



*A Soldier in the Multi-Functional  
Reconnaissance Company, 2nd Battalion,  
327th Infantry Regiment, 1st Mobile  
Brigade Combat Team "Bastogne" uses  
a Skydio drone during a training exercise  
at Fort Campbell, KY, on 16 June 2025.  
(Photo by SGT Jewell Fatula)*

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# The MFRC and the Future of Army Reconnaissance

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**A**t the Reconnaissance and Surveillance Leaders Course (RSLC), our team trains more than 300 students annually across the joint force — including Infantry scouts, reconnaissance Marines, tactical air control party (TACP) Airmen, and a range of special operations personnel. Our program of instruction spans fundamental small-unit tactics, high frequency (HF) radio communications, advanced land navigation, and troop leading procedures (TLPs)/military decision-making process (MDMP) as applied to reconnaissance teams. Although RSLC has operated for over 25 years, the force it serves, and the demands placed upon it, have changed significantly. Once focused on validating and certifying members of long-range surveillance units (LRSUs), RSLC now supports a force in transition from the global war on terrorism to a large-scale combat operations (LSCO) environment. One of the most notable changes is the casing of the colors for every infantry brigade combat team cavalry squadron and the emergence of a new entity: **the multi-functional reconnaissance company (MFRC)**.

The MFRC concept was first rolled out in the 2nd Mobile Brigade Combat Team (MBCT), 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), and it has remained a point of intrigue over the past two years. MFRCs emerged out of necessity; with the deactivation of the cavalry squadrons' dismounted reconnaissance troops, the brigade commanders were left without a dedicated infantry reconnaissance formation to answer priority intelligence requirements (PIRs). It is no surprise then that many of these emerging MFRCs are pulling a noticeable number of personnel from the old C troops and training them for this new approach to brigade reconnaissance.

These questions then remain:

- What exactly are these new units?
- How are they manned?
- What technologies do they employ?
- What is their mission set?

To answer any of these, we must begin with a simple truth: **Every MFRC is different**. There is no existing doctrinal publication that defines their employment. In many ways, these units are writing doctrine as they go: adapting to their brigade's needs, experimenting at combat training centers (CTCs), and informing what will likely become the Army's future approach to echeloned reconnaissance.

Through virtual teleconferences (VTCs), planning meetings, and our most recent temporary duty (TDY) to the Joint

Readiness Training Center (JRTC), RSLC is forging relationships with MFRCs to inform their development, coordinate their efforts, and provide structured feedback during training events. Each MFRC shares some level of commonality, but each has a modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) designed with noticeable differences. What unites them is a core synthesis of Infantry scouts, robotics and autonomous systems (RAS), and electromagnetic warfare (EW) assets. The size and scope of these sub-formations are broadly mission-set based, as some MFRCs are focusing heavily on attrition for the brigade high-priority target list (HPTL), while others are taking the more traditional approach of answering PIRs while remaining undetected.

During RSLC's recent observation of 1/101's MFRC at JRTC, we identified key areas for improvement. Chief among them was something RSLC emphasizes daily: the enduring relevance of **reconnaissance fundamentals** that have broadly been unchanged since the long-range reconnaissance patrols (LRRPs) of the Vietnam era. These fundamentals include:

- **Stealth across all domains:** counter-tracking, communication window discipline, deliberate patrolling, and thermal defeat systems;
- **Deliberate mission planning** with robust contingency frameworks to offset risk (engagement criteria, compromise plans, evasion and escape corridors); and
- **Reconnaissance-specific fieldcraft:** camouflage, surveillance techniques, and codified North American Treaty Organization (NATO) reporting procedures.

While the MFRC demonstrated an impressive ability to project combat power deep into enemy territory, multiple casualties were preventable had these fundamentals been more strictly enforced.

As an Infantry Squad Vehicle (ISV)-enabled MBCT, 1/101's MFRC relied heavily on their wheeled mobility to make their thrust into enemy-held territory. When employed correctly, the ISV offers a significant tactical advantage as a synthesis of speed, extended reach, and improved logistical flexibility. MFRCs need to have the requisite knowledge in both planning and utilization of these assets to include instruction on ISV navigation, camouflage and signature management, and mission-specific load plans. While a great asset for enabling deep standoff operations, insufficient use of counter-tracking techniques, route and vehicle drop-off (VDO) offsetting, and camouflaging create a visual signature that can greatly

degrade stealth and survivability. Likewise, the absence of reconnaissance-specific standard operating procedures (SOPs) for ISV load plans can limit a unit's ability to sustain operations forward of the forward line of own troops (FLOT) without external resupply.

Another area of improvement, not just within the MFRC but across the force, is the approach to tactical communications. HF radio remains the single most scalable, secure, and low-signature form of communication available to reconnaissance formations. For decades, RSLC has trained students to conduct directional HF shots over distances of hundreds of kilometers. However, HF proficiency remains rare in operational units, forcing many of these recon teams to default to frequency modulation (FM) communications and Android Team Awareness Kit (ATAK) messaging (methods lower in the primary, alternate, contingency, emergency [PACE] plan, but higher in risk). These alternatives often suffer from line-of-sight limitations in denied terrain and emit a larger electromagnetic signature, making command and control unreliable at best and hazardous at worst. If MFRCs are to operate effectively forward of the FLOT, HF communications must be mastered. The capability is not optional, but rather, essential for survivability and operational reach.

The rapid proliferation of unmanned aerial systems (UAS) down to the team level has been one of the most impactful transformations to emerge from the ongoing war in Ukraine. Yet, as a force, we've become so focused on acquiring the technology that we've neglected to develop disciplined employment standards. Without an SOP for offset launch/return or displacement, MFRCs can find themselves compromised due to their use of UAS. UAS variants without designated displacement criteria upon launch become liabilities — allowing enemy forces to track and target the launch points with both direct and indirect fire. There exists a meaningful use case for these drones in reducing the kill chain and bypassing the fire direction centers (FDCs) for softer targets on the HPTL, but we must be disciplined in our use of such systems. Forward of the FLOT, compromise kills. And improperly employed drones are one of the easiest ways to give reconnaissance teams away.

The final point of friction we observed during this rotation was conceptual in nature: **What is the MFRC's true purpose?** Are these units intended to be a reconnaissance "Swiss Army Knife," a hammer, or something in between? While the MFRC showed a tangible capability to attrit the HPTL, this target focus can mean that brigade leadership



*MFRC Soldiers in 2/101 MBCT conduct area reconnaissance using an unmanned aerial system during an exercise at Fort Campbell on 25 April 2024. (Photo by SGT Caleb Pautz)*

won't be able to fully leverage assets to pull PIRs for their course-of-action development. Historically, the strength of these forward-operating reconnaissance units has been in their ability to **infiltrate, collect information, and hand off named areas of interest (NAIs)** to maneuver elements for maximal attacks/seizures. This focus has made those formations necessarily small teams of well-trained experts tasked with high-risk, high-reward missions. Today, we are inserting larger formations into the same spaces, all while tasking them with both collection and strike roles. These companies are unquestionably valuable, but their dual-purpose nature raises a doctrinal question: How do we achieve persistent, all-weather information collection at the division level?

Just as the MFRC was created to satisfy PIRs at the brigade level, is it now time to consider reestablishing long-range surveillance (LRS) capabilities for divisions? Current doctrine and feedback from MFRCs suggest a clear need. Small, technology-enabled reconnaissance formations are already demonstrating effectiveness in denied environments and under challenging weather conditions. Providing division leaders with a comparable all-weather capability is far from just advisable; it is vital in the current operational environment. As the Army continues to transform in contact, RSLC and its cadre of subject matter experts stand ready to shape the next evolution of Army reconnaissance.

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