

# LETTER TO THE EDITOR

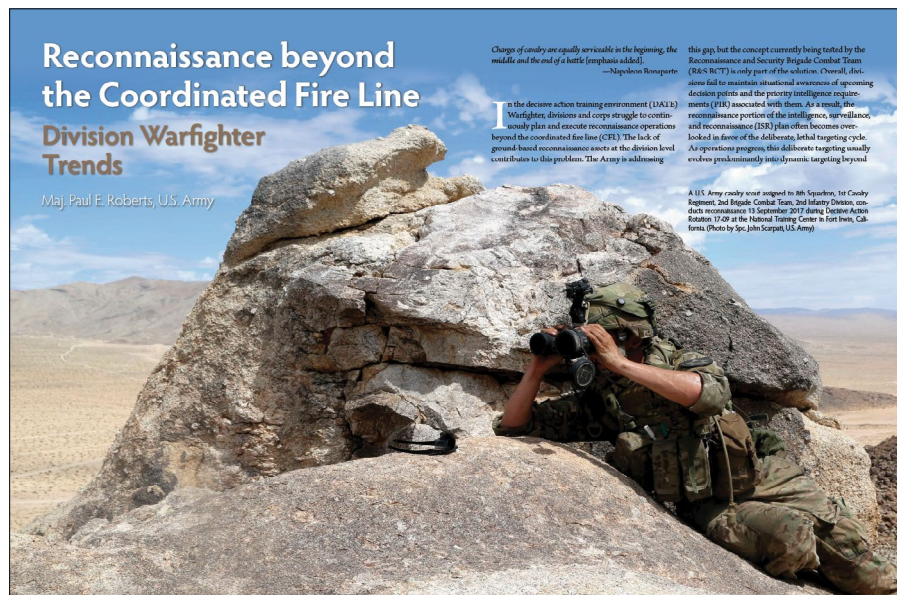
## Response to Maj. Paul E. Roberts's "Reconnaissance beyond the Coordinated Fire Line: Division Warfighter Trends"

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In his recent article, "Reconnaissance Beyond the Coordinated Fire Line (CFL)," Maj. Paul Roberts advocates the establishment of a reconnaissance cell as a means of improving reconnaissance planning and synchronization at the division- and corps-levels. While establishing a reconnaissance cell may improve the staff's ability to plan and integrate reconnaissance, Roberts' article glosses over the underlying issue: the Army lacks sufficient ground reconnaissance capability at the division- and corps-level.

Over the last fifteen years, the Army systematically dismantled its ground reconnaissance formations. Risk aversion in Iraq and Afghanistan

frequently led commanders to rely on unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) and other air-based platforms rather than deploying small ground reconnaissance formations as a means of answering their priority intelligence requirements (PIR). Between under-employment in Iraq and Afghanistan and



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the Army's growing obsession with brigade-centric, modular formations, several division- and corps-level reconnaissance formations soon faced the chopping block.

In 2005, the Army began divesting itself of division and corps long-range surveillance (LRS) detachments and companies. These storied units once deployed elite six-man teams days in advance of their parent division or corps to answer their command's PIR and to drive operations. While some LRS units reflagged as pathfinder companies in combat aviation brigades or dismounted reconnaissance troops in battlefield surveillance brigades, this simply postponed their inevitable fate. The last of these elite reconnaissance units inactivated in 2017.

Light, infantry-based units were not the only reconnaissance formations sacrificed in the name of modularity. The Army also dismantled several cavalry formations. Division cavalry (DIVCAV) squadrons, lethal combined arms reconnaissance squadrons that once served as the eyes and ears for highly mobile armored and mechanized divisions, met their demise in 2005. In 2011, the cavalry saw its coup de grâce as the last armored cavalry regiment (ACR), a formation once capable of organically screening, guarding, or covering an entire corps with its lethal assortment of armored vehicles, self-propelled artillery, and rotary-wing aircraft, transformed into a run-of-the-mill Stryker brigade combat team.

The loss of these reconnaissance formations has left our divisions and corps with a notable capability gap. In a conflict against a near-peer adversary, we will not enjoy the luxury of uncontested airspace. Our UAS and other air- and space-based platforms will not operate with impunity. Our divisions and

corps will rely heavily on traditional ground reconnaissance to answer PIR and drive operations. However, due to the Army's shortsighted divestiture of reconnaissance formations, these echelons are currently forced to piece together impromptu reconnaissance task forces from their subordinate brigades. These task forces lack the specialized training, organization, and, most importantly, the institutional knowledge and experience required to effectively meet the reconnaissance and security demands of two- and three-star headquarters.

If the Army truly wants to eliminate its reconnaissance capability gap, it will take more than creating a reconnaissance cell. Instead, the Army must invest in developing competent reconnaissance units specifically organized and tasked with supporting division- and corps-level commanders. This does not require recreating the wheel with a new "Reconnaissance and Security" brigade combat team. Although the grey beret, SOF-like arrowhead-shaped patch, and "Recon" tab undoubtedly proposed for such a unit surely look splendid, there is a better solution. We need to bring back LRS, Pathfinders, DIVCAV, and ACRs. The tables of organization and doctrine for these formations are tried and true; we need only pull out the old manuals and blow the dust off. More importantly, the knowledge and experience needed to rekindle these formations still resides throughout the force. By reinvesting in our battle-proven reconnaissance formations, we can eliminate this capability gap in a timely and efficient manner. ■

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