support operations and civil affairs operations.”²

Cavalry should similarly become organized, manned, trained and employed, taking advantage of national diversity to provide expanded reconnaissance and security across the full range of possible landpower commitments. Note the breadth of this requirement: Reconnaissance, as defined by Joint Publication 2-0, *Joint Intelligence*, is

a mission undertaken to obtain, by visual observation or other detection methods, information about the activities and resources of an enemy or adversary, or to secure data concerning the meteorological, hydrographical or geographical characteristics and the indigenous population of a particular area.³

According to Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-90, *Offense and Defense*, “Reconnaissance primarily relies on the human dynamic rather than technical means.”⁴ Reconnaissance addressing the indigenous population and relying primarily on the human dynamic in an environment of conflicting states, tribes and religions is, as we have observed in the Middle East, as essential as it is complex, often requiring judicious use of a sophisticated array of national assets—not yesteryear’s routinized “route recce” or long-range reconnaissance patrol (LRRP).

Security operations, as stated in ADRP 3-90, are

those operations undertaken by a commander to provide early and accurate warning of enemy operations, to provide the force being protected with time and maneuver space within which to react to the enemy, and to develop the situation to allow the commander to effectively use the protected force. The ultimate goal of security operations is to protect the force from surprise and reduce the unknowns in any situation. The force being protected may be the civilian population, civil institutions and civilian infrastructure with the unit’s area of operations . . . while reconnaissance is enemy- and terrain-oriented. Security operations are shaping operations. As a shaping operation, economy of force is often a consideration of tactical security operations.⁵

Security “protects the force,” which may be “the civilian population, civil institutions and civilian infrastructure.” That can be an exceedingly broad mission. Who is the enemy? As this author observed personally in Bosnia in the 1990s, it could be Croatian or Serb or Bosniac or some combination. Which, when, why? So what? What is the threat? Ground attack? Kidnapping key leadership? Targeted improvised explosive devices (IEDs)? Snipers? Suspicious chemicals? These are challenging security issues—vastly more complex than executing your Combat Outpost Line (COPL) or delaying position of yore.

Due to the breadth and variability of these CAM and WAS landpower requirements for reconnaissance and security, America's Army requires the ability to "plug in" some form of cavalry organized at every level from platoon to regiment, with as much potential movement variety—foot, vehicle, air (attended, unattended)—as the tactical or operational situation may mandate. To be effective, the cavalry "plug-ins" require combined-arms capabilities sufficient to conduct reconnaissance, including the ability to fight for information or to provide credible security including force-appropriate economy-of-force missions or to integrate on-call highly technical analytical support. Therefore, cavalry needs the ability to cross task organize—organizationally as well as with combat power flexibility structured to draw on the remarkable strengths of America's Army, particularly its diversity, with increasing recognition and advantaging of all citizens irrespective of race, sex, religion, language, ethnic origins and organizational or regional practices. Cavalry trooper personnel should be available with such characteristics as may be most appropriate to the situation for the conduct of effective decisive action executing CAM or WAS or to address the requirements of any combination of the two, anywhere.

Note the proven effectiveness of combined arms applied at the lowest practical levels within the specialties. The capability may include functional combinations such as were institutionalized in the Special Forces A-team of Vietnam, e.g., as was employed in Operation White Star in Laos:

Our Special Forces A-detachment consisted of Captain Jim Ipsen, commander, me as a lieutenant executive officer, and 10 NCOs with medical, weapons, communications, demolitions, intelligence and operations specialties. The team was so configured that it could be split and still retain these basic specialties.⁶

Another example is functional combinations organized in the cavalry platoons of the armored cavalry regiments on the German border as a covering force in the mid-20th century: two tanks, four mobile scout teams, an infantry squad and a mortar-carrier for indirect fire. The organization provided absolute, immediately available, combined-arms combat power to respond to unexpected mission opportunities or challenges.

The nested interoperability of the design "imperatives"—interlocking *doctrine* ("families" of Army Doctrine Publications [ADPs] and Army Doctrine Reference Publications [ADRP]), *training, leader development, organization, quality troopers, superb material and facilities*—all interrelated through Warfighter Forums and exercised at a Combat Training Center—provides remarkable opportunities to mix and match capabilities for specific mission purpose.⁷ Reflecting on the extraordinary combined-arms force competencies demonstrated in the December 1989 invasion of Panama (Operation Just Cause), then-Army Chief of Staff General Carl E. Vuono commented:

Thank goodness we had done the amount of training that we had done on very rigorous operations, airborne operations bringing Heavy [and] Light forces together, for example, working special operations forces. We started to do that down at the Joint Readiness Training Center [Fort Polk, Louisiana] in a very, very fundamental way. And it carried through in Panama where at one time we had special operations forces linked with a mechanized infantry battalion, supporting the 82d Airborne Division.⁸

We all associate with mission requirements of organization and equipment. Now add design of the human composition to enable domination of the human dynamic. Compose and train cavalry troopers, teams and units designed to leverage racial, sexual, religious, language or ethnic origins as locally appropriate to achieve mission-relevant human decisive action, particularly in support of highly focused, regionally oriented WAS cavalry operations.

Rigorous job task definition and intensive training can ensure a scout is a scout is a scout, prepared to exploit support available wherever he or she may be assigned. The issue then becomes how to support that scout, with what and for what purpose. Scout common basic skills, knowledge and attributes can be trained and sustained as common trooper tasks. Where local adaptations may be appropriate due to variable composition manning or particular mission reconnaissance or security requirements, "best practices" for task execution now can be and are distributed across cavalry through distributed learning achieved by various Warfighter Forums.

These are all new combat-power enablers stimulated by superb troopers—all "digital natives" thriving on new and emerging practices to build high-performing cavalry teams of variable composition. All enablers

combine to provide national “return on investment” for past decades of remarkable innovation in America’s Army and experience gained through prolonged commitment.

Other new potential combat-power reconnaissance and security requirements—such as chemical, biological and radiological (CBR) offense and defense (emerging nuclear states), cyber attack and defense (grouped or distributed) and/or laser-designated tactical- or operational-level fires, including directed energy—may come suddenly. Each cavalry capability combination could be designed to enable CAM and WAS to be applied to current examples of the abiding instability of competing nation-states and religious and tribal conflicts. These may appear in bizarre combinations of governance, weapons and organizations that are entirely possible and in fact exist today in North Korea (CBR), Iran, Syria and elsewhere. Increased uncertainty justifies increased Special Forces and cavalry in maneuver—both active and reserve forces. USSOCOM supports—broadens—Army Special Forces. Joint intelligence and fires communities can similarly broaden support to cavalry.

Recognition and exploitation of America’s Army should be dominant in design and composition of cavalry. Cavalry provides extraordinary mental as well as physical flexibility—adaptability to uncertain requirements. Both are evident in cavalry “genes” developed post-World War II—extending worthy traditions of cavalry adaptability demonstrated in the opening of our Western Frontier. More recently, with Force XXI Battle Command Brigade and Below (FBCB2)/Knowledge Management adding the electron, mission command information exchanges multiply, increasingly augmented by social networking practices. “Digital natives” proliferate. Today, similar to various forms of cavalry of old, cavalry can apply the inherent adaptability and flexibility of organic CAM capabilities applied across the range of WAS missions to permit effective exploitation of these unique diversity characteristics of America’s Army. Consider cavalry to be the key enabler of the Army’s diversity.

“Designer” responsiveness of cavalry organization and competencies in America’s Army—platoon, troop, squadron, regiment—are limited only by the imagination of national governance seeking very broadly defined reconnaissance or security dominance. Such dominance should take advantage of cavalry’s “cultural” affinity for applications of emerging advanced technology (mechanical or digital), as demonstrated by the ease of full assimilation of the M1A2 Abrams main battle tank’s advanced capabilities. Cavalry culture is now prepared to exploit air vehicles, accomplished so well with integration of air cavalry in the past. Superb combined-arms organizational examples—air cavalry “D troops” in the divisional cavalry squadrons supplementing the combined-arms platoons in armored cavalry regiments—created diverse combined-arms learning environments for young leaders. Those kinds of multipurpose CAM- and WAS-capable organizations—platoon to regiment—are powerful incubators that can be powered by state-of-the-art intensive officer and noncommissioned officer development programs and structured learning environments comparable to Ranger training support to infantry. That combined-arms tactical learning for developing leaders is exactly what is desirable in the current period of tactical, operational and strategic uncertainty. These capabilities could be particularly supportive of various regional alignment initiatives as variations in diversity composition can be applied. Design of cavalry organizations could be tailored to exploit ongoing innovative employment of National Guard units in State Partnership Programs.

The necessary enabling traditions are present. From the armed cavalry platoons of the armored cavalry regiments—lieutenants learning and commanding combined arms—cavalry has demonstrated willingness to lead in innovative applications of new capabilities to address new tactical and operational requirements. This is reinforced by innovative application of the diversity of America’s Army in a combat arm grounded in “can do”—the spirit, the elan, of “if you ain’t Cav, you ain’t.”

So leaders, seek not only sensible existent maneuver capabilities but also a practical “foundry” preparing leaders for the uncertain future that exists for U.S. landpower. In supporting, cavalry provides highly flexible, adaptive reconnaissance and security to augment essential “bread and butter” dismounted and mounted close-combat readiness to engage and defeat any enemy landpower capability.

America’s Army needs to possess both Special Forces and cavalry to protect the freedom of variable task organization combinations of combined arms in infantry and tank/infantry just as both Special Forces and

cavalry have done successfully over the decades. Both provide the organizational “plug-ins” for new capabilities certain to come in order to address wholly uncertain requirements for America’s Army.

New perspectives of cavalry are necessary. Cavalry today and tomorrow can and should be strikingly different from the cavalry of the past. Command expectations of reconnaissance and security performance have broadened notably. These expectations are matched by new capabilities of organization, ground and air mobility material, highly focused and intensive leader development and training and the potential of extraordinary diversity of troopers within America’s Army. The challenge is imaginative governance of cavalry at all levels as America’s Army rebuilds again.

Endnotes

- ¹ Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-0, *Unified Land Operations*, October 2011, para. 22, p. 6, http://usarmy.vo.llnwd.net/e2/rv5_downloads/info/references/ADP_3-0_ULO_Oct_2011_APD.pdf.
- ² Linda Robinson, “The Future of U.S. Special Operations Forces,” Special Report No.66 (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, April 2013), p. 10, <http://www.cfr.org/national-security-and-defense/future-us-special-operations-forces/p30323?co=C009601>.
- ³ Department of Defense, Joint Publication 2-0, *Joint Intelligence*, June 2007, p. GL-15, http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp2_0.pdf.
- ⁴ Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-90, *Offense and Defense*, August 2012, para. 5-1, p. 5-1, http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/DR_pubs/dr_a/pdf/adrp3_90.pdf.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 5-11, p. 5-3.
- ⁶ Colonel Alfred H. Paddock, Jr., U.S. Army (Ret.), “Personal Memories of Operation White Star in Laos, 1961,” Blog Post, *Small Wars Journal*, 10 April 2013, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/personal-memories-of-operation-white-star-in-laos-1961>.
- ⁷ General Carl E. Vuono, interviewed by author, 17 October 1996.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*

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