

Reconnaissance in the Light Brigade Combat Team

CPT SEAN PARROTT

The Army's Transformation in Contact (TIC) initiative leverages emerging technology and future-forward force design to transition existing brigade combat teams (BCTs) into agile, hyper-enabled fighting formations.¹ As the character of war has shifted, the Army has begun to adapt its BCT structure to better suit a division-centric fight. In 2024, the 25th Infantry Division's 2nd Brigade Combat Team transitioned from an infantry brigade combat team (IBCT) to a light brigade combat team (LBCT-prototype). This experimentation is currently ongoing, with a Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center (JPMRC) rotation executed in October 2024.² Initial returns are promising, but past and present training observations highlight challenges the LBCT has in fighting without a dedicated reconnaissance capability.

The LBCT is designed to be a lethal and adaptable formation that can fight in heavily restricted terrain. Traditional enabling assets like the brigade engineer battalion (BEB), cavalry squadron, and brigade sustainment battalion (BSB) have been restructured or eliminated entirely to lighten the formation and unburden the brigade staff. Building a more

robust enabling capability at the division level facilitates the Army's desire to return to it as a unit of action while allowing the brigade to focus on training and employing its rifle companies. The rifle battalion has also not been immune to change. Battalion scouts and mortars were combined with the remnants of the cavalry troop to form battalion-level cross-domain effects companies (CDEs). These companies have been employed as force generators, training specialty platoons that are attached to rifle companies for operational control. CDEs combine robotics and autonomous systems with traditional reconnaissance platoons to form lethal and highly enabled teams. The LBCT rifle company has more assets than ever to sense, see, and strike the enemy. Equipped with Infantry Squad Vehicles (ISVs), the LBCT's infantry formations can rapidly move combat power around the battlefield while providing more off-road capability than legacy vehicles.

The transition from a brigade cavalry squadron to three battalion CDEs leaves the brigade commander short of intelligence capability. The loss of the military intelligence company (MICO) and its Shadow tactical unmanned aerial system (UAS) platoon leaves the brigade with no organic ability to set conditions for the rifle battalions' success. To answer priority intelligence requirements (PIRs), the commander must task a subordinate CDE to act as a reconnaissance element, diverting crucial combat power from its parent battalion. This gap in manned reconnaissance also exists at the division level and has compounding effects in the LBCT construct. To address this gap, both LBCT prototypes have stood up provisional recon-



Soldiers assigned to 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Light Brigade Combat Team (Prototype), 25th Infantry Division, use a drone to survey the area during Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center 25-01 at Pōhakuloa Training Area, HI, on 9 October 2024. (Photo by SFC Ryele Bertoch)

naissance companies to answer brigade PIRs directly. The 2nd Mobile Brigade Combat Team (MBCT), 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) has successfully tested a multi-functional reconnaissance company (MFRC), while 2/25 deployed its reconnaissance and strike company (RSC) at the most recent JPMRC iteration.³ These concepts mirror previous experimentation conducted by 2/25 during fiscal years 2022 and 2023 at Twentynine Palms, CA, and Japan. Combining electronic warfare (EW), UAS, and traditional human reconnaissance techniques can have a tremendous effect in the brigade fight. The Army should consider standardizing this structure across its TiC formations to speed the development of tactics, techniques, and procedures, and the acquisition of equipment for reconnaissance companies. In this article, I will articulate a structure for a multidomain reconnaissance company (MRC) that can answer PIRs in the brigade deep area while enabling rifle battalions to succeed in the close fight.

The Multidomain Reconnaissance Company

The MRC consists of a company headquarters, a strike platoon, and four multidomain reconnaissance teams (MDRTs) that can operate independently for extended periods of time. This structure allows the brigade staff flexibility during transitions, as well as the ability to cover a larger frontage than a single CDE can at present. The MRC headquarters includes both a command and control (C2) element and a liaison capability. The C2 package should have both dedicated communications and intelligence analysis capabilities to help “make sense” of collections from the MDRTs. Depending on the situation, the headquarters element can operate autonomously or serve as a reconnaissance operations center (ROC) in the brigade command post to coordinate and deconflict reconnaissance operations. The strike platoon is armed with loitering munitions and medium-range reconnaissance (MRR) UAS. Its role is to independently find and attrite targets in the brigade deep area in support of the brigade high-payoff target list. The MRC headquarters serves as a crucial link between the strike platoon and the MDRTs in the field.

Each MDRT is a self-contained element capable of operating in the brigade deep area to answer PIRs and facilitate targeting of high-payoff targets. The team consists of 8-10 personnel and is able to deploy in two ISVs, using EW collection and short-range reconnaissance (SRR) UAS to locate the enemy in multiple spectrums. Previous experimentation in this area has identified the importance of training to maximize multidomain capabilities. Merely establishing habitual relationships between EW specialists and conventional scouts is not enough. MDRT leadership should understand the best way to employ their EW assets, and EW Soldiers must become proficient in fieldcraft to avoid becoming a liability to survival. Trust and familiarity are best built through an organic training relationship. Marine Corps radio reconnaissance teams (RRTs) provide a good model for training and equipping this capability. The mobility capability of the MDRT allows for increased endurance over legacy reconnaissance formations like the dismounted cavalry troop. An

MDRT in support of a Marine division emplaced and fought for an entire battle period (over five days) without external sustainment during a maneuver warfighting exercise (MWX) in 2022.⁴ This feat was repeated in harsh sub-Arctic conditions during Artillery Relocation Training Program (ARTP) 23.4 in Hokkaido, Japan. Multiple MDRTs operated in the enemy rear area to locate and destroy High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) launchers, C2 nodes, and other high-value assets.⁵ In summary, the MDRT offers a measure of self-sufficiency that helps the brigade combat team set conditions for its main effort (often a rifle battalion) while freeing up critical logistics assets for other missions. As expected, however, these types of operations rely on proper manning and training.

Training the Multidomain Reconnaissance Company

The MRC mission set is complex and often highly ambiguous in nature. The Soldiers assigned to the MRC should be selected for assignment. The LBCT has no shortage of highly qualified 19Ds and 11Bs with experience in reconnaissance operations, and only the best should be chosen to serve in the MRC. Officers and NCOs should be second-time leaders with proven experience leading reconnaissance missions. Most BCTs already have informal processes for filling out their scout platoons, and those populations are ideal funnels to the MRC. EW and UAS operators need to undergo the same screening process and be selected for both physical fitness and mental agility. The MRC needs Soldiers comfortable operating in highly dynamic environments, as no two missions will look the same. MRC commanders will need to aggressively seek out training opportunities for MDRTs to include working for organizations outside the LBCT. One of the biggest lessons we learned during our experimentation was the friction that comes with operating in others' battlespace. The MRC will often be the first contact point between the brigade and other formations, especially during transitions. The division artillery brigade (DIVARTY), combat aviation brigade (CAB), and intelligence and electronic warfare battalion (IEW) make natural partners.

Coordination requires communication. The MRC and its teams must master the full spectrum of communications technologies. High frequency (HF) radio is one of the most powerful yet underused capabilities in a spectrum-contested environment. Proper use of HF allows the MDRT to push voice, text, and data to higher and adjacent units while minimizing electromagnetic signature. The Army should also seriously look at procuring joint communications capabilities like Link-16 interoperability to allow the MDRT to integrate into kill webs. The Reconnaissance and Surveillance Leaders Course (RSLC) already offers critical training in reconnaissance and training techniques, and it should be a prerequisite for all members of the MRC. If fire supporters and joint terminal attack controllers (JTACs) are not assigned to the MDRT, the Joint Fires Observer Course (JFOC) can help bridge that gap. In previous experimentation, region-specific training like the Cold Weather Leader Course (CWLC) and

the Jungle Operations Training Course (JOTC) have proven to be force multipliers.

Employing the Multidomain Reconnaissance Company

To maximize utility, the MRC requires considered employment. The brigade staff must nest the MRC into its intelligence collection plan, though the endurance of the formation offers plenty of post-deployment flexibility. Additionally, the MRC requires patience and autonomy from leaders at echelon. Reconnaissance formations develop the situation in accordance with the commander's reconnaissance guidance and should be afforded the time to emplace, collect, and report intelligence. In competition, the MRC can partner with the reconnaissance elements of allies and partners, a mission that was formerly the domain of the cavalry squadron. In conflict, the MRC offers diverse capabilities.

We see three major missions for the MRC that can help guide the eventual creation of a mission-essential task list (METL). The first is multidomain area reconnaissance. The MDRT can answer PIRs aligned against a specified area, based on terrain or enemy activity. In this task the team conducts reconnaissance of the area in both the physical and electromagnetic spectrum, using small UAS and other cross-domain capabilities to develop a robust picture of the named area of interest (NAI). The second task is to conduct an anti-armor screen. The nature of the MDRT's mobility platform, coupled with the devastating killing power of modern anti-tank weapons, allows the team to lock down key ground lines of communication (GLOCs). During MWX, one eight-man MDRT used Carl Gustafs and Javelin anti-tank weapons to interdict and fix an entire light armored reconnaissance (LAR) company in a key mobility corridor. The MDRT in conjunction with the company's strike platoon can attrite enemy motorized and mechanized formations in advance of brigade defensive and offensive operations. Finally, the MRC can synchronize multidomain effects at the tactical level. Previous experimentation saw the company operating as a hub for multiple cross-domain "spokes," including tactical cyber operations, organic EW effects, and joint munitions delivery. As the forward brigade element, the MRC is in the best position to help coordinate and apply certain kinetic and non-kinetic effects. This last task needs further refinement but will only become more critical as multidomain capabilities are fielded to progressively lower echelons.

Conclusion

The light brigade combat team is a long-needed evolution of the IBCT construct. The character of war is changing, and Transformation in Contact acknowledges this reality, focusing on the future while retaining the core focus of the infantry brigade to close with and destroy the enemy. Transformation offers an opportunity to holistically rethink what reconnaissance formations look like at echelon. Units across the Army are conducting informal campaigns of experimentation to understand the best structure for the future reconnaissance



Soldiers from the 2nd Light Brigade Combat Team (Prototype), 25th Infantry Division travel by Infantry Squad Vehicle during Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center Rotation 25-01. (Photo by SSG Katelyn Vazquez)

company. The multidomain reconnaissance company concept is born from more three years of trial and error with lessons learned through training in the desert, the jungle, and the sub-Arctic. The interwar period has historically been the most fertile ground for innovation and development of new fighting concepts. TIC offers the Army a chance to build a lethal and adaptive reconnaissance formation that maximizes the potential of its newest warfighting formations.

Notes

¹ Ashley Roque, "Army Using 'Transformation in Contact' to Make Case for New Weapons, Formation Decisions," *Breaking Defense*, 27 August 2024, <https://breakingdefense.com/2024/08/army-using-transformation-in-contact-to-make-case-for-new-weapons-formation-decisions/>.

² SSG Tiffany Banks, "US and Multinational Partners Prepare for Largest Indo-Pacific Army Exercise," U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, 24 October 2024, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3930566/us-and-multinational-partners-prepare-for-largest-indo-pacific-army-exercise/>.

³ Sam Skove, "Army Puts New Unit Loaded with Cutting-Edge Tech to the Test," *Defense One*, 22 August 2024, <https://www.defenseone.com/technology/2024/08/army-puts-new-unit-loaded-cutting-edge-tech-test/398980/>.

⁴ Anthony Perez and Sean Parrott, "The Future of Army Reconnaissance: Lessons from a Marine Corps Exercise in the Mojave Desert," *Modern War Institute*, 31 March 2023, <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/the-future-of-army-reconnaissance-lessons-from-a-marine-corps-exercise-in-the-mojave-desert/>.

⁵ A.J. Vitanza and Sean Parrott, "The Joint Reconnaissance Strike Complex: Marine and Army Experimentation in the First Island Chain," *Modern War Institute*, 16 August 2024, <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/the-joint-reconnaissance-strike-complex-marine-and-army-experimentation-in-the-first-island-chain/>.

CPT Sean Parrott is currently a graduate student at Georgetown University. He previously commanded the Cross-Domain Effects Company, 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry Battalion, 2nd Light Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, Schofield Barracks, HI. His other assignments include serving as a scout platoon leader, 1st Squadron, 75th Cavalry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, Fort Campbell, KY. CPT Parrott is a graduate of the Army Reconnaissance Course and Expeditionary Warfare School. He earned a bachelor's degree in political science from Santa Clara University.