

# BRIGADE CAVALRY SQUADRONS IN OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

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by

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## ABSTRACT

BRIGADE CAVALRY SQUADRONS IN OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM, by MAJ Michael J. Crooks, 143 pages.

In 2003 the Army began converting to a modular force initiating the most far reaching transformation of the Army's operational forces since World War II. Modularity established the Brigade Combat Team structure that included a cavalry squadron. This marked the first time that an organic reconnaissance element existed at the brigade echelon. The modularization of the Army began simultaneously as the insurgency in Iraq rose in the aftermath of the US invasion in early 2003. Operation Iraqi Freedom was to be the proving ground for the Brigade Combat Team and the new cavalry force. This thesis is a study on the employment of brigade cavalry squadrons during Operation Iraqi Freedom. The study utilizes 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment as a case study to highlight the evolution of the role of cavalry through the squadron's role as a division cavalry squadron during Operation Desert Storm through three different campaigns during Operation Iraqi Freedom as both a division cavalry squadron and brigade cavalry squadron. Utilizing cavalry doctrine, an analysis of the modularity process, and the operations conducted in Iraq this thesis will show the shift in the role of cavalry from a reconnaissance and security force to a reconnaissance force. Analyzing the employment of brigade cavalry during Operation Iraqi Freedom contributes to the history of the cavalry and identifies lessons learned for the doctrine, organization, and use of brigade cavalry in the future.

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Prepared and Loyal!

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## ACRONYMS

ACR	Armored Cavalry Regiment.
AD	Armored Division
AOE	Army of Excellence
AO	Area of Operations
AR	Armor
ARS	Armored Reconnaissance Squadron
BCT	Brigade Combat Team
BG	Brigadier General
CAS	Close Air Support
CAV	Cavalry
CFV	Cavalry Fighting Vehicle
COL	Colonel
CTC	Combat Training Center
FOB	Forward Operating Base
HBCT	Heavy Brigade Combat Team
IBCT	Infantry Brigade Combat Team
ID	Infantry Division
IN	Infantry
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
LTC	Lieutenant Colonel
LTG	Lieutenant General
LRAS3	Long Range Advanced Scout Surveillance System
NTC	National Training Center



OBJ	Objective
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
RSTA	Reconnaissance Surveillance Target Acquisition
SBCT	Stryker Brigade Combat Team
UAS	Unmanned Aerial System
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In an article published in 2001 in *Armor* magazine, CPT Benson stated that “the cavalry is in a struggle for legitimacy and recognition in today’s transitioning Army.”<sup>1</sup> When this article was written, the Army was pursuing multiple initiatives to build a new force that addressed the evolving 21st century security environment and enhanced the Army’s ability to conduct the full range of military operations. The cavalry force found itself amongst these initiatives of change with advances in technology and new concepts of reconnaissance beginning to emerge. In 2003 these initiatives came to a head when the Army was instructed to rapidly convert to a modular force while simultaneously facing an aggressive insurgency in Iraq. One of the most radical transformations in Army history produced a force that was focused around the brigade structure and included the addition of a brigade cavalry squadron making it the first time a reconnaissance element existed organically at the brigade echelon. The new cavalry squadrons were organizationally and doctrinally designed to perform reconnaissance, but the cavalry that deployed to Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) was not employed within the fundamental roles of cavalry.

Operation Desert Storm brought the mission of the cavalry into the spotlight after an overwhelming victory against the Iraqi army in 1991. The Armored Cavalry Regiments (ACR) and the division cavalry squadrons were robust combined arms

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<sup>1</sup> William E. Benson, “The Cavalry Paradigm: We Aren’t Training as We Intend to Fight,” *Armor* (July-August 2001): 8.

elements that played a significant role in the victory over the Iraqi army in Desert Storm through the execution of reconnaissance, security, and economy of force missions for corps and divisions. Lessons learned in the aftermath of Desert Storm heightened the importance of these organizations and led to an increase in their capabilities.

Unfortunately, the cavalry in Desert Storm was a part of the Army that had been designed to fight the Soviet Union on a European battlefield, but the Soviet threat dissolved leaving the Army without a near peer threat to focus on. The Army had to face the reality of a security environment without the Soviet Union, which presented a variety of threats and challenges. New concepts and technologies began emerging that were to bring the Army into the 21st century and enable it to adapt to an evolving global security environment. New technology that enhanced information collection changed the Army's concept of reconnaissance organizations. These initiatives eventually fed into the modularity process and the future design of the new cavalry force.

The debate of how to equip, employ, and properly use cavalry in a reconnaissance role has existed since the post-war analysis of World War II. This debate or what may be considered a paradox of the use of light or heavy cavalry comes to the forefront during interwar periods when the Army reassesses the capabilities of its formations.<sup>2</sup> The context of this paradox provides the foundation of the decisions made at the Army level that have contributed to the evolution of the cavalry formations. The concept of the light-heavy paradox is that light reconnaissance units have the advantage of stealth but are perceived to not be survivable. Therefore, commanders tend to utilize other combat units

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<sup>2</sup> John J. McGrath, *Scouts Out! The Development of Reconnaissance Units in Modern Armies* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2008), 198.

with survivability to conduct reconnaissance. Typically, the unit that is already in the lead of the formation assumes responsibility for reconnaissance. On the other side of the paradox is a heavy reconnaissance force that possesses so much fire power and mobility that commanders utilize this force as another maneuver element by assigning heavy reconnaissance units to combat missions or attaching them to other organizations as additional combat power. This became common with the armored cavalry regiments and the division cavalry squadrons in both Desert Storm and early on in Operation Iraqi Freedom.<sup>3</sup>

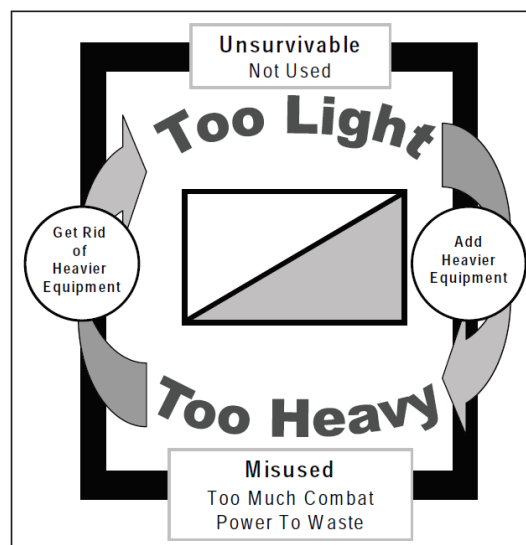


Figure 1. The Reconnaissance Paradox

Source: John J. McGrath, *Scouts Out! The Development of Reconnaissance Units in Modern Armies*, (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2008), 198.

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<sup>3</sup> McGrath, *Scouts Out!*, 198.

The Army's transition to modularity was a two-part solution to issues facing the Army in 2003. Modularity gave the Army a force structure equipped with the latest developments that provided flexibility to rapidly deploy units with a range of capabilities for missions around the world, but most importantly it gave the Army a force to maintain a continuous presence on the ground in Iraq to counter the growing insurgency. The conversion to the Brigade Combat Team (BCT) structure gave the Army a force to operate independently without having to rely on a higher echelon to provide it combat power or other capabilities. Part of the new Brigade Combat Team structure was a new cavalry squadron. Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) was to be the proving ground for the new modular force and the new cavalry squadrons. The rapid transformation of the Army meant that new doctrine had to be expeditiously published to facilitate the training of leaders and soldiers within the new units. All this was made difficult by the fact that the Army was already in combat in OIF. To make the process more difficult the Army was fighting a counterinsurgency war for which none of its units were prepared for or trained to fight.

The purpose of this thesis is to evaluate the role of the new cavalry squadrons throughout OIF as a part of the new BCTs. The thesis will also look at the structure and role of the cavalry prior to modularization to understand the evolution of cavalry specifically providing a narrative of cavalry operations during Desert Storm. It looks at the Army's path to modularity and briefly examines initial attempts to establish an organic brigade reconnaissance element prior to modularity. Finally, it will detail the employment of cavalry throughout multiple campaigns during OIF. The research questions to be addressed are: How did the U.S. Army employ cavalry squadrons under

the new Brigade Combat Team concept during Operation Iraqi Freedom? What was the doctrinal role of cavalry prior to modularity? How did the doctrinal role of cavalry evolve during OIF? How did brigade commanders interpret the role of the cavalry squadrons?

Understanding how the new brigade cavalry squadrons were used or were not used throughout OIF is important in determining the future use of cavalry. The understanding that organization and doctrine must correlate is critical for leaders to understand how to properly employ an organization. In addition, it facilitates the proper training of leaders and soldiers on tactics that are unique to the cavalry. Gains and losses in the cavalry force during Operation Iraqi Freedom must be understood to preserve the legacy of the cavalry and effectively project reconnaissance forward in the future.

### Methodology

Throughout this thesis the path to modularity and the formation of the new cavalry squadrons will be detailed. It is important to understand the impact of Operation Desert Storm and the post-war analysis that gave rise to the initiatives that shaped the Army and ultimately led to modularity. It is also important to understand the path the US took to get to Operation Iraqi Freedom. To understand how the cavalry fits within the context of all this, this thesis will utilize 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron, 4<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment as a case study to illustrate the evolution of the cavalry from Desert Storm through Iraqi Freedom and the modularity process. In previous writings, 1-4 CAV has served as a prime example of cavalry operations as the squadron has a historical legacy. It traces its lineage back to the Indian Wars in the mid to late 1800s and has participated in almost every major conflict since. Highlights of the squadron are found in operations conducted in Vietnam

and Desert Storm. Writings and arguments on cavalry typically cite the performance of 1-4 CAV during Desert Storm when discussing operations conducted by a division cavalry squadron. However, the multiple works that highlight the history of 1-4 CAV never go past Desert Storm. 1-4 CAV participated in three different campaigns throughout OIF, and it is important to detail each campaign to illustrate the employment of a cavalry squadron during a constantly evolving conflict.

The introduction of this thesis, chapter one, introduces the overall purpose of the thesis and its contributions to history. The chapter provides an overall background to understand the path the paper will take. It presents and explains the reconnaissance paradox, which will be a theme that will be addressed throughout the thesis. The chapter also introduces the 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron, 4<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment as the case study used in narratives throughout the paper and the significance of the squadron to the overall purpose of the paper.

Chapter two provides a brief overview of the Army and specifically the status of the cavalry after the conclusion of the Vietnam War. The chapter details the Army's initiatives to build a force capable of countering the Soviet threat resulting in the establishment of the Army of Excellence. It briefly reviews the doctrinal role and design of the division cavalry squadron. The significance of this chapter is in the narrative of 1-4 CAV's operations during Operation Desert Storm, which demonstrate the capabilities and role of the division cavalry squadron prior to OIF. The chapter concludes with an overview of the transition period the Army's cavalry force experienced after Desert Storm and the collapse of the Soviet Union as the Army entered a new global security



environment that required it execute the full range of military operations throughout the globe.

Chapter three is a detailed overview of Operation Iraqi Freedom primarily composed of the narrative of 1-4 CAV's operations during three different OIF campaigns. The beginning of the chapter details the build up to the invasion of Iraq and 1-4 CAV's initial role as a shaping operation prior to the invasion. During this period, 1-4 CAV was still a division cavalry squadron, but did not see combat in Iraq until after the invasion. The chapter provides a narrative of the invasion of Iraq that was spearheaded by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division with their division cavalry squadron, 3-7 CAV. The first half of the chapter details the rapid pace at which 3rd Infantry Division moved north to Baghdad and how 3-7 CAV effectively provided reconnaissance and security to shape the attack towards Baghdad. This chapter illustrates the last significant combat operation conducted by a division cavalry squadron. The remainder of the chapter details the rise of the insurgency in Iraq, which shaped how units executed operations in Iraq to include 1-4 CAV. The chapter provides a narrative of 1-4 CAV's deployment as a part of OIF II, which was the squadron's final deployment as a division cavalry squadron. The chapter briefly discusses the modularization process and the effects it had on 1-4 CAV. Finally, the chapter provides a narrative of 1-4 CAV's deployments in OIF V and OIF 09-11, which primarily consisted of operations as a BCT cavalry squadron conducting counterinsurgency operations. Chapter three is the most significant chapter that lends support to answering the primary research question.

Chapter four is a detailed overview of why and how the Army made the transition to the modular force resulting in the establishment of brigade cavalry squadrons. In

addition to the steps to modularity, chapter four looks at the Army's efforts to establish an organic brigade reconnaissance element as a result of a post-Desert Storm analysis identifying the need for brigade reconnaissance. This chapter details the Army's shift in its view on the role of cavalry with the introduction to new surveillance and information collection technology. This shift is captured in the overview of how cavalry doctrine evolved from the onset of modularity. The chapter concludes with a summary of the performance of the brigade cavalry squadrons in OIF.

Chapter five provides a summary of key subjects covered throughout the paper that support the research questions. It revisits the reconnaissance paradox discussed in chapter one and discusses its significance to the information detailed in chapters two, three, and four. Based on the information throughout the body of the paper, this chapter discusses the current state of the cavalry and how lessons learned from doctrine, modularity, and operations in OIF shaped the cavalry of today. Finally, the chapter looks at the authors conclusions from the research found throughout the thesis and how it contributes to both history and the future of the cavalry.

### Literature Review

In recent years there has been an increase in research and written pieces focused on the importance and role of cavalry. Specifically, there has been a call for the return of the division cavalry squadrons with the Army's emphasis on shifting its doctrinal and training focus back to large-scale combat operations. The operations of 1-4 CAV during Operation Desert Storm have been written about in numerous research papers emphasizing the success demonstrated by division cavalry squadrons. The squadron's participation in multiple conflicts throughout history have been documented in a variety

of sources; however, the documentation of 1-4 CAV's significant history stops after Operation Desert Storm. Most historical resources detailing OIF end around the 2006 and 2007 timeframe failing to detail the history of the last half of OIF. This thesis looks to fill in the gaps of 1-4 CAV's documented history while researching the role of the new brigade cavalry squadrons throughout the entirety of OIF by utilizing a variety of primary, secondary, and doctrinal sources.

Chapter one provides a layout of the overall thesis. The significance of this chapter is the introduction of the reconnaissance paradox found in John McGrath's book *Scouts Out! The Development of Reconnaissance Units in Modern Armies*. McGrath's book explains the reconnaissance paradox and its existence since the mechanization of the cavalry. *Scouts Out!* details the overall evolution of cavalry from its mechanization through the initial phase of OIF. This source is utilized throughout this paper because it has significance in each chapter. Chapter one also uses an article for *Armor* by CPT Benson that highlights the cavalry's loss in identity during a time of Army transitions.

Chapter two is primarily focused around the cavalry operations of 1-4 CAV in Desert Storm. This chapter is supported by two primary sources. The first is the book *Road to Safwan* written by Stephen Bourque who served as the operations officer for 1-4 CAV during Desert Storm. The co-author of the book is John Burdan who served on the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division staff during Desert Storm. *Road to Safwan* gives an overview of the role of the division cavalry squadron, the doctrine that supported the division cavalry squadron, and a detailed summary of 1-4 CAV's operations in Desert Storm from the viewpoint of key leaders within the squadron and the division the squadron served. The second primary source is an article for *Armor* written by LTC Wilson titled "Tanks in the

Division Cavalry Squadron.” LTC Wilson served as the 1-4 CAV squadron commander during Desert Storm and his article details his innovation in task organizing the squadron with the addition of tanks and effectively employing the squadron in combat.

Chapter three provides a narrative of four different OIF campaigns ranging from the invasion in 2003 to the end of OIF in 2010. The details of the invasion of Iraq and 3-7 CAV’s march to Baghdad come from *On Point* written by Gregory Fontenot, E.J. Degen, and David Tohn. *On Point* lays the groundwork for the invasion of Iraq and provides a detailed narrative of combat operations resulting in the fall of Baghdad. The remainder of the chapter relies heavily on interviews with leaders from 1-4 CAV during each respective campaign to include Major Kirby Hanson who served as the squadron executive officer and LTC Scott Synowiez who served as the squadron intelligence officer for 1-4 CAV during OIF II. The squadron’s role in OIF V is supported by two articles written by LTC James Crider who served as the squadron commander during “The Surge”. LTC Crider’s articles were the first significant pieces of literature that detailed the effective use of new counterinsurgency strategies. The information in these articles are supported by the squadron’s after-action report from OIF V. The details of 1-4 CAV’s deployment in support of OIF 09-11 were provided through an interview with COL John Scott Nelson who served as the squadron commander.

Chapter four looks at the evolution of the brigade cavalry and by doing so it discusses why the Army turned to modularity and how modularity occurred. This chapter primarily focuses on the evolution of cavalry doctrine using multiple versions of *Field Manual 3-20.96*, which outline the fundamental role of cavalry organizations. The remainder of the chapter is primarily supported by Dr. James Cameron’s book *To Fight*

*or Not to Fight*, which is a secondary source that details the doctrinal and organizational changes in cavalry from World War II through the first half of OIF and modularity. John McGrath's *Scouts Out!* also helps support the chapter with further detail on changes in the cavalry from Desert Storm through modularity and OIF.

Chapter five summarizes the paper, provides an overview of the current state of cavalry, and lays out the conclusions of the paper. Supporting this chapter is William Donnelly's book *Transforming an Army at War* that looks at the Army's overall initiatives that resulted in modularity and specifically notes Army leadership acknowledging the need for cavalry in the new modular force. Supporting the need for cavalry in the future force is Thomas Cipolla's monograph that describes the "Quality of Firsts" paradigm defined as the ability to see first, understand first, act first, and finish decisively. John McGrath's *Scouts Out!* is utilized for the last time to reintroduce the reconnaissance paradox and link it to the paper's overall conclusions.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE DESERT STORM ERA CAVALRY

At the conclusion of World War II, it was difficult to comprehend the idea of combat on that grand of a scale ever occurring again. However, America's role in the world as a superpower and the threat of the Soviet Union meant that large-scale ground combat remained a viable course of action for the Army. Primary doctrine, tactics, and training efforts for the Army remained focused towards a Soviet peer threat in Europe despite involvement in conflicts such as Vietnam. The post-Vietnam era was one in which the Army evaluated how to posture itself after over a decade engaged in a conflict that had its share of battles with conventional forces, but for the most part was a large scale counterinsurgency.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the Warsaw Pact still posed a significant threat and training remained focused on conventional operations against a potential Soviet threat. However, the training and restructuring of the Army was not to be used against the Soviets, but against a different threat. This chapter will detail the cavalry operations of Desert Storm to emphasize the role of the cavalry and the effect it had on the post-Desert Storm period.

The cavalry experienced a series of changes as the Army attempted to find its niche in the post-Vietnam era. During Vietnam the cavalry, like every other unit, had found itself outside of the role they trained for; however, some cavalry units including 1-4 CAV found success in operations conducted in Vietnam.

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<sup>4</sup> James King, "Large-Scale Combat Operations: How the Army Can Get its Groove Back," Modern War Institute, June 19, 2018, accessed 8 November, 2018, <https://mwi.usma.edu/large-scale-combat-operations-army-can-get-groove-back/>.

It was initially thought that the terrain of Vietnam would preclude the use of armored cavalry in Vietnam. Early successes in mounted operations in the Vietnamese highlands by Troop C, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry, as well as successes in the area north west of Saigon in III Corps Tactical Zone by the 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry and then the 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry convinced commanders that given their mobility and firepower, armored cavalry along with tank and mechanized infantry units supported by air cavalry could be very effective against Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces.<sup>5</sup>

The performance of armored cavalry units in Vietnam validated the purpose and the importance of having cavalry out front. “Like other units, the squadron recovered from the Vietnam conflict and adapted itself to the realities of warfare in the last quarter of the century. The lethality of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War motivated American officers to overhaul the army’s approach to education, equipment, and training. The unit’s activities, often called operational tempo, increased as the squadron routinely deployed to Europe for REFORGER or Return of Forces to Europe exercises.”<sup>6</sup> The exercises in Europe and the rotations at the National Training Center were the only opportunities available to heavy units to exercise their capabilities.

The post-Vietnam era was dominated by Army initiatives to restructure the force to counter the Warsaw Pact threat including the Division 86 and Army of Excellence (AOE) initiatives. In the late 1980s, the frustration from the organizational changes as a result of these initiatives was felt by the 1-4 CAV squadron commander, LTC Richard Cowell:

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<sup>5</sup> Global Security, “1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment: Quarterhorse,” last modified May 6, 2013, accessed 2 February 2019, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/army/1-4cav.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Bourque and John Burdan, *The Road to Safwan: The 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry in the 1991 Persian Gulf War* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2007), 10.

Cowell's most challenging and thankless duty was supervising the change in the squadron's organization in 1989. In spite of warnings from World War II and Vietnam-era cavalymen, the army pulled all the tanks from divisional cavalry squadrons to use in other combat organizations. This new divisional cavalry organization was no longer assigned directly to the division commander but to a new organization: the Aviation (sometimes referred to as the 4th) Brigade. To make matters worse for Cowell, one of his two ground troops was now permanently stationed in Germany as part of the 1st Infantry Division's forward deployed brigade. This arrangement left him with only the Headquarters Troop, one small ground troop (B Troop), and two small air cavalry troops (C and D Troops). Because of its lack of firepower, standard division practice was to attach a tank company from the 2nd Brigade for all training exercises and contingency plans.<sup>7</sup>

The Division 86 force structure, as it was known by those in the squadron, essentially left the division cavalry squadrons as fair game for their organizations to be piecemealed as commanders saw fit. Fortunately for LTC Robert Wilson, who assumed command of 1-4 CAV in June 1990, he had the luxury of being able to re-task organize the squadron as he saw fit. He did so as the inevitable prospect of the 1st Infantry Division deploying to support Desert Shield in Saudi Arabia was fast approaching. An advantage of having a lineage of a direct link to the division headquarters means that the squadron typically had priority in allocations. In November 1990, the Division G3 operations officer informed LTC Wilson that the division was exchanging the M1 variant tanks and were drawing the new M1A1 variant in Saudi Arabia. The division was receiving an excess of nine M1A1 tanks. These nine tanks were immediately offered to LTC Wilson with the freedom to task organize the tanks as he saw fit upon arrival to ports in Saudi Arabia.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Bourque and Burdan, *The Road to Safwan*, 11.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 23.



## Desert Storm

Prior to Desert Storm, *FM 17-95* defined the basic tasks of cavalry to be reconnaissance and security executed through combined arms action from the scout team level through the regimental level. It was understood that cavalry was an economy of force having to fight to accomplish its mission of gaining information while protecting the friendly force.<sup>9</sup> 1-4 CAV was the primary reconnaissance element for the 1st Infantry Division and it employed the squadron in every doctrinal sense. The squadron was out in front of the Big Red One throughout Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.<sup>10</sup> The details of the actions executed by 1-4 CAV in 1991 are important in the understanding of how one cavalry squadron can shape the battlefield when properly employed by its higher headquarters. The actions of 1-4 CAV were not repeated until 12 years after Desert Storm when 3<sup>rd</sup> Squadron, 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry executed what may be considered the last charge of the division cavalry squadrons.

In December 1990, 1-4 CAV deployed with the 1st Infantry Division to Saudi Arabia in support of Operation Desert Shield as part of the world response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The remainder of the squadron filtered into Saudi Arabia in January 1991. With the addition of the nine M1A1 Abrams tanks, LTC Wilson task organized his two ground troops, A and B troops, as a mixture of M3A2 Cavalry Fighting Vehicles (CFV) and M1A1s while also forming a third aviation troop from organic rotary wing

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<sup>9</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Field Manual (FM) 17-95, *Cavalry Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1981), i.

<sup>10</sup> Nathan A. Jennings, "Reconsidering Division Cavalry Squadrons" (Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2017), 24.

assets as seen in Figure 2. A portion of the squadron, including one ground troop and the air troops, were deployed to screen forward of what was known as LOGBASE ECHO, the VII Corps logistical staging area .<sup>11</sup>

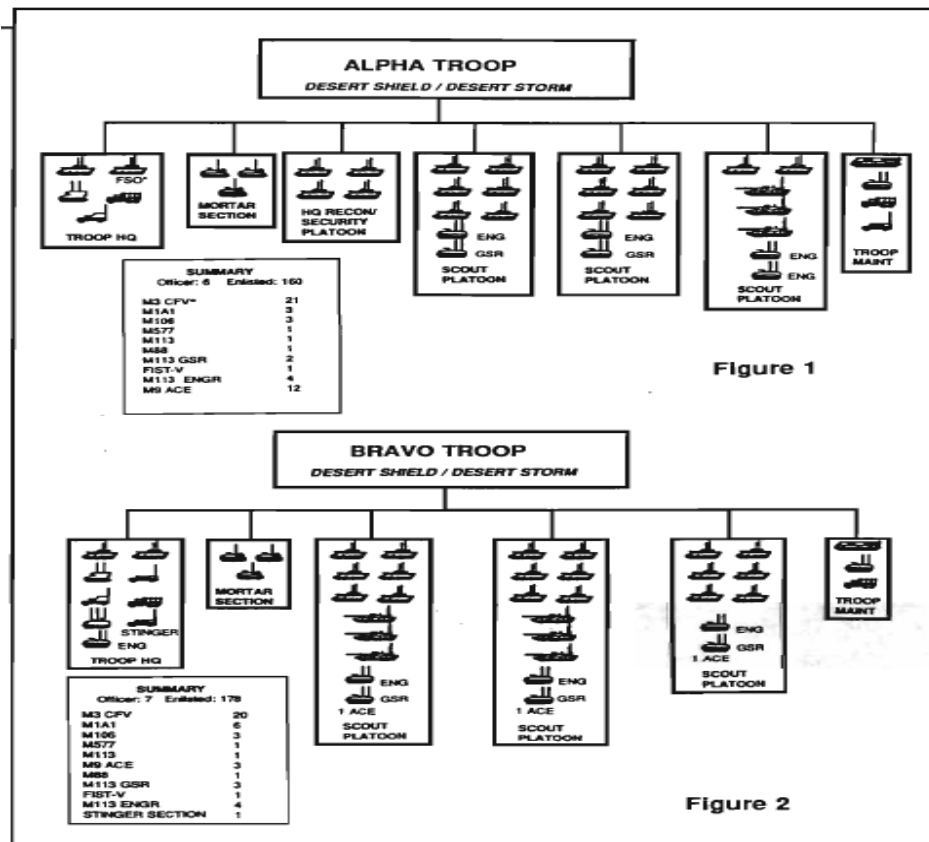


Figure 2. A and B Troop Task Organization

Source: Robert Wilson, "Tanks in the Division Cavalry Squadron," *Armor* (July-August 1992): 7.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Wilson, "Tanks in the Division Cavalry Squadron," *Armor* (July-August 1992): 7-8.

The squadron mission was to provide forward security to both VII Corps and 1st ID to allow buildup of combat power. The remainder of the squadron was completing training and familiarization with the new M1A1s. By 27 January 1991, the entire squadron was deployed forward to establish a screen line northwest of LOGBASE ECHO over watching the northern berm that divided Saudi Arabia from Iraq. During this time the squadron maximized its opportunities to train on air and ground integration. Sometimes training opportunities were based on downtime while most were a result of responding to perceived or confirmed threats forward of the screen line. From 24 January to 13 February 1991, 1-4 CAV completed the mission of providing forward security allowing the main force to effectively build combat power. The squadron screened a 60-kilometer sector of desert terrain. During this period the squadron conducted several operations that resulted in the destruction of one Iraqi engineer vehicle, a radar tower, several buildings in a town north of the berm that was serving as a C2 node and captured 12 Enemy Prisoners of War (EPW). These operations prevented Iraqi forces from detecting the VII Corps main body, which could have resulted in the Iraqi army repositioning defensive positions.<sup>12</sup>

On 13 February 1991, the squadron was placed under operational control (OPCON) of 3rd Brigade, 2nd Armored Division. 3rd Brigade was a forward heavy force in Europe but fell under 1st ID to give them their compliment of three brigades. 3rd Brigade oversaw what became known as Task Force Iron. The task force included 1-4 CAV, 1-41 IN, 3-4 FA, and 317 Engineers. The mission of TF Iron was to set the

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<sup>12</sup> Wilson, "Tanks in the Division Cavalry Squadron," 8-9.

conditions for the 1st ID main attack on 24 February by conducting counter reconnaissance and cutting gaps in the border berm to facilitate mobility. In this capacity 1-4 CAV was utilized as both a reconnaissance element and economy of force. The TF engineer blade teams created gaps that the 1-4 CAV tanks and Bradleys poured through onto the other side to establish a new screen line. Contact north of the berm was light other than indirect fire from Iraqi mortars and some artillery. On 17 February, the TF Iron mission was complete, and they conducted a rear ward passage through 1st and 2nd Brigades back south of the berm.<sup>13</sup>

On 24 February 1991, the ground attack was initiated. VII Corps initiated the breach of the berm into Iraq with the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR) leading the Corps movement as a guard force with each respective division following.<sup>14</sup> 1-4 CAV was OPCON to 1st Brigade as they moved through the lanes in the berm that had been prepared by the squadron and TF IRON days prior. Once through the breach, the squadron came back under direct control of MG Rhame, the 1st ID commanding general. The squadron was dispatched ahead of the division to conduct a mobile screen to secure the division's northern flank and protect it from any counterattack. Whenever the squadron was out front maneuvering, they led with the tanks acknowledging the existence of an enemy armor threat. While screening forward the squadron destroyed

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<sup>13</sup> Bourque and Burdan, *The Road to Safwan*, 95-105.

<sup>14</sup> McGrath, *Scouts Out!*, 174.

three antitank guns, two AMLs, four trucks, and numerous bunkers, and captured 145 EPWs.<sup>15</sup>

Besides reconnaissance and security missions, 1-4 CAV was effective in enabling the 1st ID commander in coordinating with friendly adjacent units. On 26 February, the squadron was instructed to conduct a zone reconnaissance east and link up with 2nd ACR. Inclement weather during the movement prevented the squadron's air assets from supporting, so the squadron bounded their Bradleys with tanks in over watch positions. While moving to establish contact with 2nd ACR, the squadron engaged and destroyed one T-62 tank and one ZSU 23-4 anti-air system. Upon making contact with 2nd ACR, MG Rhame instructed the squadron to coordinate the night forward passage of lines of the division.<sup>16</sup> Prior to the linkup between the two cavalry elements, 2nd ACR had been the advance guard for VII Corps as it attacked eastward in which the regiment had advanced into the left flank of the Iraqi *Tawakalna* Mechanized Division. This meeting engagement, that proved deadly for the Iraq division, became known as the Battle of 73 Easting.<sup>17</sup> During this time 1st ID was consolidating in the southwest in preparation of being passed forward to continue the attack east. 1-4 CAV helped facilitate this passage of the division. After four hours of a night passage through another friendly element, the

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<sup>15</sup> Wilson, "Tanks in the Division Cavalry Squadron," 9.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> McGrath, *Scouts Out!*, 173.

division commander had once again ordered the squadron forward to screen the northern flank along the shared boundary with the 3rd Armored Division.<sup>18</sup>

In the dark, early morning hours of 27 February the squadron encountered dismounted infantry and engaged tanks between 100-500 meters while conducting their screen. Upon further investigation, the squadron discovered an enemy pocket between 1st ID and 3rd AD. With two ground troops abreast the squadron conducted an attack from west to east sweeping away whatever enemy presence remained in the area. After the attack it was discovered that there was an Iraqi logistics base being secured by a tank company, a mechanized infantry company, and an artillery battery. The squadron decimated all Iraqi opposition and effectively protected the division from what could have been an unexpected engagement.<sup>19</sup>

Later in the morning of 27 February, after a tactical pause to refuel and resupply, 1st ID renewed their attack to the east towards their objective known as Objective Norfolk. The squadron resumed its position as a screen along the division northern flank and boundary with 3rd AD. By this time throughout the theater, the Iraqi army was in retreat out of Kuwait. However, the Iraqi army had demonstrated their ability to still launch small counterattacks that were unsuccessful, but vigorously executed. The counterattack threat meant flank security was vital to protecting a moving division that may have been unprepared. The mission of VII Corps and 1st ID was a pursuit of the

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<sup>18</sup> Wilson, "Tanks in the Division Cavalry Squadron," 9.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

retreating Iraqi army, and the current attack was aimed at cutting off the Iraqis in Kuwait along the Basra Highway.<sup>20</sup>

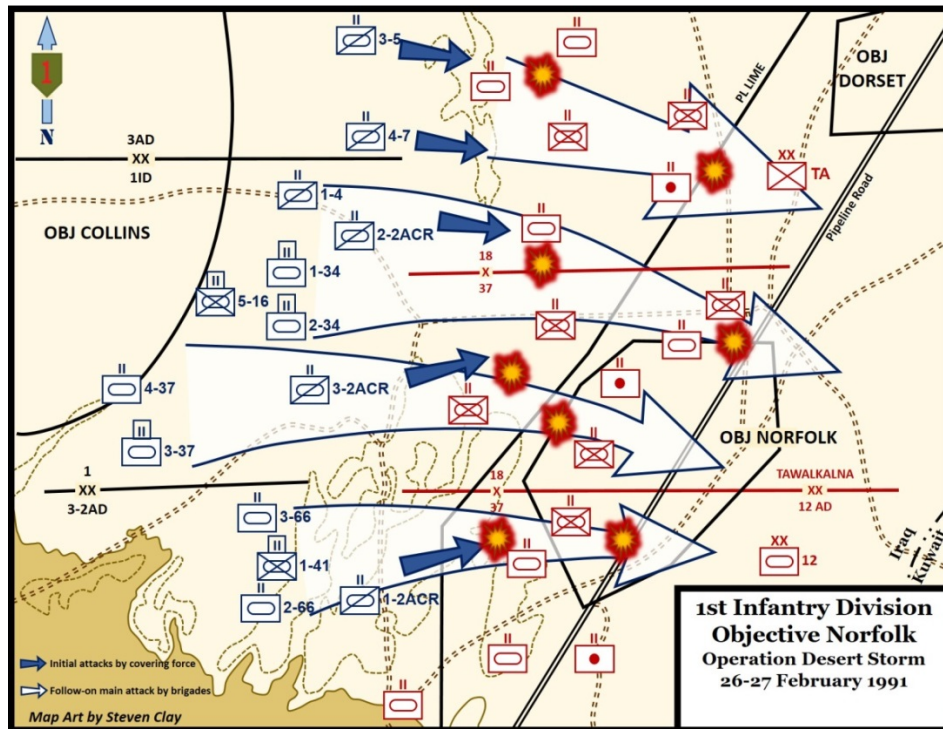


Figure 3. 1st Infantry Division Battle of Objective Norfolk, 26-27 February 1991

Source: 16th Infantry Regiment Association, “1st Infantry Division, Battle of Objectiver Norfolk, 26-27 February 1991,” accessed January 28, 2019, <https://16thinfassn.org/history/regimental-maps/desert-storm-bosnia-1990-2001/1st-infantry-division-battle-of-objective-norfolk-26-27-february-1991/>.

The squadron ground troops moved out behind each other with the bradleys oriented on the flank, the tanks in depth for security, and the air troops out forward and along the flanks. This movement began at 0930 on 27 February and as the division

<sup>20</sup> Bourque and Burdan, *The Road to Safwan*, 160-161.

secured Objective Norfolk by 1230 the squadron had also conducted a halt 15 miles inside of Kuwait leaving behind the 25 Iraqi destroyed tanks and personnel carriers. With the Iraqi army still in retreat, MG Rhame used all the combat power he had to prevent the Iraqi army from retreating back into Iraq. The division resumed its attack at 1430 assigning objectives to the squadron and to each brigade oriented along the Kuwait City/Basra Highway. The squadron's mission was in the extreme north of the Basra Highway just 12 kilometers from the Iraq border. The squadron continued its task of conducting a mobile screen along the division's northern flank by rapidly moving towards its objective attempting to destroy Iraq reconnaissance and block further Iraqi movement. The squadron came upon their objective at 1630 hours and identified enemy armor moving north. Alpha troop engaged and destroyed the lead vehicles, which helped to establish an initial blocking obstacle along the highway. In an attempt to send a situation report, the squadron commander realized that the squadron had advanced to their objective so quickly they outran the rest of the division.<sup>21</sup>

LTC Wilson realized the squadron was now out of range of communication and support with the division. His attempts to contact 2nd brigade, who was supposed to establish blocking positions south of the squadron, had failed. Understanding the division commander's intent, LTC Wilson ordered the squadron to attack the column they had observed and then establish a screen three kilometers east of the highway to observe further movement. By 1830 the squadron had destroyed several armored vehicles and captured over 450 EPWs with more coming in along with a growing stockpile of seized

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<sup>21</sup> Wilson, "Tanks in the Division Cavalry Squadron," 10.



weapons. Limited visibility and the threat of a counterattack caused LTC Wilson to break down the screen to establish defensive positions. The squadron's command post was established, and combat trains came forward to assist with security for the growing number of prisoners. LTC Wilson finally established communication with the 2nd brigade commander to find out that the rest of the division attack had halted short of its objectives and that there were no other division assets within 25 kilometers of the squadron. The 2nd brigade commander delivered more discouraging news when he informed LTC Wilson that the division commander had denied any movement in zone meaning 2nd brigade was unable to send any reinforcements to the squadron. The squadron utilized every bit of manpower throughout the night to handle security and the reception of over 2,000 prisoners. In the early hours of 28 February, the division secured its objectives, and at 0723 hours a cease fire was declared ending ground combat operations.<sup>22</sup>

Throughout Operation Desert Storm, there was a variety of cavalry operations at both corps and division levels. Each echelon employed their cavalry squadrons in a variety of reconnaissance, security, and economy of force missions:

Ground reconnaissance forces carried out a number of missions. At the corps level, ACRs were used either to lead the advance, or as an additional combat force, or both as in the case of the 2d ACR. At division level, cavalry squadrons were split into air and ground elements, which generally operated separately. Ground elements primarily covered the flanks of the movement and kept divisions tied in with the units to their left and right. Division commanders, as necessary, also used their squadrons as attacking forces, as in the case of the 1-4th Cav.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Wilson, "Tanks in the Division Cavalry Squadron," 10.

<sup>23</sup> McGrath, *Scouts Out!*, 175.

The success and capability that 1-4 CAV demonstrated was seen across each division cavalry squadron in both VII and XVIII corps.

The 24th Infantry Division was the only mechanized division, apart from 3rd ACR, within the XVIII corps that was primarily made up of light infantry divisions. The 2nd Squadron, 4th Cavalry served as the division cavalry squadron for 24th ID. Like 1-4 CAV, 2-4 CAV was deployed forward as a security element in the buildup phase of the war. The 24th ID commander recognized that 2-4 CAV was a division asset and operated as a semi-independent organization. Therefore, it was recognized that 2-4 CAV needed augmentation with armor and other enablers to effectively operate forward of the division. The ground combat elements of 2-4 CAV consisted of two reconnaissance troops, a tank company, an MLRS battery, engineers, and some air defense artillery. The squadron's aviation was consolidated with the rest of the division's aviation assets. With this combat configuration, 2-4 CAV was employed in a variety of tasks:

Control of the cavalry task force varied between the division command and subordinate brigades. At the start of operations, its two ground cavalry troops supported different brigades. Similarly, the missions assigned to the squadron frequently changed, ranging from zone and route reconnaissance to screen and guard functions. There was no attempt to focus the squadron predominantly on information collection. The division commander expected it to operate forward of the main body and conduct independent security operations. During the course of the ground campaign, the mission set performed exceeded the doctrinal emphasis on information collection, but it reflected the division commander's desire for a robust and versatile cavalry organization.<sup>24</sup>

The two light divisions that were on 24th ID's flank as a part of the XVIII corps found success with the division cavalry squadrons that were unique to their organizations. The

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<sup>24</sup> James Cameron, *To Fight or Not to Fight* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2010), 318.

1st Squadron, 17th Cavalry conducted forward security with one HMMWV troop and three air troops for the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division that made most of its division movements in trucks. The 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division relied on the 2nd Squadron, 17th Cavalry as an aerial forward security element.<sup>25</sup>

The commonality of success between the two heavy division cavalry squadrons was the integration of the Abrams tank. LTC Wilson wrote a post war article in *Armor* about how indispensable the tanks were for the overall operation. The tanks provided needed combat power that enabled the squadrons to accomplish a variety of reconnaissance and security tasks. LTC Wilson also noted, for 1-4 CAV, specifically that the formation of a second ground troop was essential in providing the division commander a credible reconnaissance and security capability.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the performance of the Iraqi army, the reconnaissance and security tasks executed by the division cavalry squadrons demonstrated the flexibility and lethality that a squadron possesses when enabled with cross domain capabilities. 1-4 CAV demonstrated that the division commander possesses a capability that can shape the battlefield through aggressive information collection, counter reconnaissance, and can serve as an attacking force. Cavalry organizations like 1-4 CAV proved their worth and validated the Army of Excellence concept.

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<sup>25</sup> Jennings, "Reconsidering Division Cavalry," 29.

<sup>26</sup> Wilson, "Tanks in the Division Cavalry Squadron," 11.

### The Interwar Period

The aftermath of Operation Desert Storm was no different than the aftermath of every other war in history in which the Army had to evaluate the actions of the force to improve the organization and future capabilities for the next threat. The question was what was the next threat? The Cold War was coming to an end and in four days the Army, along with joint and coalition partners, decimated the fourth largest army in the world. The rapid and lethal capabilities of the U.S. Army to conduct ground warfare were put on display for the entire world to see. The sting of what some may have considered a failure in Vietnam was all but erased with a decisive victory in the Middle East following the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. The Army had to utilize the lessons learned in Desert Storm to determine the force posture for the future. However, the analysis of the way forward for the Army was made more difficult as it entered a period of budget cuts and downsizing.

The heavy cavalry entered the Force XXI initiative having disproved several previous theories behind the organizational changes that were made as part of the Army of Excellence changes. The force developers that drove the Army of Excellence changes rationalized that the Armored Cavalry Regiments would be the primary reconnaissance, security and economy of force element out front fighting for information. The division cavalry squadrons were somewhere behind in the formation; therefore, the division cavalry squadrons did not need tanks. This was one of the most unpopular decisions amongst the armor and cavalry community. The commanders in Europe lobbied from the start to leave the tanks alone, but to no avail. The actions performed by the heavy division

cavalry squadrons validated that they indeed required the combat power of tanks to accomplish the tasks assigned to them.

The reality of the world situation in 1991 was that the significance of the fall of the Soviet Union eclipsed the achievement of Desert Storm. One of the greatest ground forces assembled was now subject to budget cuts, downsizing, and a world that had no need for a large standing army. The rise in new technology to augment combat formations became one of the primary driving factors of the Army's Force XXI initiative, which absorbed all the Army's time and money. Fortunately for mounted reconnaissance forces there was "a growing willingness to experiment with combined arms reconnaissance teams, the return of tanks to the heavy division cavalry squadrons, and recurring platform survivability concerns reflected a persistent interest in versatile, combat capable units."<sup>27</sup> Three years after Desert Storm, despite downsizing, the L-Series cavalry squadron set was introduced. The set included the addition of eight tanks to the squadron that were task organized into the troops, and a third ground troop was established.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Cameron, *To Fight or Not to Fight*, 335.

<sup>28</sup> McGrath, *Scouts Out!*, 166.

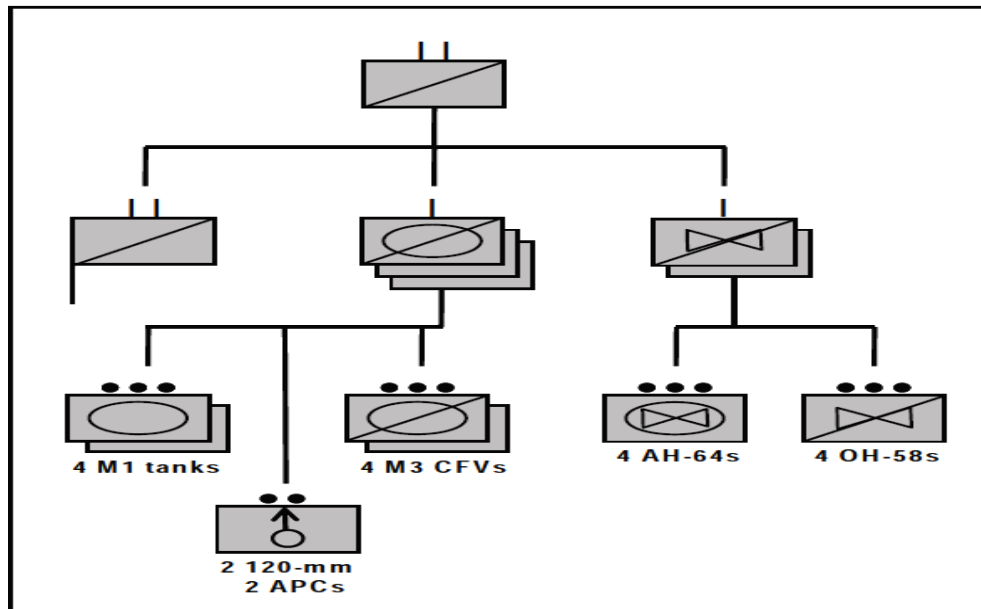


Figure 4. L-Series Division Cavalry Squadron, 1995-2004

Source: John J. McGrath, *Scouts Out: The Development of Reconnaissance Units in Modern Armies* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2008), 167.

An issue that arose from the analysis of Desert Storm, that became a persistent issue throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s, was the lack of a reconnaissance element at the brigade level. At the time of Desert Storm, every echelon at corps, division, and battalion had a reconnaissance capability. It was noted during an analysis of combat operations that if the assets had been available, then brigade commanders would have experimented with some form of brigade scouts. Based on their experiences, most brigade commanders felt that operations had warranted the need for a brigade reconnaissance element. The Armor Center, being the proponent for force structure in the armor and cavalry, agreed with these findings and made it a priority to try to secure at

least a scout platoon for the brigades.<sup>29</sup> However, it was not until 1998 that the brigades were authorized an internal reconnaissance element. Until then they relied on augmentation from the division cavalry squadrons.

Despite the magnitude that was Desert Storm, it was not the sole military operation that defined the 1990s. Between the execution of Desert Storm and 1995, the U.S. military was conducting 42 separate military operations around the globe excluding Desert Storm. Major operations mounted in areas such as Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo began to consume the manpower available in a downsizing force. Missions focused on security and humanitarian aid around the world became the new normal. In addition, forces were still committed to deterrence along the demilitarized zone in Korea as well as along the Kuwait and Saudi Arabia borders to prevent a repeat of Iraqi aggression. This new mission set was another factor for Force XXI developers to figure out how to make forces lighter and rapidly deployable.<sup>30</sup>

Cavalry units like 1-4 CAV became a part of this new normal rotation to areas with security missions. Following Desert Storm, 1-4 CAV and most of the 1st Infantry Division relocated from Fort Riley, KS to Schweinfurt, Germany. In 1995, 1-4 CAV was one of the first units to rotate through Bosnia-Herzegovina for a yearlong deployment supporting the peace keeping mission set forth by the Dayton Peace Accord. The squadron was attached to 2nd Brigade, 1st Armored Division during Operation Joint Endeavor. The squadron led 2nd Brigade across the Sava River into Bosnia. In 1999 and

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<sup>29</sup> Cameron, *To Fight or Not to Fight*, 319.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 336.

2000 the air troops from 1-4 CAV rotated to Kosovo as a part of Operation Joint Guardian II. It became normal for the squadron to deploy without all its subordinate units.<sup>31</sup>

In December 1996, despite downsizing and an ever evolving future battlefield, the Army published *FM 17-95 Cavalry Operations* defining the fundamental role of the Armored Cavalry Regiments (ACR) and division cavalry squadrons to be:

The fundamental purpose of cavalry is to perform reconnaissance and to provide security in close operations. In doing so, cavalry facilitates the corps or division commander's ability to maneuver divisions, brigades, and battalions and to concentrate superior combat power and apply it against the enemy at the decisive time and point. Cavalry clarifies, in part, the fog of battle. Cavalry is, by its role, an economy of force. The flexible capabilities of cavalry allow the commander to conserve the combat power of divisions or brigades for engagement where he desires. The combat power of cavalry units, in particular, makes them ideal for offensive and defensive missions as an economy of force.<sup>32</sup>

The manual was like the 1991 version that was published following Desert Storm reinforcing the Air Land Battle doctrine demonstrated during Desert Storm. The 1996 manual began to shift the focus away from the old Soviet threat and addressed more detail on range of military operations. Armor branch had its own approach to development in line with the Army's Force XXI initiative. Known as Armor 2000, the way ahead for the armor branch anticipated changing needs, emerging technologies, and set objectives to guide modernization within the branch to include mounted reconnaissance. Armor branch saw the future battlefield as nonlinear and characterized

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<sup>31</sup> Society of the 1st Infantry Division, "History," Accessed December 24, 2018, <https://1stid.org/history/>.

<sup>32</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Field Manual (FM) 17-95, *Cavalry Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1996), 1-2.



by dispersion along with availability of weapons and sensors suited to the location and destruction of an enemy force. They viewed the environment of the future battlefield as ideal for mounted reconnaissance and security organizations; therefore, validating the need for division cavalry squadrons.<sup>33</sup>

Desert Storm validated the Army of Excellence model against a near peer threat, but the global security environment that evolved after Desert Storm was one that had no need for the Army of Excellence as a whole. The ACR and the division cavalry success in Desert Storm solidified cavalry's place in the Army with its diverse capabilities to shape the battlefield. Despite new initiatives such as Force XXI, which will be discussed in chapter four, the cavalry force was left untouched after being upgraded to the L-Series squadron structure. This proved to be advantageous as the division cavalry was to play a significant role when the Army returned to Iraq in 2003.

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<sup>33</sup> Cameron, *To Fight or Not to Fight*, 341.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM CAMPAIGNS

Following Desert Storm, Central Command (CENTCOM) oversaw the continued security mission along the Kuwaiti and Saudi Arabian borders. Using Kuwait and Saudi Arabia for basing provided CENTCOM groundwork to plan what many commanders saw as a future defensive campaign against Iraq. Maintaining a presence in the region allowed Third Army, as a part of CENTCOM, to make vast improvements in training, logistics, and command and control infrastructure. A continuous rotation of Army and joint units provided CENTCOM commanders and staff with ways to improve operations always looking at a future rematch with Iraq. The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in September 2001 shifted the military towards what they had been assuming for 12 years. “Major General Henry “Hank” Stratman, the deputy commanding general for support of Third Army and CFLCC observed that from 9/11 on, the assumption in Third Army concerning war with Iraq was not whether, but when.”<sup>34</sup>

Operation Iraqi Freedom officially began in 2003 with political and military leaders expecting a swift and decisive conflict to dislodge the Baath Regime of Saddam Hussein and to liberate the people of Iraq. The swift and decisive conflict desired by American leaders became a drawn out and complicated war with US led combat operations ending in 2010 with a transition to a security and advisory role. The war in Iraq became a catalyst for a significant change in organization and doctrine for the Army

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<sup>34</sup> Gregory Fontenot, E. J. Degen, David Tohn, and United States Army Operation Iraqi Freedom Study Group, *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2005), 29-31.

and more specifically the reconnaissance force. This chapter will provide a narrative of the three campaigns during OIF in which 1-4 CAV participated. The narrative of 1-4 CAV's campaigns provide an analysis of the constantly changing environment of combat operations in Iraq and how cavalry organizations were employed throughout the different campaigns of OIF.

In October 2002, the troopers of 1-4 CAV were unaware that war with Iraq was on the horizon. LTC James Chevallier, the new squadron commander, and his troopers were awaiting follow on orders after being told they were no longer deploying to Kosovo. In November, the squadron received a warning order from 1st ID that the squadron along with the rest of division were going to be a part of Army Force Turkey (ARFOR-T). CENTCOM planners were evaluating every possible location from which to stage forces for an offensive into Iraq resulting in the development of the "Northern Option" in which forces entered Iraq from Turkey. Turkey was within the European Command (EUCOM) area of responsibility; therefore, the task of establishing a Joint Rear Area Coordinator was given to 1st ID. The Big Red One was to become the Joint Rear Area Command (JRAC) to provide command and control as ARFOR-T with its division headquarters, two battalion task forces, and an augmentation of enabling units from U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR).<sup>35</sup>

The overall mission in Turkey was a V Corps mission. The intent was to have the 1st and 4th infantry divisions attack from Turkey into Iraq with 4th ID being the main effort. After receiving the ARFOR-T warning order the squadron staff along with the

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<sup>35</sup> Fontenot et al., *On Point*, 4; Kirby Hanson, interview by author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, January 29, 2019.

division began initiating planning and developing training plans. The division and squadron spent the remainder of 2002 conducting extensive planning, command post exercises, and a joint warfighter exercise in which key personnel from 1st ID travelled to Fort Hood, TX to conduct planning alongside 4th ID staff. Meanwhile, LTC Chevallier dispatched an advance element of the squadron comprised of 40 personnel to Turkey. This element was to set the stage for the division's deployment into Turkey by conducting a reconnaissance of the area where the division was going to establish itself and then conducting a thorough route reconnaissance of routes that units could use moving from Turkey into Iraq.<sup>36</sup>

As the division finalized planning and a small contingent of the squadron was gathering information in Turkey, the remainder of 1-4 CAV began training to conduct convoy security and escort operations in Turkey.<sup>37</sup> In January 2003, 1st ID deployed almost 2,200 personnel to Turkey in preparation to receive, stage, and support units that CENTCOM planned to employ from Turkey. With assistance from Turkish authorities, 1st ID established three ports of debarkation, two airports, three command posts, and three convoy support centers along a 700km route going into Iraq. In a last-minute decision, the Turkish parliament voted in March to not allow the flow of U.S. forces from Turkey into Iraq. This prompted a change of mission for 1st ID to redeploy back to Germany. By April 2003 the division completed its redeployment back to Germany. The

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<sup>36</sup> Hanson interview; Society of the 1st Infantry Division, "History."

<sup>37</sup> SGT Jason Bell, interview by Daniel Van Wey, January 25, 2006, Contemporary Operations Studies Team, Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, KS.

main body of 1-4 CAV never left Schweinfurt. CENTCOM made the decision to send 4th ID along with other allocated forces in from Kuwait. 1st ID remained in Germany. However, the effort by 1st ID was not in vein. The activity in Turkey got Saddam Hussein's attention causing him to reallocate Iraqi forces to the north, which weakened his southern defenses.<sup>38</sup>

On 16 March 2003 an ultimatum, with a 48-hour deadline, was issued by President Bush for Saddam Hussein to leave Iraq, and thus the second ground offensive against Iraq in 12 years began. The major differences in this fight were the number of ground forces employed. In Desert Storm, the might of two corps with ACRs, armored divisions, and mechanized divisions rapidly moving across the desert defeated the infamous Iraqi Republican Guard. In March 2003, the V Corps led the invasion with 3rd Infantry Division (Mechanized) as its main effort, the 101st Airborne Division, and 2nd Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division. Unlike Desert Storm, there was not a variety of ACRs and division cavalry squadrons conducting a variety of tasks throughout the battlefield. One division cavalry squadron was the extent of the employment of cavalry in the invasion of Iraq. "All of America rode with 3rd Squadron, 7th Cavalry as it led the fight up-country on point for the 3rd Infantry Division, V Corps, the CFLCC, and the nation."<sup>39</sup> The 101st Airborne employed their aerial division cavalry squadron, 2-17

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<sup>38</sup> Fontenot et al., *On Point*, 41; Society of the 1st Infantry Division, "History."

<sup>39</sup> Fontenot et al., *On Point*, xxv.

CAV, as they did in Desert Storm. 2nd Brigade, 82nd Airborne utilized A Troop, 1-17 CAV, a troop of eight OH-58 Kiowas, for forward reconnaissance.<sup>40</sup>

Organizationally, there were both similarities and differences in each of the division cavalry squadrons from Desert Storm to Iraqi Freedom. 3-7 CAV entered the war as an L-Series squadron, which is the formation adopted in the mid-1990s following lessons learned from Desert Storm. The squadron was task organized into three ground troops made up of tanks and CFVs with two air troops of scout and attack helicopters.<sup>41</sup> During Desert Storm, division cavalry squadrons were augmented with tanks in Saudi Arabia days prior to the initiation of the ground attack. The advantage for 3-7 CAV already configured in the L-series formation was they had more of an opportunity to task organize and train with the integration of tanks prior to deployment:

Much has been written about the merits (or demerits) of scouts and tankers being organized into hunter-killer teams. Our two cents—it works. Our ground cavalry troops (GCTs) trained hunter-killer teams and tactics at Fort Stewart, the National Training Center (NTC), and in Kuwait, then exercised them in the ultimate test—combat. The typical team consisted of three cavalry fighting vehicles (CFVs) and two tanks.<sup>42</sup>

3rd ID understood it had a formidable formation to put out front that was task organized appropriately and doctrinally lined up with the *FM 17-95* to effectively employ its organic ground and air assets. 2-17 CAV served again in Iraq with the 101st Airborne in

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<sup>40</sup> McGrath, *Scouts Out!*, 175.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> J. D. Keith, “3d Squadron, 7th U.S. Cavalry Up Front: Operation Iraqi Freedom Lessons Learned,” *Armor* (September-October 2003): 26.

the same configuration it had in 1991, which was four subordinate air troops of OH-58D Kiowa scout/attack helicopters.<sup>43</sup>

### Operation Iraqi Freedom

On 20 March 2003, ground operations began as the U.S. Air Force engaged targets in and around Baghdad in an attempt to kill regime leaders and weaken overall Iraqi defenses. As “Shock and Awe” was occurring in the north, the 3rd Infantry Division was conducting the breach of a 10km wide obstacle belt along the Kuwait and Iraq border. By 0200 hours on 20 March, 3-7 CAV had their air troops conducting forward reconnaissance while the squadron pushed into Iraq with the 2nd Brigade Combat Team behind them.<sup>44</sup> 3rd ID operations from 20-23 March were the spearhead for V Corps into Iraq and to establish Lines of Communication (LOCs) to enable the attack north into Baghdad. Initial estimates and expectations were that resistance in the south was going to be minimal. The 1st and 3rd BCTs moved in the east to seize Tallil Air Base outside the town of An Nasiriyah. 3-7 CAV along with 2nd BCT moved in the west to contain the city of As Samawah. The mission of 3-7 CAV was also to protect the 3rd ID northwestern flank.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> McGrath, *Scouts Out!*, 175.

<sup>44</sup> James G. Lacey, *Takedown: The 3rd Infantry Division's Twenty-One Day Assault on Baghdad* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2007), 10.

<sup>45</sup> Fontenot et al., 86-88.

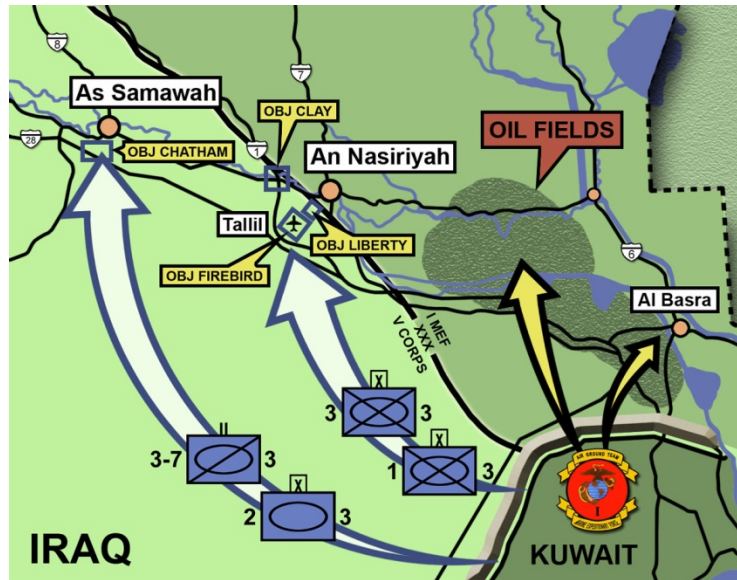


Figure 5. 3rd ID Attack 20-23 March 2003

Source: Gregory Fontenot, E. J. Degen, David Tohn and United States Army Operation Iraqi Freedom Study Group, *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004), 87.

The city of As Samawah was on the Euphrates River as well as Highway 8, which is a main road leading northwest to Baghdad. V Corps did not want to get held up and drawn into urban areas. Therefore, the Corps wanted the city contained to move 3rd ID around to the west along Highway 28. Two bridges located on the southwest of the city were key to isolating Iraqi forces and allowing freedom of movement onto Highway 28. On the morning of 22 March, 3-7 CAV entered into its first, but not last, engagement with paramilitary forces. Moving towards the city of As Samawah, the squadron saw little resistance and if any resistance existed, they were looking for elements of the Iraqi army. The 3-7 CAV was to assess the enemy situation in As Samawah and the status of the bridges on the southwest side of the city. A special operations team operating in the area linked up with the squadron to alert them to the presence of both Iraqi army and



paramilitary forces within the city. The 3-7 CAV dispatched one of their hunter-killer teams towards the bridges where some Iraqis began to gather. At 0900 the Iraqis opened fire on the element with small arms, machine gun, rocket propelled grenade (RPG), and mortar fire.<sup>46</sup>

The fight with Iraqi forces in and around As Samawah went on into 23 March. Iraqis continued utilizing the urban terrain to launch attacks using pickup trucks and then hiding back in the city. The 3-7 CAV ground elements used Kiowa support to engage targets. After identifying a Baath headquarters building within the city, the squadron received permission to have Air Force close air support (CAS) engage and destroy the building. By this time V Corps command elements accepted that As Samawah was a threat to the overall movement. 1st BCT coming from the east passed through 3-7 CAV to continue their move north with follow on logistical packages being ordered to go around As Samawah from Highway 8 to 28. 3-7 CAV cleared an area 1 km north of highway 8 to support the bypass. The 3rd BCT complete with their mission in Tallil were directed north to assume the fight in As Samawah. The 3rd BCT assumed control of the As Samawah fight from 3-7 CAV at 1430 on 23 March. 3rd ID reassumed control of 3-7 CAV and ordered them north to seize a bridge to isolate the next major town along the route to Baghdad, An Najaf.<sup>47</sup>

The movement north towards An Najaf was anticipated to be a relatively simple movement north along the Euphrates River. 3-7 CAV conducted a mobile screen along

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<sup>46</sup> Fontenot et al., *On Point*, 126-127.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 132-133.

Highway 9 moving 100 km north. After the execution of this movement the route was dubbed ‘Ambush Alley’ by the troopers of 3-7 CAV. Most of the movement was dominated by ineffective, but persistent ambushes from a variety of Iraqi regular and paramilitary forces. The task of 3-7 CAV was to screen north and then seize a bridge on the southeast side of An Najaf isolating it from the east and north. The bridge location was deemed Objective Floyd. The squadron’s movement also served as a feint to make it appear that the main effort was crossing east of the Euphrates River in An Najaf. On 25 March, the squadron transitioned from their mobile screen into an attack to seize Objective Floyd. To make matters more difficult a weather system that initiated a sandstorm was sweeping over Iraq from west to east. The sandstorm grounded all aviation assets and limited overall visibility.<sup>48</sup>

Bravo Troop, 3-7 CAV led the attack onto Objective Floyd at 0600 on 25 March. Ground troops relied on night vision and thermal optics to gain any clarity due to limited visibility from the sand storm and lack of air reconnaissance. Like As Samawah, the squadron was met with small arms fire, RPG fire, and suicidal attacks. Bravo Troop made their way to the bridge on Objective Floyd determining that it was intact. Bravo crossed the Euphrates at 1100 east of An Najaf and passed Alpha Troop to attack north to secure a concrete dam and bridge over the river. Alpha Troop’s attack was heavily contested, and the sandstorm allowed the enemy to close within a few feet of the squadron before being identified. Charlie Troop, who had seen most of the fighting in As Samawah, was

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<sup>48</sup> Fontenot et al., *On Point*, 133, 203; Daniel R. Kudwig, “Fighting Blind: Why US Army Divisions Need a Dedicated Reconnaissance and Security Force” (Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2017), 12.

to the rear of the squadron guarding trains and moved to establish security on Objective Floyd.<sup>49</sup>

Charlie Troop was engaged again on Objective Floyd. At this point in the operation the squadron was spread out over 30 km with intermittent radio communication. Fighting continued throughout the night as the squadron ground forces fought through intense resistance using CAS from Air Force aircraft still able to employ precision munitions despite the sandstorm. Bravo Troop started fighting its way north towards Alpha Troop when they were ambushed at close range costing the troop two tanks that took direct hits to the turrets. On Objective Floyd, Charlie Troop was engaged in such heavy fighting that they requested reinforcements. 1-64 Armor Battalion from the 2nd BCT responded moving from Objective Rams in the west arriving after nightfall to relieve Charlie, and then continued north to assist Bravo. Fighting around An Najaf continued throughout the 26th as night fell and elements of 2-69 Armor Battallion from the 1st BCT moved from Objective Jenkins in the north to reinforce Alpha Troop east of An Najaf. By 27 March the situation in An Najaf was deemed stabilized, and the division made the decision to leave 3-7 CAV in place. At noon, after 120 hours of continuous fighting, 3-7 CAV was relieved and withdrew to refit.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Fontenot et al., *On Point*, 203.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 203, 207-208.

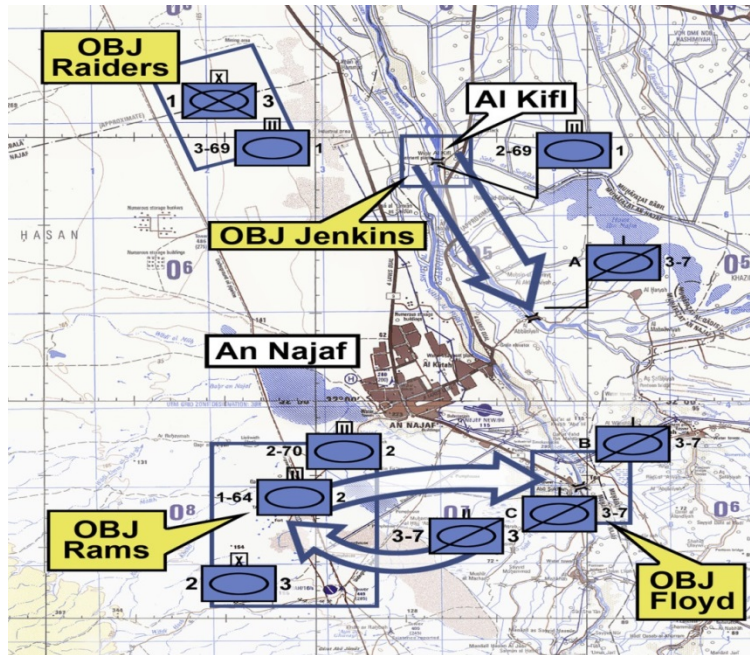


Figure 6. Battle of An Najaf, March 25-27 2003

Source: Gregory Fontenot, E. J. Degen, and David Tohn, *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004), 207.

The 3rd ID was allotted a few days to conduct resupply, and by 30 March the division renewed its move north closing the distance with Baghdad. The division was maneuvering towards Al Hindiyah, which was designated as Objective Murray. The attack on Objective Murray was part of a deception to make the enemy reposition forces. V Corps believed that the majority of the Republican Guard was in and around Baghdad, and the corps wanted to draw them out for a fight. The 2nd BCT led the attack on Objective Murray while 3-7 CAV moved west of 2nd BCT to guard the division's western flank. The attack on Objective Murray lasted until 1 April and was successful in

fixing enemy forces east of the Euphrates River allowing the 1st and 3rd BCTs to maneuver around and seize the Karbala Gap securing the attack route into Baghdad.<sup>51</sup>

Simultaneous to the attack on Objective Murray, the 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions were back south conducting attacks in As Samawah and An Najaf effectively cleaning up the two towns still demonstrating stiff resistance. These simultaneous attacks had offset the Iraqis causing them to commit troops in multiple directions. The Karbala Gap was key terrain offering the fastest approach to Baghdad. The Iraqis were aware of this and deployed their Medina Division to defend the gap, but the reallocation of forces to deal with the attacks in the south left the gap lightly defended. Predicting that the breach through the Karbala Gap was supposed to be some of the toughest resistance, 3rd ID led the attack with its 3rd BCT instead of 3-7 CAV. The 3rd and 1st BCTs were successful in establishing a foothold in and around the gap allowing 3-7 CAV to pass. At 0845 on 2 April, the squadron moved through the gap to establish a screen along the division's northern flank. The screen was designed to defend the division against an anticipated counterattack from the Hammurabi Division and allow the rest of the division to seize multiple objectives to support the eventual cordon of Baghdad.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Fontenot et al., *On Point*, 261-264.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 286-287.

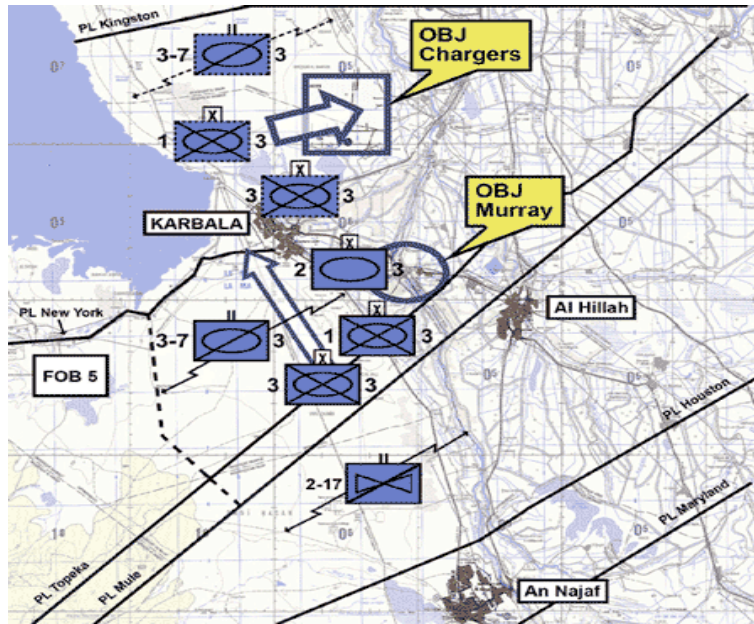


Figure 7. Breach at Karbala Gap, 2-3 April 2003

Source: Gregory Fontenot, E. J. Degen, and David Tohn, *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004), 286.

Exploiting the rapid success of operations thus far, 3rd ID pressed their attack towards Baghdad. Objectives to the west were secured by the 1st and 2nd BCTs, and 3rd ID began to attack towards the northern approaches into the city on 3 April. 3-7 CAV moved to establish a guard position on the intersection of Highways 1 and 10 in vicinity of Objective Montgomery in response to Iraqi forces beginning to reposition south. The squadron was to protect the division's northern and western flanks as the BCTs maneuvered to attack and seize the Baghdad Airport. True to the analysis of V Corps, elements of the Hammurabi Division closed in on the 3-7 CAV position. In the early morning hours of 4 April, the squadron employed direct fires, CAS, and artillery fires in an effort to destroy a steady stream of Iraqi vehicles attempting to counterattack against

3rd ID units seizing the airport. As fighting subsided, Air Force aircraft relayed to the squadron that a battalion-size tank formation had been observed north of Highway 10. Multiple Air Force aircraft dropped munitions in the area, and then a battery of artillery engaged the target area. Unable to confirm the effects of these engagements, Alpha Troop moved to assess the status of the enemy tank battalion to discover that 16 unharmed T-72 tanks occupied battle positions along a berm. Upon visual identification of the Iraqi tanks, Alpha Troop engaged the Iraqi positions. The Iraqi position responded with mortar, artillery fire, and utilized air defense artillery guns as direct fire weapons. Alpha Troop broke contact after calling for suppressive fires from their artillery. Within 15 minutes the troop along with artillery support had destroyed a Republican Guard battalion.<sup>53</sup>

For the remainder of the offensive 3-7 CAV maintained its guard position protecting the division's northwestern flank as 3rd ID entered downtown Baghdad. By 10 April 2003 the major fighting in and around Baghdad subsided into small attacks, but victory was achieved by V Corps and 3rd ID. The 3rd ID division cavalry squadron saw some of the most intense fighting against a determined enemy. They effectively synchronized their capabilities to close with and engage the enemy. The successful operations executed by 3-7 CAV in 2003 echoed many of the same operations 1-4 CAV executed in 1991. During the march north to Baghdad, 3-7 CAV was effective in shaping the battlefield for both 3rd ID and V Corps. Most of the engagements that 3-7 CAV was involved in essentially served as information gathering especially when the squadron was

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<sup>53</sup> Kudwig, "Fighting Blind: Why US Army Divisions Need a Dedicated Reconnaissance and Security Force," 12; Fontenot et al., *On Point*, 310-311.

engaged in urban areas. The squadron was able to determine the threat level that existed in and around the cities along the route allowing the division or corps to determine the need to commit further combat elements. The squadron was essential in setting conditions for the BCTs within the division by providing security along the flanks or making initial contact to pass along follow on forces. The task organization of the L-series squadron that 3-7 CAV went to war with gave the division an adaptable and survivable force in a constant changing environment that provided critical information, time and space for the higher command

### Operation Iraqi Freedom II

As 3rd ID was making its historical attack north to Baghdad, the elements of 1st ID that made up ARFOR-T were breaking down established bases and redeploying back to Germany. The mission to receive, stage, and move forces from Turkey into Iraq had been cancelled just before the invasion had begun. 1-4 CAV was to be a part of that mission, but the main body never left Germany. The Big Red One and 1-4 CAV awaited their future mission. By the summer of 2003 the division received a warning order that they would be deploying to Iraq sometime in early 2004. It was unknown exactly when the division was to go, but they were told to get ready. The squadron engaged in a high optempo of training to include multiple tank gunnery rotations and force on force training in Hohenfels, Germany. Along with force on force training, the squadron executed urban operations with simulated Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). 1-4 CAV arrived in Kuwait in



February 2004 where the squadron received further training on convoy security and counter improvised explosive device (IED) training from Special Operations trainers.<sup>54</sup>

Troopers within 1-4 CAV understood they were not going to be assigned a cavalry mission based on the current situation in Iraq even though most of their home station training was focused on conducting a zone reconnaissance to gather information for division. Planners with 1st ID headquarters were still unsure on how they were going to employ the squadron. There was talk of using the whole squadron as a quick reaction force (QRF) for the division. This plan came off the table as it didn't make sense and for a cavalry unit it violated the doctrinal fundamental of not holding reconnaissance assets in reserve. The division planners finally informed the squadron staff that the squadron was going to assume control of a battle space. On 28 February 2004, the squadron crossed into Iraq still not fully understanding what tasks were expected of them.<sup>55</sup>

Conventional combat in Iraq had ended as declared by President Bush on 1 May 2003; however, the operational environment that was post-Saddam was beginning to quickly evolve and shaped the environment that 1-4 CAV was going operate in. The U.S. had toppled the regime of Saddam Hussein and destroyed the Iraqi Army effectively neutralizing any significant Iraqi resistance. As victory was being declared, coalition forces began transitioning to stability operations and the U.S. began analyzing the potential for withdrawing forces while turning off units that were preparing to deploy. The reality that the Saddam regime had maintained control over the Iraqi populace began

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<sup>54</sup> Hanson interview; Bell interview.

<sup>55</sup> Hanson interview; Bell interview; Rafael Colon Hernandez, correspondence with author, 27 December 2018.

to show in the aftermath of the regime's downfall as looting, destruction, and all-around lawlessness began to take shape. Political, religious, and ethnic conflicts that had been previously suppressed began to rise with some Baathist Party loyalists beginning to lead what was starting to appear to be an insurgency in the summer months of 2003.

Throughout the summer and late into the fall of 2003 the rising insurgency in Iraq had begun targeting coalition forces with attacks doubling each month reaching a recorded 1,000 attacks by November 2003 including the downing of a Chinook helicopter on 2 November killing 16 US soldiers and wounding 20 others. The rise in attacks on coalition forces, sectarian violence, and the rise of resistance figure heads such as Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr could not hold back the pressure from Washington along with Iraqi politicians to transfer sovereignty to establish an Iraqi led government. In October 2003, President Bush established a deadline of 30 June 2004 to hand over full political authority to the Iraqis.<sup>56</sup>

In February 2004, III Corps headquarters with their divisions began taking over for V Corps and their divisions. The 1st Infantry Division stood up as Task Force Danger and assumed control of the Sunni heartland from the 4th Infantry Division.<sup>57</sup> In early March 2004, 1-4 CAV stood up as Task Force Saber with its three ground troops, two air troops, and a field artillery battery from the North Carolina National Guard. In comparison to square kilometers, the squadron assumed control of an area of operations

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<sup>56</sup> Donald P. Wright, Timothy Reese, and the Contemporary Operations Study Team, *On Point II: Transition to the New Campaign: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2008), 25-36.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

(AO) the size of Delaware northwest of Baghdad. The AO was bounded in the North by the Hammerin Mountains, to the west along the Tigris River, around Samarra, to the south by a bend in the Tigris River near Ad Duliya, and in the east by an unknown river. The AO consisted of four major towns including Tikrit East, Ad Dawr, Ad Duluiya, and Al Mutasam. The squadron also owned the battle space around the city of Samarra, but not the city itself. The AO was so large that the squadron had to divide its headquarters. The squadron main headquarters along with Headquarters Troop, Alpha Troop, Bravo Troop, and the two air troops established Forward Operating Base (FOB) Mackenzie near Ad Duluiya. The squadron executive officer (XO) with Charlie Troop and the attached field artillery battery established FOB Wilson in Tikrit East.<sup>58</sup>

The squadron assumed control of its AO from 4th ID as did the rest of the 1st ID units under Task Force Danger. The squadron conducted what is known as a left seat, right seat ride in which the 4th ID unit took the squadron units around the AO to describe the AO and how 4th ID had operated. The 4th ID units handing over the AO were the units that were originally supposed to be a part of the invasion of Iraq coming through Turkey. Due to the inability to send U.S. forces into Iraq from Turkey, 4th ID was rerouted through Kuwait. By the time they arrived in Iraq the major fighting was over, and the coalition forces were transitioning to stability operations. The initial rise of an insurgency presented the 4th ID units with a confusing scenario on how to react. The area they were handing over to 1-4 CAV was not their responsibility during their entire deployment. Some of the 4th ID units were in Baghdad previously and then transitioned

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<sup>58</sup> Scott Synowiez, correspondence with the author, 3 January, 2019; Hanson interview.

to the Sunni Heartland for a short period of time before handing it over to 1st ID. The 4th ID units did not fully understand the AO nor did they comprehend the rising threat to include the new trend of the IED.<sup>59</sup>

Prior to their deployment to Iraq, the squadron had heard enough reports coming in from theater to understand they were not going to be conducting a cavalry mission. However, they were unprepared for the fight they entered immediately upon coming into their AO. 1-4 CAV deployed to Iraq at a time of transition. Saddam Hussein was captured months prior in December 2003, which led many to believe would help ease tensions throughout the country by ending the idea of a Baath party resurgence. Politically the US and Iraq were making progress in the initial process of standing up a new government. As 1-4 CAV came into country, they understood their overall mission would consist of security that supported the transition of government. The rules of engagement (ROE) were more restrictive as operations transitioned to a security focus. The restrictive ROE helped to emphasize the perception that US forces were present to help rebuild a free Iraq. Winning hearts and minds became the reoccurring theme and remained the theme throughout OIF II and beyond. This became difficult for 1-4 CAV as they entered the Sunni heartland during the initial stages of a Sunni led insurgency uprising across the country.<sup>60</sup>

The squadron occupied the AO and engaged in a series of area reconnaissance and route reconnaissance missions throughout the AO mapping out their new home and

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<sup>59</sup> Bell interview.

<sup>60</sup> Wright and Reese, *On Point II*, 35-38; Bell interview.

identifying key areas. The squadron was used as an economy of force and essentially treated as a BCT by 1st ID as the squadron reported directly to the division commander. All the squadron ground troops were assigned their own pieces of the squadron AO to focus on security. Bravo Troop was responsible for a portion of the AO, but also had the task of serving as a QRF for the division headquarters typically responding to support light infantry units needing tank support. The focus for 1-4 CAV became area security and most operations centered on the population centers within the AO. The population centers became the focus for key leader engagements (KLE) in which US military leadership met with local leaders within their AO to discuss issues pertaining to security and infrastructure. These meetings helped US leaders in determining the allocation of resources to their AO to enable efforts to rebuild the country. Unfortunately, as with most areas throughout Iraq, the population centers served as strongholds for insurgent groups. In and around the larger towns within the AO is where troopers received contact. Traffic control points (TCP) or checkpoints established by the squadron typically drew an attack from drive by small arms fire, hit and run RPG attacks, and mortar fire. The month of April 2004 proved to be challenging as the growing insurgency increased their efforts in conducting coordinated attacks against coalition forces. Within the 1-4 CAV AO, the attacks were constant, and the squadron lost three troopers in the first week of April.<sup>61</sup>

The squadron brought with it an abundance of combat power as they were still task organized as an L-series squadron similar to 3-7 CAV during the invasion. However, 1-4 CAV was not fighting Republican Guard units and never anticipated fighting

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<sup>61</sup> Bell interview; Synowiez correspondence; Hernandez correspondence.

anything that came close to a near peer threat. For most of the missions, the squadron left its tanks parked at FOB Mackenzie. Instead they patrolled the AO with their Bradleys or used HMMWVs that had little to no additional armor. Early in the deployment the use of tanks was limited since most operations were conducted in and around the major cities. It was difficult to travel through urban areas without damaging property, which resulted in squadron leaders having to negotiate with locals and pay for damages. The ROE also restricted the use of the 120mm main gun on the Abrams unless there was a threat that warranted its use, and even then the squadron commander had to approve the engagement. The tanks were primarily used for TCPs outside of the cities, and this became a tactic to draw out enemy fighters into the open as well as determine the areas they were hiding. Engagements were typically conducted from the Bradleys or scout weapons team helicopters quickly responded to ground troops requesting assistance.<sup>62</sup>

Throughout Iraq the rising Sunni led insurgency along with Shia militias had finally convinced coalition forces that the threat needed to be dealt with. Influential insurgent leaders like Shia leader Muqtada al-Sadar led coordinated attacks against coalition forces and Iraqi government officials. Coalition forces responded with coordinated operations in cities outside of Baghdad such as Fallujah and Sadr City. These operations proved to be a temporary success at a high cost. The insurgents proved in these fights that they were more tactically skilled and more willing to resist than US military leaders anticipated. Within the Sunni Triangle, 1-4 CAV remained focused on overall security by starting to identify insurgent leaders and groups within the AO. The

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<sup>62</sup> Bell interview; Synowiez correspondence; Hanson interview.

squadron worked with special operations forces working in the AO or conducted squadron operations to target high value targets to kill or capture.<sup>63</sup>

The city of Samarra was located in the Salah ad Din province along the Tigris River with a population of approximately 200,000 people. The city was predominantly a Sunni Arab populated city, but also had a significant population of Shia Muslims. Coalition forces arrived in the city in late 2003 to discover a contest over control of the city amongst emerging insurgent, criminal, and tribal groups. Coalition forces attempted to win over the local populace with reconstruction and civic projects. Unfortunately, the coalition was beginning to contend with something they did not understand, but they did understand that the increase in insurgent power needed to be addressed. In December 2003, 4th ID committed its 3rd BCT to go into Samarra to combat the insurgency. The brigade executed Operation Ivy Blizzard to eliminate the insurgency, and then transition authority over to the newly organized ISF. Unfortunately, the insurgent leaders within the city received warning of the operation allowing them to escape prior to the start of the operation. 3rd BCT was redirected to address requirements elsewhere in January 2004 leaving a small contingent of forces in Samarra. The insurgency returned and by February 2004 prior to 1st ID assuming control of the AO, the city of Samarra returned to a state of insurgency.<sup>64</sup>

In April 2004, as attacks against coalition forces increased throughout the country, 1st ID launched a battalion size offensive into Samarra to uproot the insurgency.

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<sup>63</sup> Wright and Reese, *On Point II*, 39; Synowiez correspondence.

<sup>64</sup> Wright and Reese, *On Point II*, 338.

The operation achieved minimal success but demonstrated to 1st ID that the insurgency foothold within the city was stronger than anticipated. Conditions in the city deteriorated rapidly in the following months as local government officials resigned to be replaced by those sympathetic to the Sunni Arab insurgency and ISF forces in the city quickly disappeared. By July 2004 the city became a full-blown insurgent stronghold as die hard Baathists and al- Qaeda operatives poured into the city. The increase in coordinated attacks against US forces and ISF came to a boiling point for the 1st ID commander.<sup>65</sup>

Major General John Batiste, commander of 1st ID, sought a permanent solution to the insurgency problem within the AO with all eyes focused on Samarra as the key issue. The division began planning Operation Baton Rouge, which was to be a brigade-size combined arms operation conducted in four phases to reestablish order in Samarra. The division gave the task to its 2nd BCT and attached 1-4 CAV to the brigade. Phase I of the operation was reconnaissance and preparation aimed at identifying and attacking insurgent groups in and around the city to disrupt enemy organizations allowing the US to help reestablish the local government. Phase II was the isolation of the city enabling Phase III, search and attack. MG Batiste hoped 2nd BCT was not going to have to resort to the large-scale combined-arms assault that made up phases II and III. His overall goal was that operations in Phase I set conditions enough that the division could move into Phase IV. The last phase was designed to support reconstruction projects, establishment of a legitimate government, and the placement of trained ISF in the city.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Wright and Reese, *On Point II*, 338-339.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.



In late July 2004 1st ID had 2nd BCT initiate Phase I of Operation Baton Rouge. The brigade launched their own operations in August called Cajun Mousetrap I, II, and III. The brigade employed their organic mechanized battalion task forces into the city with support from attack helicopters and CAS. The attacks were few and limited not intended to hold areas of the city. The attacks were in line with the overall concept of Phase I of the operation, which was reconnaissance. The attacks allowed the brigade to determine where the insurgents were coming from and how they defended the city. The site of US mechanized forces moving into the city was enough to draw some insurgents out to fight. Between 13 and 15 August the brigade killed 45 insurgents. MG Batiste viewed the brigade's operations as successful prompting the initiation of Phase IV and soon 1st ID began their campaign to rebuild Samarra.<sup>67</sup>

By September the division realized their decision to transition to Phase IV was a premature decision. At midnight on 1 October, the 2nd BCT with two mechanized infantry battalions, two light infantry battalions, one armor battalion, and 1-4 CAV initiated the execution of Phase III of Baton Rouge to isolate the city. 1-4 CAV cordoned off the city by establishing blocking positions on the north, northeast, and southeast edges of the city after the two mechanized infantry battalions and the armor battalion attacked into the city from different directions. The squadron prevented the enemy from escaping the city or trying to move around behind the attacking battalions. The intent of this operation meant the ROE for the US was temporarily less restrictive than what they were used to. The 2nd BCT along with 1-4 CAV were met with small arms fire, RPG attacks,

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<sup>67</sup> Wright and Reese, *On Point II*, 340-341.

and a series of IEDs. The enemy attacked in small groups, but the fighting was the heaviest in the southeast portion of the city in vicinity of one of the blocking positions established by the squadron. Insurgents were moving in and out of buildings to engage US forces, which the squadron responded by firing tank rounds into the building. Eventually, 2nd BCT requested air support from an AC-130 gunship. By dawn the next morning, the brigade commander had committed the light infantry battalions with support from six ISF battalions. After three days of fighting, the brigade regained control of the city suffering one soldier killed and eight more wounded. 1-4 CAV did not sustain any casualties and assisted in the initial clean up as 2nd BCT resumed Phase IV operations to ultimately restore the local government.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 342-342; SGT Jason Bell, interview by Daniel Van Wey, January 25, 2006; Kirby Hanson, interview by author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, January 29, 2019.

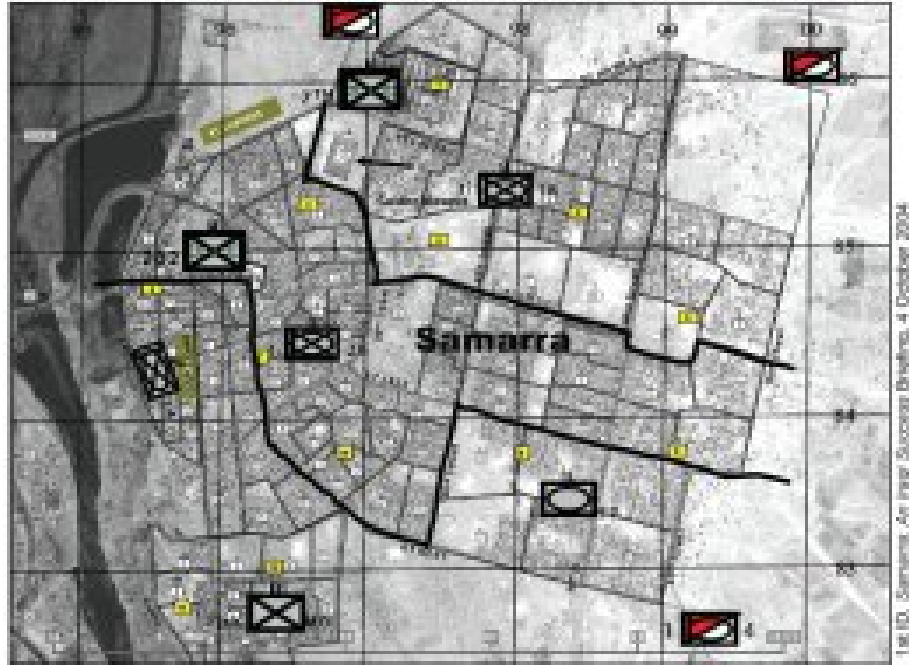


Figure 7B. Phase IV, 030800C-033300C OCT04

Figure 8. Operation Baton Rouge, 1 October 2004

Source: Donald P. Wright and Timothy Reese, *On Point II: Transition to the New Campaign: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2008), 340.

The battle for Samarra was the biggest combined arms operation that the squadron participated in throughout the whole deployment. The remainder of the deployment was focused on supporting the coalition's overall goal of rebuilding. The squadron participated in security operations in June when the coalition transitioned power to the Iraqi Provisional Government. The squadron was also tasked with security for the historical national elections in January 2005. The feeling amongst the squadron after Samarra was to see the elections through so everyone could go home. The squadron continued to deal with attacks throughout the AO for the remainder of the deployment

especially prior to the elections. They also continued conducting a multitude of other operations to include civil affairs and training the ISF.<sup>69</sup>

The squadron executed a variety of tasks during their one year deployment in support of OIF II. As a division cavalry squadron, 1-4 CAV demonstrated their ability to adapt to different mission sets. The combat power they possessed allowed them to serve as battle space owners and operate as an economy force. Despite not fully understanding the mission they assumed and receiving limited training tailored to the current situation in Iraq, the troopers of 1-4 CAV demonstrated adaptability to accomplish the mission. 1-4 CAV lost a total of 11 personnel during their deployment. Nine soldiers were killed as a result of the attacks seen throughout the AO. One soldier was killed in a vehicle accident. The squadron had a civilian Abrams tank technician assigned to them that was killed during a mortar attack on FOB Mackenzie.<sup>70</sup>

Outside of Iraq the Army was moving towards modularity, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. Rumors began rotating around the squadron during the deployment about a possible organizational change. The squadron was never formally briefed on the new modularity model being developed. Late during the deployment, prior to Christmas in December 2004, it was revealed to the squadron that changes were coming in regard to division cavalry. The squadron was made aware that the division cavalry squadrons were going away to be replaced by some type of cavalry unit, but the current L-series structure was going away. The first step in this change was that the

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<sup>69</sup> Synowiez correspondence.

<sup>70</sup> Hanson interview.

squadron was going to lose their air troops. Guidance was issued that some of the squadron OH-58 Kiowa helicopters were to remain in Iraq for other units to assume control of while the rest were to be turned in back in Kuwait. The squadron also left most of its tanks in Iraq for the same reason.<sup>71</sup>

1-4 CAV along with the rest of the 1st Infantry Division's Task Force Danger began redeploying back to Germany in February 2005. The entire division was returning home to an unknown as modularity was sweeping across the Army. By the middle of March 2005, the entire division redeployed back to Germany. The summer of 2005 was a period of transitions as commanders changed command and units began to reorganize. On June 15, 2005 the 1-4 CAV air troops of Delta, Echo, and Foxtrot officially inactivated. The scout weapons teams that had a lineage of providing forward reconnaissance in Desert Storm and brought a sense of relief to troopers on the streets of the Sunni Triangle as Kiowas flew in low and fast to engage targets were officially no more. The organization officially lost its tanks when they left them in Iraq. The squadron acquired tanks in Desert Storm as a result of an over allocation to the division. The ability to employ tanks forward as demonstrated by 1-4 CAV in Desert Storm was a significant factor in helping to convince the Army to establish the L-series squadron set. The reintegration of tanks into the heavy division cavalry squadron after Desert Storm allowed 3-7 CAV to protect 3rd ID as the division rapidly marched north to Baghdad in March 2003. 1-4 CAV initially converted to a HMMWV and Bradley configuration that summer. This configuration lasted for a few months, and by December 2005 the squadron

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<sup>71</sup> Hanson interview.

was a light squadron. 1-4 CAV in Germany was converted to 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry Regiment and became the brigade reconnaissance squadron for the 173rd Airborne Brigade. “There’s great camaraderie between the air and ground cavalry troops in this unit. Anyone who has ever been with a division cavalry unit feels like this is the end of an era. On the other hand, everybody realizes the need to go through this change to make the Army a more effective fighting force in the years to come.” By 2006 the division cavalry squadrons were a thing of the past.<sup>72</sup>

### Modularity and Counterinsurgency

Modularity was the Army’s solution to the problem of task organizing units from divisions and deploying them to different regions around the globe to meet the demands of the evolving security environment. This left divisions lacking the required combat power to effectively conduct their overall missions if called upon to do so. Combat operations in Iraq validated the need for a rapidly deployable force with a host of capabilities. The Brigade Combat Team structure became the force structure model for the Army. The origins and overall process of modularity will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter, but it is important to understand that the process of modularity began after the invasion of Iraq and continued as OIF developed into a complex counterinsurgency. Cavalry organizations underwent significant organizational changes

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<sup>72</sup> Hanson interview; Joe Alger, “1-4 CAV Air Troops to Inactivate Following OIF II,” *1st Infantry Division News*, May 8, 2007, accessed 10 February 2019, <http://www.riley.army.mil/Website-Moved/Article-Display/Article/469631/1-4-cav-air-troops-to-inactivate-following-oif-ii/>.

as they and the rest of the Army were trying to figure out how to fight an unfamiliar type of war.

By the end of 2005 and into 2006, the modularization of the entire Army was on glide path to be complete by 2007. A drawdown of US forces in Europe triggered multiple division level realignments to include 1st ID. The 1st ID stood down in Germany and in its place arose parts of the 173rd Airborne Brigade. In August 2006, the 1st ID returned to Fort Riley where it was to complete its transformation to the new modular structure of four BCTs. Three of the division's BCTs were at Fort Riley (1st HBCT, 2nd HBCT, and 4th IBCT) and the fourth (3rd IBCT) was located at Fort Knox. As a part of modularization, each BCT has its own organic cavalry squadron. 1st HBCT initially did not convert to a full HBCT because it was tasked to serve as the trainers for the Army's new Transition Teams that were designed to train Iraqi security forces. 2nd HBCT stood up with 5-4 CAV as its organic cavalry squadron and 3rd IBCT stood up with 6-4 CAV. Initially 4th IBCT stood up with 2-4 CAV, but in 2007 2-4 CAV was reflagged as 1-4 CAV.<sup>73</sup>

The modularization of the Army impacted not only the overall structure of the Army, but more specifically the structure of each BCT. The HBCTs were structured with two combined arms battalions and a RSTA cavalry squadron, also known as an Armored Reconnaissance Squadron (ARS), made up of three reconnaissance troops of HMMWVs and CFVs. The IBCTs were similar in that they had two infantry battalions and a RSTA squadron of two reconnaissance troops with HMMWVs and a troop of dismounted

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<sup>73</sup> Society of the 1st Infantry Division, "History"; Global Security, "1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment: Quarterhorse."

infantry. 1-4 CAV now serving as the cavalry squadron for 4th IBCT, 1st ID meant they stood up as a light RSTA squadron. The overall design concept for the light RSTA squadron was for reconnaissance and information collection. 1-4 CAV operated off HMMWVs equipped with the LRAS3 systems and small UAV systems such as the RAVEN for long distance surveillance. Each reconnaissance troop is equipped with a combination of TOW missile launchers, .50 caliber machine guns, MK-19 grenade launchers, and M240B machine guns. The organizational design of the RSTA squadrons will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter, but overall the light RSTA was designed to gather information and not to fight for information.

One of the significant issues that impacted the progress of Army organizations to complete the modular transformation was the continuous rotation of units in and out of Iraq. Units had little time to convert to the new structure, train their soldiers on their new equipment, and prepare to deploy to Iraq for a year or more. The security situation in Iraq remained unstable with the US failing to achieve the objectives of economic development, governance, communicating, and security lines of operation according to General George Casey Jr. upon his assessment of the situation in Iraq at the end of 2006 as the commander of Multi-National Forces-Iraq (MNC-I).<sup>74</sup> The need for a continuous US presence was high resulting in a routine rotation of BCTs into Iraq.

The experiences in Iraq following the initial invasion in 2003 and into 2004 could not hide the fact that US forces were fighting a full-blown insurgency and even worse was the fact that they were receiving on the job training in how to conduct

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<sup>74</sup> Nicholas Schlosser, *The Surge: 2007-2008* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History United States Army, 2017), 7.



counterinsurgency operations. “Without relying on doctrine or experience, US Army units transitioned to a practice of full spectrum operations that, by the end of 2003, followed many well-established principles of counterinsurgency warfare.”<sup>75</sup> The emergence of an organized and lethal insurgency following a war of liberation came as a surprise to US Government officials and military leaders alike.<sup>76</sup> The reality of the war being fought left commanders and soldiers on the ground confused as they reacted to the unexpected threat. This was the case for LTC Chevallier and 1-4 CAV as he described in an *Army* magazine article following the squadron’s OIF II tour:

“I don’t think we came in with leaders fully prepared to fight counterinsurgency,” Lt. Col. Jim Chevallier, commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron of the 4<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment in the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, told *Army* magazine much later, after his 2004-5 tour of duty was concluded. “I don’t think we understood what the enemy’s basic scheme of maneuver was.” So, he said, “until you understand counterinsurgency, it’s difficult to tell what success is. If I had to do it all over again, I’d train my leaders more on counterinsurgency operations.”<sup>77</sup>

In 2005 Lieutenant General David Petraeus took command of the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, KS where he spearheaded initiatives to combat the growing insurgency through education, training, and doctrine.<sup>78</sup> The most important output of his initiatives was the publishing of *Field Manual 3-24 Counterinsurgency* in December

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<sup>75</sup> Wright and Reese, *On Point II*, 87.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Thomas E. Ricks, *FIASCO: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York, NY: The Penguin Press, 2006), 323.

<sup>78</sup> Schlosser, *The Surge*, 23-24.

2006. This was the first field manual published by the Army in 20 years that deliberately addressed counterinsurgency operations.<sup>79</sup>

### OIF V: The Surge

The US government wanted to focus on transitioning security and governance to the Iraqis; therefore, US military efforts were focused on supporting the ISF and providing security to help support the new Iraqi government elected in January 2005 in which 1-4 CAV had participated in providing security for the elections. As the campaign in Iraq moved into 2006, the US efforts to rebuild Iraq into a self-sustaining democratic state continued to meet resistance from an ever-growing insurgency plaguing the country. The Iraqi security forces were proving to be both unable and unwilling to stand up to the threat from the sectarian violence between Sunni insurgent groups, Shi'ite militias, and al-Qaeda in Iraq. This ongoing violence effectively crippled the Iraqi capital city of Baghdad with a newly elected Iraqi government fragmented and unable to assert any authority. General Casey, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and some members of Congress believed in the strategy of transition and that putting the Iraqis in the lead was the solution to resolving the current security situation. They did not feel that an increase in American presence was necessary; however, President Bush saw the situation as more dire. President Bush viewed the deployment of more US troops as a last chance to restore security and provide the Iraqi government time and space to secure itself. In January 2007, President Bush ordered the deployment of five Army brigades to reinforce

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<sup>79</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006), Foreword.

forces in Iraq and appointed General David Petraeus as the new commander of forces in Iraq. This began the Iraqi surge campaign also referred to as “The Surge”.<sup>80</sup>

Amongst the five Army brigades designated to deploy as part of the surge campaign was the newly formed 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division. The five brigades called upon to deploy all recently made the transformation to the modular structure and the surge campaign was essentially to be the first test in combat for the Army’s new modular force. Part of the 4th BCT, 1st ID included the newly stood up 1-4 CAV RSTA squadron under the command of an infantry officer, LTC James Crider. In the past it was typical to see an armor officer in command of a cavalry formation because they had previous training in cavalry operations; however, a trend in the new modular infantry BCTs was to have light infantry battalion commanders in command of the maneuver units. Branch designation aside, LTC Crider had a challenge lying ahead of him in that he now commanded a newly formed light cavalry squadron under orders to deploy to Iraq as a part of a new strategy to quell the ongoing violence in Iraq.

The strategy of the surge shifted the military focus from transition of governance to the overall protection of the Iraqi populace who were suffering significant casualties as a result of ongoing sectarian violence.<sup>81</sup> Iraqi civilian deaths were at an all-time high by the summer of 2006 with almost 3,000 civilian casualties a month as a result of the violence.<sup>82</sup> The US military, ISF, and now Iraqi civilians became targets of opportunity

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<sup>80</sup> Schlosser, *The Surge*, 7-8.

<sup>81</sup> Thomas Sills, “Counterinsurgency Operations in Baghdad: The Actions of 1-4 Cavalry in the East Rashid Security District,” *Military Review* (May-June 2009): 97.

<sup>82</sup> Schlosser, *The Surge: 2007-2008*, 7.

for a variety of conflicting groups. “By 2007 what Americans called the “Iraq War” was actually a series of interconnected, overlapping conflicts that included an anticoalition insurgency, a sectarian civil war between Sunnis and Shi’ites, and fighting within the Sunni and Shi’ite communities.”<sup>83</sup> The sectarian violence was more so prevalent in the capital city of Baghdad where one-quarter of the Iraqi population resided; therefore, the capital city became the main effort for the new surge campaign.

In November 2006, the 1st Cavalry Division headquarters under Major General Joseph Fil arrived in Baghdad to assume command of the Multi-National Division-Baghdad (MND-B) headquarters. Major General Fil was to receive two of the five incoming surge brigades to employ in the city while the other three brigades were to be employed in the surrounding areas under different headquarters. In January 2007 the two surge brigades given to MND-B were the 2nd BCT, 82nd Airborne Division and the 4th BCT, 1st Infantry Division. The addition of the two surge brigades brought the total strength of the 1st Cavalry Division to five total brigades that also included 2nd BCT, 1st Cavalry Division, 2nd BCT, 1st Infantry Division, and 2nd BCT, 2nd Infantry Division. The 3rd BCT, 2nd Infantry Division served a dual mission as a quick reaction strike force for MND-B and as the reserve for MNC-I.<sup>84</sup> Each brigade was assigned a section of the city that they were to be responsible for. 4th Brigade took up position in the East and West Rashid security districts.<sup>85</sup> In February 2007, LTC Crider and 1-4 CAV were

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<sup>83</sup> Schlosser, *The Surge: 2007-2008*, 24.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>85</sup> Sills, “Counterinsurgency Operations in Baghdad,” 97.

initially positioned in East Rashid in vicinity of the neighborhoods of Al Hadr, Saha, and Abu T'Shir. 1-4 CAV was ordered to relocate north to reinforce 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry in Doura.<sup>86</sup> Doura was viewed at the time as the most violent and contested neighborhood in the Rashid District. Unoccupied by coalition forces until 2007, Doura became a safe haven for Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) to freely gather materials and equipment. Analysis of the area brought LTC Crider to the conclusion that Doura was part of a gateway for the flow of insurgents into the Rashid District and that Doura was a location that AQI was not willing to give up.<sup>87</sup>



Figure 9. Rashid District Overview, 2007

Source: James Crider, "A View From Inside the Surge," *Military Review* (March-April, 2009): 82.

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<sup>86</sup> James Crider, "A View From Inside the Surge," *Military Review* (March-April, 2009): 82.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

The 2-12 Infantry Battalion was a battalion attached to 4th BCT that been the brigade's main effort in Doura with three rifle companies fighting an entrenched AQI insurgent force. In order to effectively expel the insurgent presence, 1-4 CAV was sent to reinforce 2-12 Infantry by assuming control of the eastern part of Doura allowing 2-12 Infantry to focus on the west side.<sup>88</sup> 1-4 CAV was manned with just fewer than 500 soldiers. The squadron was divided into three troops with Alpha and Bravo troops consisting of approximately 80 soldiers each while Charlie troop had 90 with the addition of the mortar platoon which was built from the mortar sections of Alpha and Bravo as the squadron stood up as seen in Figure 10. This provided Charlie troop with a third maneuver element. The squadron was augmented with one National Police battalion and a US national Police Training Team. The National Police battalion had about 300 police on the ground at any given time.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Crider, "A View From Inside the Surge," 82.

<sup>89</sup> 1-4 Cavalry, "After Action Report: 1-4 Cavalry OIF V Counterinsurgency Operations," Baghdad, Iraq, 21 March 2008, Slide 4.

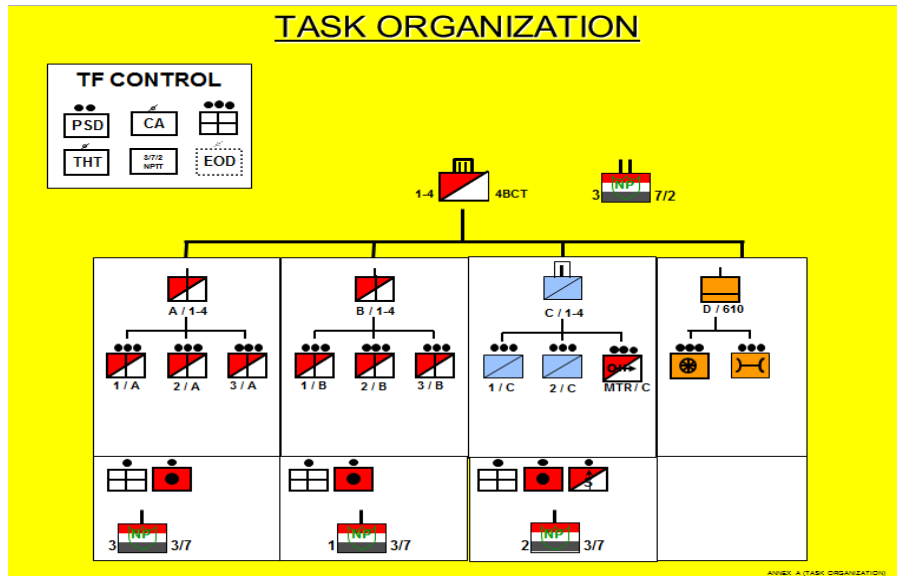


Figure 10. 1-4 CAV Task Organization OIF V

*Source:* 1-4 Cavalry, “After Action Report: 1-4 Cavalry OIF V Counterinsurgency Operations,” Baghdad, Iraq, 21 March 2008, Slide 4.

LTC Crider understood upon the squadron’s arrival to Iraq that they were there to reduce violence and to protect the population while affording the Iraqi government time to focus on political progression. He saw the squadron’s mission as defeating Al Qaeda and neutralizing insurgent and militia groups.<sup>90</sup> Within the first 30 days the squadron was confronted with over 50 enemy initiated attacks, most of which were IED attacks. The squadron had little understanding of the area they were operating in and as to why they

<sup>90</sup> 1-4 Cavalry, “After Action Report,” Slide 3.

were being attacked. They were able to gather little to nothing as far as intelligence from the local populace even though they were there to protect the people.<sup>91</sup>

There were several hurdles that 1-4 CAV had to overcome to secure the population in Doura. LTC Crider and his squadron lacked the knowledge of the strife between the Sunni citizens and the new Shiite Iraqi government. The Sunnis viewed the new government as an organization ultimately sponsored by Iran with the intent of destroying the Sunni people. This fact made it difficult for 1-4 CAV to work with local security forces in the Doura area as the citizens saw the ISF as an extension of the Shiite government. Local citizens refused to provide information on insurgent activity for fear of reprisal from the insurgents making it difficult for the squadron to identify and locate active insurgents. Local government officials often had a variety of complaints or wanted to secure contracts for local projects, but never had actionable intelligence to offer. Locals complained that the squadron was too slow to respond to the few tips that were reported, and LTC Crider acknowledged that they were slow to respond. The squadron had too few soldiers to cover the area they were responsible for. Some locals felt that the US presence was to blame for the insurgency, which caused a greater divide between the squadron and local citizens.<sup>92</sup>

The first initial months for 1-4 CAV were frustrating and costly with at least one soldier killed in a firefight and others wounded in IED attacks. The situation on the

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<sup>91</sup> Jim Crider, "Inside the Surge: One Commander's Lessons in Counterinsurgency," White Paper, Center for a New American Security, Washington, DC, 2009, 7-8.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 8-10.



ground began to turn around for the squadron after LTC Crider implemented several strategies. The first and most important was the implementation of the 24/7 strategy in June 2007 which was 24 hours a day and seven days a week of on the ground presence through patrolling. The squadron employed two mutually supporting platoons in the most populated neighborhoods. This continuous presence paid immediate dividends in that it deterred insurgents from emplacing IEDs along routes. It also provided the squadron the ability to quickly react to situations to gain near perfect situational awareness of events throughout the area of operations. Along with a continuous presence was the construction of concrete barriers along routes to facilitate the flow of people and vehicles through checkpoints allowing the squadron to filter out potential insurgents. Finally, LTC Crider launched Operation Close Encounters in which the squadron interacted with the citizens throughout the area by going into almost every home where people felt safer. This allowed the squadron to build relationships and eventually a network of reliable informants. It also made it difficult for insurgents to target citizens because the squadron interacted with almost the entire populace making it difficult for insurgent groups to determine who was cooperating with the Americans and who wasn't.<sup>93</sup>

A strategy throughout the surge seen across Baghdad was the continued presence of American soldiers inside neighborhoods. Units were moving away from the giant FOBs and occupying smaller, newly constructed outposts located inside of the neighborhoods allowing soldiers to maintain a continuous presence and interact with locals:

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<sup>93</sup> 1-4 Cavalry, "After Action Report," 11.

Lt. Col. James R. Crider, whose 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, operated in southwest Baghdad under the command of 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, deployed “two platoons on the streets 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.” Crider’s soldiers took photos of every military-aged male they encountered and visited every home in their patrol area, speaking to residents to determine who exactly lived in the neighborhood and who was an outsider. The tactic not only helped the battalion to compose a census of its area of operations, but also created a closer connection between local residents and the Americans. Recognizing that the Americans would be maintaining a constant presence in the area, locals felt more comfortable providing information to soldiers, as many were no longer fearful of reprisal attacks should their assistance be discovered by extremists.<sup>94</sup>

The continuous presence of US foot patrols and HMMWV patrols day and night had brought back a sense of security to the Doura neighborhood that had been lacking for some time.

The implementation of the 24/7 strategy and Operation Close Encounters resulted in the number of enemy attacks against 1-4 CAV reduced by half after two months as seen in Figure 11. By the end of September 2007, insurgents in the area had given up on attacking the squadron and turned to a campaign of emplacing smaller IEDs that were more for intimidation than causing damage. This had little to no effects on the achievements that the squadron had accomplished with the locals. This reduction in violence allowed the squadron to focus on empowering the local government, providing new projects for the neighborhoods, and building relationships with the local security forces as more surge units arrived to reinforce the city.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Schlosser, *The Surge*, 44-45.

<sup>95</sup> 1-4 Cavalry, “After Action Report,” Slide 17; Sills, “Counterinsurgency Operations in Baghdad,” 102.

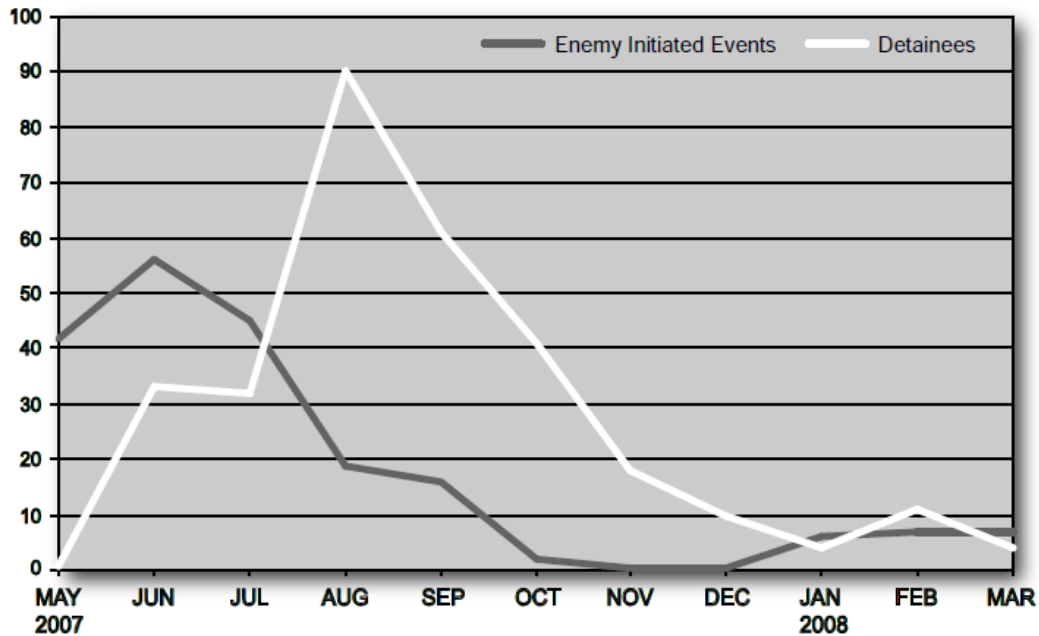


Figure 11. Attacks and AQI detentions by Month in the 1-4 CAV Area of Operations

Source: Thomas Sills, "Counterinsurgency Operations in Baghdad: The Actions of 1-4 Cavalry in the East Rashid Security District," *Military Review* (May-June 2009): 102.

In March 2008, 1-4 CAV redeployed back to Fort Riley, KS after losing nine troopers with several others wounded. At the tactical level, the surge campaign achieved the goal to reestablish security and reduce the threat of the insurgency. LTC Crider admitted later to not fully understanding counterinsurgency at the beginning of the deployment but credited the new *FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency* manual with having effective techniques to conduct counterinsurgency. He wrote after his experience as a squadron commander on the need for leaders to study counterinsurgency and to apply the new counterinsurgency manual.

The surge was a success tactically in that every unit that participated in the campaign essentially served as an infantry unit with one goal to protect the populace by

engaging and destroying insurgent groups. Mounted units like 1-4 CAV and other cavalry organizations designed for standoff did not have that ability in dense urban terrain. 1-4 CAV also had limited time to train as a newly formed light cavalry squadron before being thrust into the surge campaign, but the operations they participated in did not actually require them to be trained on their reconnaissance skills. Unfortunately, most units were untrained in counterinsurgency operations and had to resort back to infantry tactics. The publishing of the counterinsurgency manual and the success of the surge prompted an increase in education and training on counterinsurgency throughout the Army.

### The Final Campaign

Prior to the initiation of the surge campaign, the Army recognized the need to maintain expeditionary forces in both Iraq and Afghanistan. The Army developed a system for managing the training and deployment of its units known as the Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) process. Through this system all Army units, including the reserves, were placed into one of three sequential, cyclical readiness pools. In March 2008, after returning from Iraq, 1-4 CAV fell into the first pool, which was the Reset/Train Force pool. During this phase of ARFORGEN the squadron reconstituted strength by bringing in new personnel and changing out leadership, then they received new or updated equipment to begin training on basic skills. The second pool was the Ready Force pool, which is where units conducted advanced training for specific missions or future missions. This was the period when most units rotated through one of the Army's CTCs. The third pool was the Available Force pool, which was the pool of

units available for deployment around the globe.<sup>96</sup> The process of ARFORGEN provided units predictability by placing them on what was known as a patch chart. Brigades could see up to a year in advance where and when they were to deploy again. Some units knew when and where they were going to deploy next just as they were finishing their current deployment. Coming off of an almost 14-month long combat tour in Iraq, 1-4 CAV was already slated to deploy again sometime in the summer of 2009.

The 4th BCT entered the Ready Force Poll in early 2009 with rumors circulating throughout the brigade of a deployment to Afghanistan that summer and then transitioning to rumors of a return to Iraq. Prior to the brigade's rotation to NTC in May 2009, the brigade was notified they were going to deploy to Iraq. Upon return to Fort Riley from NTC, the brigade was informed that they were going to Iraq as an advise and assist brigade. This was part of the new approach the Army was taking with forces in Iraq. The situation in Iraq was more stable than it had been in years towards the end of 2008 and the role of the American military was to change after the ratification of a status of forces agreement on November 17, 2008 between the Iraqi parliament and the United States. The new agreement called for American troops to pull out of all major Iraqi cities by the summer of 2009 and it also set a glide path for American troops to completely withdraw from Iraq by the end of 2011. Brigades rotating into Iraq were no longer going in as combat brigades in which they were in the lead on all operations but were now assuming the primary role of advising and assisting ISF.

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<sup>96</sup> Schlosser, *The Surge*, 23.

By September 2009, all of 1-4 CAV had arrived in Camp Buehring, Kuwait to stage and prepare to cross into Iraq with the rest of the 4th BCT. While in Kuwait, the squadron was alerted that they were potentially getting detached from 4th BCT for a separate mission somewhere in northern Iraq in support of Multi-National Division-North (MND-N). The planning at the higher headquarters to utilize the squadron elsewhere resulted in the squadron remaining in place in Kuwait as the rest of the 4<sup>th</sup> BCT moved from Kuwait to the Salah al-Din province in Iraq to their new base at COB Speicher in Tikrit. 1-4 CAV was temporarily cut from the MND-N mission planning since the headquarters wanted a heavy cavalry squadron and not a light squadron. By the end of September, the squadron joined the rest of the brigade at COB Speicher where they were to be employed as a battle space owner as they had served as during the surge. The squadron commander, LTC Scott Nelson, was adamant that the squadron was to be used as a cavalry squadron and began reaching out to higher headquarters seeking a mission that was in line with the role of a cavalry squadron. Knowing that the 3rd ID was eventually going to assume command of MND-N, LTC Nelson began communicating with the division G3, COL Jim Crider, to secure a cavalry mission somewhere in northern Iraq.<sup>97</sup>

The insurgency in Iraq had been subdued in major parts of the country such as Baghdad, but pockets of insurgent activity remained heavy in some areas. This was the case in northern Iraq where AQI maintained a strong presence within the city of Mosul in the Ninewa province. In January 2009, the 3rd HBCT, 1st Cavalry Division had assumed

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<sup>97</sup> Scott Nelson, interview by author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, May 19, 2019.

responsibility for operations in and around Mosul in the eastern part of the Ninewa province. There they supported the Provincial Elections by assisting the local ISF with security. The brigade continued to conduct operations with the ISF throughout Mosul to prevent the insurgency from maintaining a foothold inside the city. In June 2009, the new status of forces agreement forced the brigade to relocate outside of the city putting more responsibility for security with the ISF. In August 2009, the western area of the Ninewa province, known as AO West, had previously been occupied by a Marine Corps light reconnaissance unit and now fell under control of 3rd HBCT. Owning the entire Ninewa province resulted in the brigade having to spread out its combat power and unable to effectively oversee the entire area of operations. After leaving Mosul, the primary focus for the brigade, besides advising the ISF, was reacting to border disputes in vicinity of the Syrian and Kurdistan borders. In the west, foreign fighters and terrorists were using the open border to cross into Iraq from Syria. The brigade repositioned their armored reconnaissance squadron, 6-9 CAV, to interdict elements attempting to cross into Iraq from Syria.<sup>98</sup>

In October 2009, 1-4 CAV received the mission to move north to FOB Sykes outside the city of Tal Afar and link up with 6-9 CAV. The squadron was to fall under control of 3<sup>rd</sup> HBCT for 30 days and then return to 4th BCT control. The squadron was to assist 3<sup>rd</sup> HBCT by screening the Syrian border and reinforce 6-9 CAV along with 3-73 CAV to interdict or prevent the movement of foreign fighters into Iraq. 3<sup>rd</sup> HBCT was

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<sup>98</sup> 3rd HBCT, 1st Cavalry Division, "After Action Report: Final Rotation Report of 3HBCT, 1CD OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM 08-10 26 MAR 2008 – 1 DEC 2009," 1 October 2009, 4-5, 39-40.

due to rotate out of the area at the end of 2009 and MND-N needed to fill the security gap along the border until the next brigade took over the area with additional combat power. However, LTC Nelson was convinced that there was a direct correlation between the border crossings along the Syrian border and the flow of materials to AQI in Mosul. He was adamant that the squadron was up to the task of conducting what he considered a traditional cavalry mission by permanently maintaining the screen mission along the border. Through his communication with his predecessor, COL Crider, his request was granted by the new MND-N commander and the area was divided into northern and southern areas of operation with 3-73 CAV in the north and 1-4 CAV assuming control of a battle space equivalent to the size of Rhode Island.<sup>99</sup>

The task organization for 1-4 CAV did not change in that they were a light squadron of two mounted reconnaissance troops and a dismounted infantry troop. The difference during this deployment was that the entire squadron was mounted, and this was necessary for the mission they were given. Due to the lethal threat of IEDs, the US developed a new vehicle to replace the up armored HMMWVs. Most units in Iraq were issued Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles. The MRAP was larger than the HMMWV but was designed to survive most IED strikes and was capable of being equipped with the same armament and systems found on the HMMWV to include the LRAS3 systems. Each platoon in the squadron was assigned at least four MRAPs to include the two infantry platoons in Charlie troop and the mortar platoon in the squadron headquarters. Each platoon was also equipped with at least two LRAS3 systems for long

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<sup>99</sup> 1st Cavalry Division, "Command Report: Multi-National Division Baghdad 1st U.S. Cavalry Division 2009," 29 March 2010, 93; Nelson interview.



range surveillance. The desert along the Syrian border was bare with some rolling sand dunes, which made it easier for the MRAPs to easily traverse the terrain and observe out to the max effective distance with the LRAS systems. By providing all the maneuver platoons with MRAPs the squadron increased its mounted capability allowing it to conduct squadron screens along the Syrian border throughout the month of October after arriving at FOB Sykes.

Within the first month of arriving at FOB Sykes, the squadron executed Operation Ten Bears establishing a lengthy screen line along the border effectively disrupting border crossings and intercepting communications from across the border between elements on both the Iraq and Syria sides of the border.<sup>100</sup> Upon assuming control of the AO, the squadron's mission expanded from primarily screening the border to patrolling the urban centers throughout their area of responsibility. The western portion of Ninewa province is a diverse region that is home to Sunni, Shiite, and Kurdish Iraqis. This melting pot of a region has its own internal disputes coupled with the remaining presence of an insurgency. When the area was divided between 1-4 CAV and 3-73 CAV, the city of Tal Afar fell under 3-73 CAV's responsibility while 1-4 CAV was responsible for the other two major cities in the area, Sinjar and Biaj. Sinjar was a significant Kurdish city that sits on the south side of Sinjar Mountain. The city often saw violent civil clashes between the Kurds, Sunni, and Shia population. The city of Biaj lay south of Sinjar and is primarily a Sunni populated city that once had Baathist ties. Biaj was known to be a location that AQI insurgents flowed through on their way to Mosul. Along the road

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<sup>100</sup> Nelson interview.

between Sinjar and Biaj lay Combat Outpost (COP) Nimr, which had been built during the OIF I and II campaigns when elements of the 101st Airborne and 3rd ACR had initially operated in the area. The COP was a US compound surrounded on either side with an Iraqi Army Brigade headquarters and a Peshmerga Battalion headquarters. Behind the COP was another US compound that was occupied by a Special Operations team that worked with the local Iraqi Army headquarters.

The squadron divided the area of operations between the three troops. Apache Troop was responsible for the areas east of FOB Sykes, which was a series of villages that needed civil projects such as schools and sewage. Bandit Troop was given responsibility of managing COP Nimr and responsible for patrolling and interacting with the local ISF in Sinjar and Biaj. Comanche Troop was given responsibility of screening the Syrian border and building a relationship with the Iraqi Border Patrol (IBP). They were given a platoon from Bandit Troop to provide them more combat power. The squadron was supported by a Tennessee National Guard aviation brigade that had aircraft at FOB Marez in Mosul and at FOB Sykes. The brigade provided support to the squadron throughout the area with continuous coverage with OH-58 Kiowa and AH-64 Apache helicopters. They used COP Nimr as a forward refuel and rearm point to give them operational reach. Coupled with national level assets and rotary wing aviation, the squadron was able to cover a wide area of the Syrian border simultaneously 24 hours a day. As a RSTA squadron, 1-4 CAV possessed a robust digital communication capability that allowed the squadron to execute effective mission command throughout the entire AO.

To enable the squadron's ability to manage operations throughout the AO and to focus on the border mission, the squadron had to build the capabilities of the ISF in the AO through cooperation and joint operations. Conducting joint operations with their ISF partners allowed the squadron to build mutual trust with the local security forces and provided the ISF with confidence to help control the urban areas allowing the squadron to focus combat power along the border. Although the status of forces agreement prevented US forces from entering the cities, the ISF throughout 1-4 CAV's AO had no issue with the squadron having a presence inside urban areas as it provided the local ISF a security blanket that prevented them from being attacked. This cooperative relationship allowed the squadron to reallocate combat power to the Syrian border. Comanche troop maintained a constant presence along the border, but they received support from Apache and Bandit troops who began rotations along the border. Apache and Bandit platoons conducted three to four day rotations patrolling their respective AOs before transitioning to conduct a week long rotation along the border using either COP Nimr or Iraqi border forts to stage or refit. The squadron was disrupting border crossings, but smugglers and foreign personnel were finding new routes around the squadron prompting the squadron to extend their coverage along the border.<sup>101</sup>

In November 2009, the 1st Cavalry Division changed over command of MND-N to the 3rd ID. 3rd HBCT, 1st Cavalry Division changed over responsibility of their AO to 2nd HBCT, 3rd ID. 1-4 CAV now fell under command of 2nd HBCT. Around the same time, the Tennessee National Guard aviation brigade began to redeploy as well limiting

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<sup>101</sup> Nelson interview; Thomas Brett, interview by author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, May 2, 2019.

the air coverage the squadron was receiving. The squadron had to rely on a nightly rotation of AH-64 Apache helicopters that came from Mosul to support the ground troops along the border. Because of the distance the aircraft had to travel, they could only provide 30 to 40 minutes of coverage before returning to FOB Marez. To make matters more difficult, the corruption within the local Ninewa judicial system prevented the ISF from being able to detain border crossers that the squadron had interdicted and turned over for prosecution. It was not long before the squadron ran into similar individuals routinely along the border because they were being released almost immediately after being detained.<sup>102</sup>

The command at MND-N, now under MG Cuccolo recognized the security issues that the borders presented. At the end of 2009 it was announced that the US was going to pursue a new mission called the disputed internal borders mission or DIBs. The purpose of the mission was to control the flow of personnel along main routes throughout Northern Iraq to interdict and deter the movement of foreign fighters and materials into Mosul. This was to be executed through the construction of fortified checkpoints along main routes. The checkpoints were to be manned by a joint force of US, Iraqi Army, and Peshmerga forces to demonstrate a unified effort to protect northern Iraq. Within 1-4 CAV's AO there were four checkpoints that were constructed. The requirement to build and man the new checkpoints with the ISF required the squadron to reallocate forces from the border making it difficult to effectively screen the border<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Brett interview.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

Apache and Bandit troops provided the combat power to man the four checkpoints in the AO, which allowed them to continue patrolling the cities throughout the AO and continue to build the ISF. Comanche troop remained along the border but had too much area to cover with two platoons. The built-up presence at the checkpoints was effective in deterring the movement of personnel throughout the AO. The checkpoints interdicted the movement of VBIED materials along with financial aid bound for Mosul; however, there was an increase in border crossings as the squadron presence along the border decreased. The security as a result of the new checkpoints allowed the provincial elections in the spring of 2010 to occur without any security incidents.

In July 2010, the squadron was alerted that they were redeploying back to Fort Riley a month earlier than scheduled. They began handing over responsibility of the AO to 3-73 CAV temporarily until 2nd HBCT, 3rd ID could reposition their cavalry squadron along the border. The squadron moved down to Al Asad airbase in August where they redeployed back to Fort Riley. The squadron was deployed for a year and returned home without a single loss or injury throughout the entire deployment officially ending the squadron's role in OIF as the US military began transitioning to Operation New Dawn, which was the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq.

The experiences of 1-4 CAV in OIF demonstrated how quickly the environment in Iraq evolved. OIF was supposed to be a quick and decisive conflict and appeared to be such as 3-7 CAV rapidly attacked north while leading 3rd ID to seize Baghdad. The US was unable to predict the insurgency that took hold of Iraq for almost a decade. The new brigade cavalry became caught up with the rest of the Army trying to fight a growing insurgency. Instead of conducting reconnaissance, the cavalry squadrons became battle

space owners trying to rebuild areas while conducting counterinsurgency operations they were not trained for. There was an attempt to employ 1-4 CAV as a reconnaissance and security element towards the end of OIF, but the demands of counterinsurgency operations and the under manning and equipping of the squadron prevented them from being able to focus on their primary reconnaissance task.

## CHAPTER 4

### EVOLUTION OF BRIGADE RECONNAISSANCE

The role of cavalry as a force that performs reconnaissance, security, and economy of force missions at the operational and tactical levels has been cemented in the Army since World War II. For almost six decades, in a variety of combat environments, the cavalry demonstrated proficiency in these roles at the corps and division levels. Lessons learned from cavalry operations in World War II provided the foundation from which doctrinal and organizational changes would emerge as the cavalry evolved with the rest of the army.<sup>104</sup> However, as cavalry evolved the one constant that remained was the absence of a reconnaissance element within the brigades. The need for a brigade reconnaissance element had always been recognized by the army, but little effort was put into addressing the need until after Desert Storm. Even then the efforts to establish brigade organic reconnaissance achieved minimal results. Modularity laid the groundwork for the current day brigade cavalry squadrons; however, the operating environment in which the squadrons stood up along with working for a different level echelon than prescribed by original cavalry doctrine increased the difficulty for the new brigade cavalry squadrons to stay true to the roles of reconnaissance, security, and economy of force.

This chapter will expound upon the Army's efforts, following Desert Storm, to create an organic brigade reconnaissance element and how the transition to a modular

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<sup>104</sup> Louis A. DiMarco, "The U.S. Army's Mechanized Cavalry Doctrine in World War II" (Master's Thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 1995), 5.

force provided the opportunity to establish the current day brigade cavalry squadrons. The chapter will address doctrinal and organizational changes of brigade reconnaissance elements before and during modularity while analyzing the overall trends of brigade reconnaissance elements in OIF. To comprehend where the brigade cavalry squadrons fit within the operational context of the new modular army, it is important to understand how and why the army transitioned to modularity in the first place.

The Army's transformation to a modular force at every echelon was not a result of the Iraq war; however, by late 2003 the conflict in Iraq became complicated, presenting the US with a scenario that essentially validated the need for modularity. The seeds of modularity were planted a decade prior to the Iraq War during the Force XXI initiatives that focused Army transformation efforts on integrating digital technologies at higher echelons while tailoring a force of combat support units capable of meeting global demands. By 2003 the concept of modularity had already gone through analysis, assessment, testing, reassessment, and was at a point to put modularity into action. Echelons from the theater army down to the division quickly reorganized making way for a brigade centric force.

The catalyst for modularity was the near simultaneous events of the American victory in Kuwait and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The Army of Excellence, designed to fight a high intensity conflict against a near peer Soviet threat, was validated in Operation Desert Storm against what was considered a near peer Iraqi Army. Following Desert Storm, Army leaders came to the realization that the Army of Excellence was no longer a relevant force in a new post-Cold War era. Facing a force



drawdown during a changing global security environment left the Army with only one response, and that was to change.

In the early 1990s General Gordon Sullivan, the 32<sup>nd</sup> Chief of Staff of the Army, recognized the need for the Army to adapt to a world without the threat of the Soviet Union. In 1993, the Army initiated change through doctrine in the newly revised *FM 100-5 Operations* by outlining the need for a force-projection army that can operate across the range of military operations.<sup>105</sup> General Sullivan turned to General Frederick Franks and the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) to echo the theme of change. In 1994, almost a year after the publishing of *FM 100-5*, TRADOC published *TRADOC Pamphlet 525-5, Force XXI Operations* in which the first reference to modularity appears.

Embracing the theme of change, the pamphlet makes clear the end state of the army of the 21st century: “All Army forces must be rapidly deployable, highly survivable, lethal, agile, mobile, modular in design, and equipped to respond to the full range of military operations.”<sup>106</sup> The scale and pace at which the global security environment was changing required a force structure that could adapt along with it. TRADOC recognized that modularity was a method to achieve this defining it as a force design methodology that establishes a means to provide interchangeable, expandable, and tailorable force elements.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), *Field Manual (FM) 100-5, Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1993), vi.

<sup>106</sup> U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), *TRADOC Pamphlet 525-5, Force XXI Operations* (Fort Eustis, VA: TRADOC, 1994), 4-6.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, Glossary 5.

Force XXI was to be built upon five characteristics: doctrinal flexibility, strategic mobility, tailorability and modularity, joint and multinational connectivity, and versatility to function in war and operations other than war.<sup>108</sup> The post-Soviet Union global security environment gave rise to unstable balances of power in the Balkans, the Middle East, and throughout parts of Africa and Asia resulting in multiple deployments of a variety of Army organizations. The Army was challenged with tailoring the correct force allocation to meet the requirements of various global missions. Commanders executing missions required a function from specific types of units, which eliminated the necessity to mobilize an entire unit. Meanwhile, parent organizations such as divisions accustomed to mobilizing as a whole unit became concerned of the inability to perform their own missions with portions of the organization deployed elsewhere.<sup>109</sup> In previous chapters this was illustrated by the 1st Infantry Division deploying the air cavalry troops of 1-4 CAV to support the mission in Kosovo versus deploying the entire division cavalry squadron. The emphasis on forward presence shifted to an emphasis on force projection.

To address the issue of tailoring forces to support global missions TRADOC published *Pamphlet 525-68 Concept of Modularity*. TRADOC 525-68 directly addressed the need to improve the Army's ability to respond to various missions across the globe while deploying the minimum number of troops and equipment required to achieve the mission end state. The concept of modularity at its onset was to deploy the right amount

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<sup>108</sup> TRADOC, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-5, 3-1 - 3-2.

<sup>109</sup> Stuart Johnson, John Peters, and Karin Kitchens, *A Review of the Army's Modular Force Structure*, RAND Technical Report (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2012), 8.

of the right functions and capabilities in the right place at the right time.<sup>110</sup> Throughout the 1990s, Force XXI became a series of analysis, experiments, and exercises across the force through battle labs and combat training centers. However, the theme of modularity remained throughout being expanded upon by Army Chiefs of Staff that followed General Sullivan.

The theme that became most prevalent as an extension to modularity was the idea of a rapidly deployable force. A key observation of Desert Storm by senior leaders was the Army's lack of speed and mobility in deploying heavy forces. Generals Dennis Reimer and Eric Shinseki, who followed General Sullivan as the Army Chief of Staff respectively, focused their efforts in building the future force on the development of equipment that supported modularity and force projection. General Reimer developed the Army After Next concept focused on a new generation of weapon systems to be fielded in the future. Through this concept he aimed to create a mobile strike force that could deploy more rapidly than heavy forces but also be more survivable and lethal than light forces. General Eric Shinseki assumed the role of chief in 1999 and continued the initiatives of developing the future Stryker brigade and fielding a rapidly deployable force. The difference between Shinseki and his predecessors was that he wanted change more rapidly versus conducting further analysis or exercises. He set a goal for the capability to field a combat-ready brigade anywhere in the world within 96 hours, a division within 120 hours, and five divisions within 30 days.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Johnson, Peters, and Kitchens, *A Review of the Army's Modular Force Structure*, 9.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

As Force XXI dominated the 1990s as a series of analysis and exercises, it targeted the current Army of Excellence formations to apply developing initiatives. For the most part the Army of Excellence structure remained intact with technological initiatives tailored to division headquarters and proposed structural changes to the brigade. One structural initiative was to standardize the divisional brigade structure as one armored brigade and two mechanized brigades. This structural change was in line with the combined arms concept of integrating maneuver units. The proposed armored brigade consisted of two tank battalions and one mechanized infantry battalion while the mechanized brigade was the reverse with two mechanized infantry battalions and one tank battalion. The fixed brigade structure was not seen in the army formations until the 2003 time period when the 4th Infantry Division and parts of the 1st Cavalry Division began to make the transition to the Force XXI structure. In the meanwhile, a majority of the Army had adopted the BCT concept in which divisions allocated parts of combat battalions, combat support, and combat service support units down to brigades. One brigade structural proposal that did go into effect in the late 1990s was the addition of a Brigade Reconnaissance Troop (BRT), which will be discussed in more detail below.<sup>112</sup>

In August of 2003, the Army was conducting full spectrum operations in Iraq with modified and tailored Army of Excellence combat formations as General Peter Schoomaker was sworn in as the 35<sup>th</sup> CSA. General Schoomaker recognized a need for sustained land power in Iraq while acknowledging “a decade of rotating sub-divisional units to the Balkans and the Sinai, which required breaking apart divisions to support

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<sup>112</sup> John J. McGrath, *The Brigade: A History: Its Organization and Employment in the U.S. Army* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004), 105.

subordinate echelons, indicated that the Cold War Army structure was a suboptimal solution to the new strategic context.”<sup>113</sup> Schoomaker had a wealth of knowledge at his disposal that his predecessors had passed onto him through the numerous analysis, simulations, and exercises that had become the Force XXI and Army After Next initiatives with the end goal of modularity in mind. Within a month of assuming office and receiving full support from the Secretary of Defense, General Schoomaker instructed the Army to convert to a modular, brigade-based force that could meet the requirements set forth by combatant commanders.<sup>114</sup> Divisions were no longer the optimal unit of action and it was determined that smaller units were needed to address current and future challenges facing the Army. The Brigade Combat Teams were seen to be the appropriate size with the needed capabilities.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Michael Shekleton, “Combatant Commander-Based Design: The Modular Army in Context,” *The Strategy Bridge*, December 2014, accessed 26 January 2019, <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2014/12/29/combatant-commander-based-design-the-modular-army-in-context>.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Johnson, Peters, and Kitchens, *A Review of the Army’s Modular Force Structure*, 11-13.

The Premodular Force		
Heavy Brigades (armor, armored cavalry, mechanized)		Light Brigades (airborne, air assault, light infantry, light cavalry)
Open or mixed terrain <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offensive, defensive, and security (screen, guard, cover) operations</li> <li>• Against either conventional or irregular forces</li> <li>• Premium on tank/armored protected firepower balanced by dismounted infantry</li> </ul>	In or near urban terrain <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offensive, defensive, and security missions</li> <li>• Against either conventional or irregular forces</li> <li>• Balance among strategic, operational, and tactical mobility</li> <li>• Premium on infantry strength and mechanical transport</li> <li>• Tank/armored protected firepower</li> <li>• Homeland defense and civil support (e.g., disaster relief)</li> </ul>	Restrictive terrain (mountains, jungles, forests) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offensive and defensive operations</li> <li>• Against either conventional or irregular forces</li> <li>• Premium on strategic mobility</li> <li>• Premium on infiltration by foot and air assault</li> <li>• Homeland defense and civil support (e.g., disaster relief)</li> </ul>
Heavy BCT		
		Infantry BCT
Stryker BCT		
All modular BCTs have utility in stability and reconstruction operations		

Figure 12. Comparative Expectations for the Utility of Army Forces

*Source:* Stuart Johnson, John Peters, and Karin Kitchens, *A Review of the Army's Modular Force Structure*, RAND Technical Report (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2012), 13.

General Schoomaker recognized the need to improve the brigades based on the inefficiency of their organization. Implicating modularity rectified this inefficiency by standardizing the organization of the brigades across the entire Army to include the reserves and National Guard brigades allowing the Army the ability to backfill active component units with reserve components possessing the same capabilities. The overall concept of modularity was to produce brigades with a combined arms structure that were capable to combat a variety of adversaries in different types of terrain in a homeland

defense setting or overseas contingency operations as seen in Figure 8.<sup>116</sup> What was produced and modified is the current BCT structure of a cavalry squadron, three maneuver battalions, and a standard package of combat support and combat service support battalions.

### The Brigade Reconnaissance Troop

During Desert Storm every Army echelon from Corps and below had an organic reconnaissance element except for the brigade. Brigade commanders and the armor and cavalry community for years had expressed the need for a reconnaissance capability at the brigade level. Efforts had been made prior to Desert Storm to provide brigades with an organic reconnaissance element with no results. Desert Storm analysis and Force XXI initiatives reinvigorated the topic of an organic brigade reconnaissance element. The result would be the development of a troop size element organic to the brigade headquarters. The Brigade Reconnaissance Troop (BRT) came into existence in the latter part of the 1990s. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 provided brigades the opportunity to employ their new reconnaissance troops in combat only to find out that the troops proved to be ineffective at conducting reconnaissance and security.

The Army of Excellence brigade structure during and after Desert Storm was not a doctrinally set organization with organic subordinate units. At the time the only elements organic to the brigade were the headquarters and headquarters company. Brigades operated as a part of divisions and were tailored to an environment or operation

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<sup>116</sup> Johnson, Peters, and Kitchens, *A Review of the Army's Modular Force Structure*, 12-13.

with a combination of two to five maneuver armored and mechanized infantry battalions along with combat support and combat service support units from the parent division or corps. The doctrinal manual, *FM 71-3 The Armored and Mechanized Infantry Brigade*, that outlined the employment of brigades emphasized the importance of reconnaissance and security to shape the battlefield. For a brigade to conduct reconnaissance and security the assets had to be requested from the division cavalry squadron, which meant the division commander had to sacrifice organic combat power. Giving up division reconnaissance assets during Desert Storm was not something division commanders were willing to do because they did not want to sacrifice critical reconnaissance and security assets. Brigades had to rely on intelligence from division or bottom up reconnaissance from battalion scout platoons. The lack of a brigade reconnaissance asset during Desert Storm remained in the back of the minds of leaders throughout the armor and cavalry branch as the Army began analyzing the overall operations of Desert Storm.<sup>117</sup>

During the 1980s as the Army of Excellence was being developed, there was a strong initiative to include a brigade scout platoon comprised of six M3 cavalry fighting vehicles. Due to allocated budget for other initiatives higher in priority, the brigade scout platoon was scrapped prior to fielding. The concept of a brigade reconnaissance capability met a temporary demise in 1989 when the Army Chief of Staff deemed that a brigade scout platoon was too costly in manpower and money.<sup>118</sup> The topic on the lack of

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<sup>117</sup> Stephen E. Bruch, "Did Force XXI Validate the Brigade Reconnaissance Troop?" (Master's Thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 1998), 16-21.

<sup>118</sup> Cameron, *To Fight or Not to Fight*, 393.



a brigade reconnaissance capability remained on the Army's priority list based on noted deficiencies of reconnaissance at the brigade level during NTC rotations. Comments from senior leaders and analysis of Desert Storm confirmed the battlefield value of brigade level reconnaissance and reinvigorated TRADOC to design and field a brigade reconnaissance unit.<sup>119</sup>

The overall analysis of the Army's force structure that came with the Force XXI initiative not only gave the concept of brigade organic reconnaissance new life, but also proposed that the new unit be a troop versus previous concepts of a brigade scout platoon. Although Force XXI key initiatives were targeted at division and higher echelons, the creation of the BRT came from the sub-program called Limited Conversion Division XXI (LCD XXI). The intent of LCD XXI was for each armor and mechanized infantry brigade to have an organic BRT. The cost of the BRT was the elimination of one of the four line companies in the tank and mechanized infantry battalion.<sup>120</sup>

In May 1996, the first BRT stood up at Fort Hood, TX as a part of the Force XXI Experimental Force (EXFOR). This troop served as a test organization to determine the organization design and overall role for brigade reconnaissance.<sup>121</sup> In June 1996, the Armor School at Fort Knox published the draft of *FKSM 17-97-10(A) Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for the Applique' Brigade Reconnaissance Troop*. *FKSM 18-97-10(A)* was proposed doctrine for the new BRT that addresses the mission,

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<sup>119</sup> McGrath, *Scouts Out!*, 170.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Cameron, *To Fight or Not to Fight*, 394.

organization, capabilities, doctrinal employment, tactics, techniques, and procedures of the BRT. The draft defines the primary mission of the BRT is to provide battlefield information directly to the brigade commander. Force XXI initiatives that focused on reconnaissance were oriented towards a reconnaissance force that was lighter, more mobile, and stealthy. *FKSM 17-97-10(A)* reflected the new preferred method of stealthy reconnaissance over aggressive reconnaissance for the BRT. The manual outlines the BRTs ability to conduct limited security operations along with limited economy of force missions when properly augmented.<sup>122</sup>

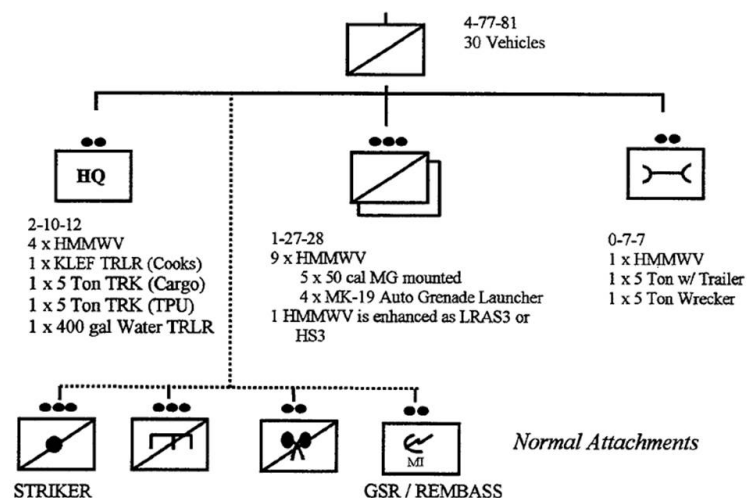


Figure 13. FKSM 17-97-10(A) Proposed Brigade Reconnaissance Troop

*Source:* Stephen E. Bruch, "Did Force XXI Validate the Brigade Reconnaissance Troop?" (Master's Thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 1998), 34.

<sup>122</sup> Bruch, "Did Force XXI Validate the Brigade Reconnaissance Troop?", 32.

Like the task organization of the battalion scout platoons, the BRT was to be a light and mobile force on HMMWVs. The initial task organization included a headquarters and two scout platoons made up of a total of 85 troopers. Each scout platoon was comprised of 31 troopers with nine HMMWVs equipped with five .50 caliber machine guns, four MK-19 automatic grenade launchers, and one of the new Long-Range Advanced Scout Surveillance Systems or LRAS3. Attachments to the troop included engineers, military intelligence sensor squads, a Combat Operations Laser Targeting (COLT) team, and a medic.<sup>123</sup> The BRT was equipped with the latest advances in computer and digital systems giving it the ability to receive combat data from the brigade including reports, orders, and graphical overlays that was then distributed down to platoons. Although stealthy and mobile, the BRT was vulnerable in the fact that the HMMWV offers limited survivability and the BRT lacked direct fire anti-armor weapon systems other than man portable anti-armor systems that had to be dismounted and could not engage quickly.<sup>124</sup>

In March 1997, the brigade Reconnaissance troop participated in its first NTC rotation as a part of the Task Force XXI Advanced Warfighting Experiment (AWE). Prior to the Force XXI AWE, TRADOC had begun a series of analysis on different division designs which included the task organization of BRTs to fit within each proposed division design. The Force XXI AWE at NTC exercised the BRT to validate the task organization that satisfied the reconnaissance and security role for the brigade while

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<sup>123</sup> Cameron, *To Fight or Not to Fight*, 394.

<sup>124</sup> Bruch, "Did Force XXI Validate the Brigade Reconnaissance Troop?", 35.

remaining with an imposed requirement for a lower personnel ceiling. In early 1998, the analysis and conclusions based off the results of the Force XXI AWE were submitted to the Army Chief of Staff's Force XXI Board of Directors.<sup>125</sup> These results helped finalize the new BRT composition. The new task organization included a small headquarters with two scout platoons and an attached COLT platoon. Each scout platoon consisted of six up-armored M1114 HMMWVs divided into three squads. The squads were made up of two HMMWVs, one with a MK19 grenade launcher or M240B machine gun and the other with an M2 .50 Caliber machine gun. The platoons were also equipped with the LRAS3. The new BRT consisted of a total of 49 troopers.<sup>126</sup> The new BRTs began being fielded in 1999 to the heavy division brigades as seen in Figure 14.

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<sup>125</sup> Bruch, "Did Force XXI Validate the Brigade Reconnaissance Troop?", 39-47.

<sup>126</sup> Cameron, *To Fight or Not to Fight*, 394-395.

Brigade	Cavalry Troop
1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division	Troop F, 1st Cavalry
2d Brigade, 1st Armored Division	Troop G, 1st Cavalry
3d Brigade, 1st Armored Division	Troop H, 1st Cavalry
1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division	Troop C, 10th Cavalry
2d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division	Troop D, 9th Cavalry
3d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division	Troop F, 9th Cavalry (2004)
1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division	Troop D, 4th Cavalry
2d Brigade, 1st Infantry Division	Troop E, 4th Cavalry
3d Brigade, 1st Infantry Division	Troop D, 4th Cavalry
1st Brigade, 3d Infantry Division	Troop C, 1st Cavalry
2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division	Troop E, 9th Cavalry
3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division	Troop D, 10th Cavalry
1st Brigade, 4th Infantry Division	Troop G, 10th Cavalry
2d Brigade, 4th Infantry Division	Troop H, 10th Cavalry
3d Brigade, 4th Infantry Division	Troop B, 9th Cavalry

Figure 14. Brigade Reconnaissance Troops as of 2003

Source: John J McGrath, *The Brigade: A History: its organization and employment in the U.S. Army*, Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004, 106.

In 2003 the BRTs saw combat for the first time during OIF I and the results mirrored the criticisms of some from the armor and cavalry community during the fielding of the new cavalry troop. The major concerns of critics of the new BRT were like the concerns of the new battalion scout platoons in that the BRT was a unit of HMMWVs that were going to be used by default as the division cavalry squadrons had been used. The idea of an organization of lightly armored HMMWVs being out front conducting traditional route, zone, and area reconnaissance while carrying the brunt of the counter reconnaissance fight raised the concerns that the troop was not going to survive long in combat. Although the doctrine designed around the BRT described the BRT's mission like any other traditional reconnaissance organization, the BRT was not designed to

perform basic information collection, security, and economy of force missions.

Essentially it was another set of eyes and ears that could not fight for information or conduct security.<sup>127</sup> These concerns and criticisms quickly became evident during the 3rd Infantry Division attack towards Baghdad in 2003.

The performance of the BRT validated the reconnaissance paradox mentioned in Chapter 1 in that they were too light; therefore, the BRTs were not employed as they were supposed to be. In line with the criticism mentioned above, the BRTs were unable to perform missions suitable for a mechanized force. The BRTs had difficulty keeping up with the fast pace of the mechanized brigades and were unable to operate independently without augmentation.<sup>128</sup> Though successful against smaller forces of dismounts, the BRTs were held back from major fighting. An example of this was when the 3rd BCT of 3rd ID was attacking towards As Samawah, the brigade commander wanted to lead with his BRT. Given the intense fighting occurring inside the town, the brigade commander opted to place his BRT along the highway while he sent one of his mechanized infantry task forces to isolate As Samawah.<sup>129</sup> As operations progressed, brigade commanders did not want to use their BRTs to fight unless they were augmented with combat power or attached to another element. This was the case on 22 March, 2003 when 2nd BCT passed 3-7 CAV, the division cavalry squadron, toward their objective with TF 1-64 AR leading

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<sup>127</sup> Cameron, *To Fight or Not to Fight*, 395.

<sup>128</sup> Daniel Mark, "Effective or Efficient: The Conundrum of the Armed Reconnaissance Squadron" (Master's Thesis, United States Marine Corps Command and Staff College, 2009), 16.

<sup>129</sup> Fontenot et al., *On Point*, 132.

the brigade with the BRT and battalion scout platoon out front.<sup>130</sup> The technique of pairing the BRT with a battalion scout platoon was quickly adopted, but a larger mechanized or armored force was never too far behind.

The shortcomings of the BRT during the 2003 invasion of Iraq can be summarized by its vulnerability to attack and inability to fight for information:

Scout platoons and brigade reconnaissance troops exist to provide the means for tactical commanders to “see” the enemy. Mounted in lightly armored HMMWVs, battalion and brigade scouts are vulnerable to RPG and cannon fires. This design is intentional and reflects a widely held view in the late Cold War era that armored and armed scouts would fight rather than conduct reconnaissance. As a consequence of this, if contact seemed imminent, commanders often chose not to use their scouts and brigade reconnaissance troops. In short, they elected to give up their “eyes” rather than risk losing them. Put another way, commanders chose not to employ scouts and brigade reconnaissance troops in the role for which they were intended.<sup>131</sup>

The trend of either holding the BRT back or ensuring it was augmented with combat power continued into OIF II. Echo Troop, 4<sup>th</sup> Cavalry was the BRT for 2nd BCT, 1st Infantry Division, which was the brigade that owned the battle space west of I-4 CAV in 2004. Echo Troop was typically placed as the brigade reserve, which is a violation of the reconnaissance fundamental to never hold reconnaissance assets in reserve. When the troop did go out on missions it was typically augmented with either a tank or mechanized infantry platoon.<sup>132</sup> For all intents and purposes, the BRT failed to meet the brigade need for a reconnaissance force due to its inability to perform its core function of providing

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<sup>130</sup> Fontenot et al., *On Point*, 161.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 423.

<sup>132</sup> Jose L. Fragoso, “Boots, Saddles, and Cross Rifles: An Infantryman in the Cavalry,” Personal Experience Paper, 2006, 2.

information on the enemy and terrain and to prevent the main body of the brigade from being surprised and to preserve combat power.<sup>133</sup>

### The Brigade Reconnaissance Squadron

The Brigade Reconnaissance Troops had filled a temporary void in reconnaissance at the brigade level, but had proven that it was not the permanent solution that had been sought for years. The year of 2003 became a year of major initiatives and transitions as the Army continued to navigate its way through an emerging insurgency in Iraq. General Schoomaker had initiated modularization and instructed the Army to convert to a brigade centric force. At the same time General Shinseki's project of the Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT) was being fielded into the force presenting leaders with a model of the future force. The period of 2003 to 2005 became a significant period of doctrinal and organizational transition for the cavalry as the long-standing division cavalry squadrons disappeared and the new brigade reconnaissance squadrons emerged.

The cavalry that transitioned into the 21st century was one that still existed within the realm of the Cold War ideology in that it needed to be prepared to fight to accomplish its mission and possess the capabilities necessary to survive combat with an armored force. However, initiatives throughout the 1990s as a part of Force XXI emphasized the development of "light, stealthy reconnaissance elements dependent on an array of

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<sup>133</sup> Mark, "Effective or Efficient: The Conundrum of the Armed Reconnaissance Squadron," 16.



technical devices.”<sup>134</sup> These initiatives gave birth to the Reconnaissance, Surveillance, and Target Acquisition (RSTA) concept that emphasized reconnaissance.

The emerging RSTA concepts began withering away at the traditional link between reconnaissance and security leading to concerns amongst the cavalry community in regard to the current state of the cavalry force not yet affected by Force XXI initiatives. The cavalry force that was still in place, including the armored cavalry regiments and division cavalry squadrons, began reevaluating their roles amidst the developments of RSTA concepts and technologies that complimented the RSTA concepts. The 1996 edition of the *FM 17-95* remained the principal governing manual for cavalry operations even though it did not address the latest in the advances of Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) operations and digital systems.

Cavalry organizations had previously been designed to be able to fight and survive in the Cold War era, which was the emphasis on the ability of the M3 Cavalry Fighting Vehicle being able to carry TOW missiles. This left little room for dismounted scouts resulting in an insufficient dismounted capability as there was now more emphasis on a cavalry organization to conduct reconnaissance and not fight. Deficiencies within leadership became prevalent as armor officer training had placed more emphasis on combined arms operations and less on cavalry operations. There was little institutional training in regard to cavalry organizations and doctrine. Training exercises exploited this

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<sup>134</sup> Cameron, *To Fight or Not to Fight*, 448.

deficiency as leaders issued insufficient orders in the employment of their cavalry forces.<sup>135</sup>

Despite these known deficiencies, the division cavalry squadrons remained a powerful, combined arms team. They remained one of the few cavalry organizations that could perform reconnaissance, security, and economy of force missions despite the lack of the latest technologies. The armor and cavalry community remained devoted to the successes demonstrated by a combined arms cavalry organization even as the Army surged forward with the new RSTA concepts. The division cavalry squadrons continued to focus on their core competencies as they received the latest M1A2 SEP tanks and M3A3 Cavalry Fighting Vehicles.<sup>136</sup>

The new SBCTs that were being developed at the turn of the century were the first organizations to include a RSTA squadron. The advanced technological capabilities of the SBCT, especially in the RSTA squadron, became the basis for the future force that Army leaders had in mind. The SBCT RSTA squadron was equipped with the latest and greatest digital communications architecture including the new Force XXI Battle Command Brigade and Below (FBCB2) system. The primary mission of the SBCT RSTA squadron was to acquire information to guide the brigade's operations and establish situational awareness within an area of operations more so than on an enemy force.<sup>137</sup> To support information gathering operations, the squadron possessed a robust

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<sup>135</sup> Benson, "The Cavalry Paradigm," 8-10.

<sup>136</sup> Cameron, *To Fight or Not to Fight*, 449.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 427.

package of enabling capabilities including a mix of sensors, radars, UAVs, manned platforms, and intelligence personnel. The RSTA squadron was more robust than previous reconnaissance organizations in that it was made up of a headquarters and headquarters troop, three reconnaissance troops, and a surveillance troop as seen in Figure 15.<sup>138</sup>

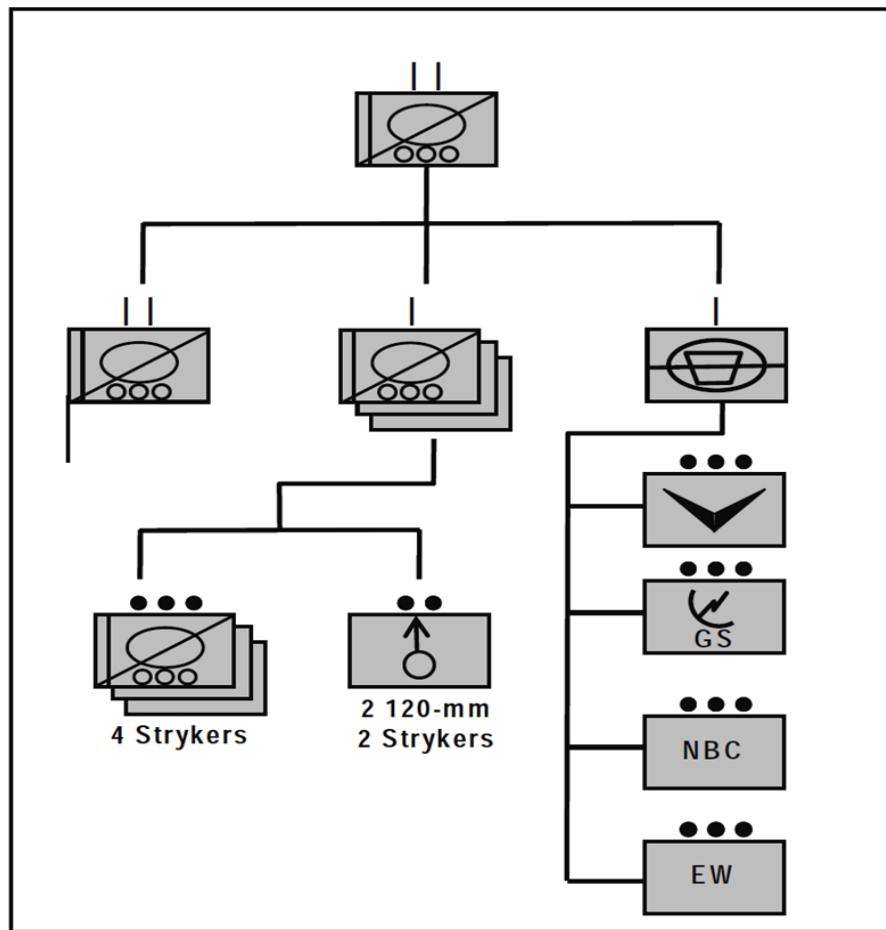


Figure 15. SBCT RSTA Squadron as of 2003

Source: John J. McGrath, *Scouts Out! The Development of Reconnaissance Units in Modern Armies* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2008), 179.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

The first Stryker brigade was fielded in 2003 and deployed to Iraq in the same year. Subsequent SBCTs followed soon after. In December 2002, *FM 3-20.96 Cavalry Squadron (RSTA)* was published. This manual became the guiding doctrine specifically for the SBCT RSTA squadron. The manual outlined the fundamental role of the squadron to be “to conduct ISR operations to develop and share a common operational picture (COP) of the operational environment throughout the brigade.”<sup>139</sup> For the first time there was a brigade organization with its own organic reconnaissance squadron and doctrinally the squadron’s only role was reconnaissance. The capabilities of information collection and intelligence generation demonstrated by the SBCT RSTA squadrons became the new way of thinking in terms of the future of reconnaissance and the role of reconnaissance forces. This was because the Armor Center at Fort Knox bore much of the responsibility for the development of many of the capabilities found within the SBCT to include the communications architecture, RSTA squadron, reconnaissance vehicle, command platform, and the direct fire support Mobile Gun System (MGS).<sup>140</sup> The ability to collect, process, and disseminate information was supported by some of the most advanced equipment:

The RSTA squadron included scouts, LRAS3, ground surveillance radars, and signal detection devices. The HMMWV-mounted AN/MLQ-40 Prophet detected signal emissions, intercepted them, and provided direction finding to the signal source. The improved remotely monitored battlefield sensor system (REMBASS) detected seismic, acoustic, magnetic, and infrared signatures. Radars within the artillery battalion enhanced counterfire capability through the detection of hostile mortar, artillery, and rocket fire. Additional reconnaissance

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<sup>139</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Field Manual (FM) 3-20.96, *Cavalry Squadron (RSTA)* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2002), 1-2.

<sup>140</sup> Cameron, *To Fight or Not to Fight*, 429.

assets included the engineer company and the NBC reconnaissance platoon of the RSTA squadron's surveillance troop.<sup>141</sup>

These new advanced systems proved more reliable and versatile than previous systems changing the way reconnaissance elements gained contact with an enemy.

In the time period between 2003 and 2004, the development of the SBCTs, the need for a rapid deployable force, and combat operations in Iraq came to a head when General Schoomaker instructed the Army to convert to a brigade centric force. Under modularity, the Army divorced itself from a division based deployable force and officially adopted the Brigade Combat Team concept. Like the new SBCT, the modular Army standardized the structure of the BCTs. The new modular force base models were comprised of a Heavy BCT (HBCT), an Infantry BCT (IBCT), and an SBCT. However, unlike the SBCTs, the HBCTs and IBCTs were designed to have two maneuver battalions instead of three. Supporting the maneuver battalions in each BCT was a field artillery battalion and a reconnaissance squadron.<sup>142</sup>

The establishment of a fixed BCT structure with an organic cavalry squadron resulted in the elimination of both the division cavalry squadrons and the brigade reconnaissance troops. The addition of a brigade cavalry squadron was based on the perception by General Schoomaker that the brigade echelon had previously been weak in conducting reconnaissance to detect enemy activities and capabilities.<sup>143</sup> The designs of the new reconnaissance squadrons were influenced by the RSTA squadron of the SBCT

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<sup>141</sup> Cameron, *To Fight or Not to Fight*, 440.

<sup>142</sup> McGrath, *Scouts Out!*, 180.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

with multiple reconnaissance troops equipped with new digital systems to link the organizations.<sup>144</sup>

The new HBCTs were comprised of two battalions that served as combined arms task forces each containing two tank and two mechanized infantry companies. Each maneuver battalion within the HBCT became known as a Combined Arms Battalion (CAB). The CABs contained a scout platoon made up of three M3 CFVs and five M1114 armored HMMWVs. The HBCT RSTA squadron, also referred to as the Armored Reconnaissance Squadron (ARS), was made up of three cavalry troops with two platoons equipped with a combination of M3 CFVs and armored HMMWVs that a troop commander could consolidate by type or team if necessary. The troops were equipped with multiple LRAS3, a UAV system, and a three-man field artillery COLT. To aid the squadron in intelligence generation, there was a Military Intelligence (MI) at the brigade to support the RSTA squadron.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Cameron, *To Fight or Not to Fight*, 466.

<sup>145</sup> McGrath, *Scouts Out!*, 180.

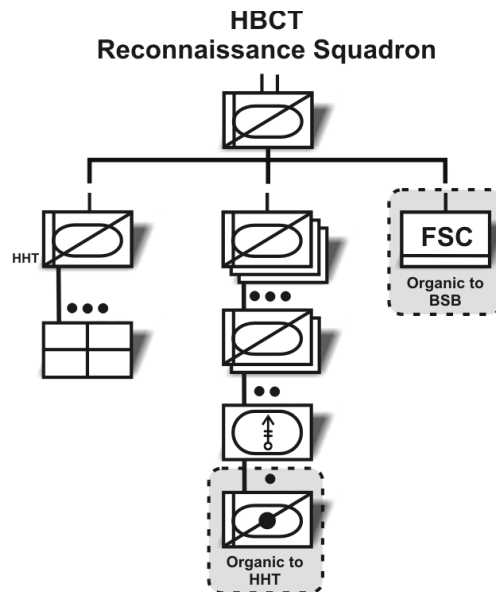


Figure 16. HBCT Reconnaissance Squadron Organization

*Source:* Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-20.96, *Reconnaissance Squadron* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006), 1-11.

The IBCT reconnaissance squadrons were standardized across all light infantry, airborne, and air assault infantry brigade combat teams. The IBCT RSTA squadron was not as robust as the ARS but was still equipped with optimal equipment for information collection. The light version of the RSTA squadron is made up of two mounted reconnaissance troops and one dismounted troop. The mounted troops originally included three platoons, a mortar section, and a COLT. The platoons were made up of six HMMWVs, including two with a TOW missile system, three with an LRAS3 and M240B machine gun, and one with a .50-caliber machine gun. The platoons each had two Javelins giving the troop a significant anti-tank capability. The dismounted reconnaissance troop was made up of 50 infantry soldiers giving the RSTA squadron a robust dismount capability; however, there were not enough organic assets in the

squadron to transport the dismounted troop. The squadron needed to request additional assets to move the dismounted troop.<sup>146</sup> Concerns surrounded the light RSTA squadrons in their ability to fight for information. These concerns were similarly related to the concerns that the BRTs were incapable of fighting and surviving because they were in HMMWVs and did not possess the armament. However, a RAND study on the Army's modular force found that compared to the premodular reconnaissance units within an infantry brigade, the new light RSTA squadrons have more vehicles and possess superior armament.<sup>147</sup>

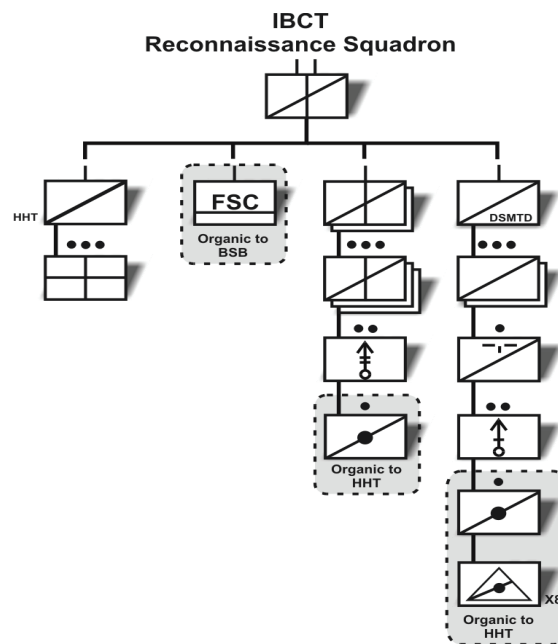


Figure 17. IBCT Reconnaissance Squadron Organization

*Source:* Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-20.96, *Reconnaissance Squadron* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006), 1-12.

<sup>146</sup> Cameron, *To Fight or Not to Fight*, 468.

<sup>147</sup> Johnson, Peters, and Kitchens, “A Review of the Army’s Modular Force Structure,” 41.



The period between 2004 and 2007 saw the Army divisions restructured to generate more maneuver brigades resulting in each division having four maneuver brigades. The decision to convert to a modular force was quick, but the actual process to convert the force took longer primarily due to the rotations of units in and out of Iraq. It also took time to build the new formations, integrate them with the new digital systems, and train the new organizations in combined arms maneuver. The number of active component cavalry squadrons rose from 13 in 2002 to 46 RSTA squadrons in 2008 including the squadrons within 3rd ACR (2nd ACR converted to an SBCT in 2005).<sup>148</sup>

By 2006, doctrine started to catch up to the new modular force. In September 2006, a new version of *FM 3-20.96* was published. It was simply titled as *Reconnaissance Squadron*. The previous *FM 3-20.96* was limited to doctrine specifically for the SBCT RSTA squadron. *FM 3-20.96 Reconnaissance Squadron* expands on the doctrine and organization related to the reconnaissance squadrons within the HBCT, IBCT, and SBCT. The *Reconnaissance Squadron* manual outlined the squadron's role as a multifaceted role of "serving as the BCT commander's eyes and ears on the battlefield, developing the common operational picture (COP) for the BCT, and finding and tracking the enemy throughout the BCT AO."<sup>149</sup> For the first time, a cavalry doctrine manual did not consider the fundamental role of the cavalry squadron to be reconnaissance, security,

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<sup>148</sup> Johnson, Peters, and Kitchens, "A Review of the Army's Modular Force Structure," 17.

<sup>149</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Field Manual (FM) 3-20.96, *Reconnaissance Squadron* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006), x-xi.

and economy of force. The role of cavalry was now considered to be focused solely on reconnaissance:

Although the reconnaissance squadron has close combat capabilities, it is not organized, equipped, or trained to conduct a reconnaissance in force. That is a maneuver battalion mission. The reconnaissance squadron can conduct screen operations and other security operations, but it is designed to be most effective when employed in reconnaissance roles. To avoid giving away their position, scouts will rarely engage the enemy with direct fire on their own initiative. Rather, they are armed with direct fire weapons only for protection. Mortars are provided to reconnaissance troops for immediate suppression and disengaging fires. All scouts can engage targets without giving away their locations through the fires network with a variety of indirect means, depending on the requirement.<sup>150</sup>

The foundation for the *Reconnaissance Squadron* manual was based on what senior leaders were seeing in operations in Iraq as well as training at the CTCs and how they envisioned the reconnaissance squadrons being employed.

There was a significant difference in how Army leaders envisioned the new reconnaissance squadrons being utilized in Iraq and how the squadrons performed in combat. Each reconnaissance squadron, despite whether it was a heavy or infantry BCT squadron was built around the equipment designed to enhance the squadron's ability to conduct reconnaissance and information gathering. The modularization process went into effect as units were rotating in and out of Iraq. Some units went to Iraq in the new configurations, but either never got issued any of the new equipment or never received the necessary training to operate equipment such as the LRAS3. The combination of the FBCB2 and LRAS3 systems that RSTA squadrons were equipped with was supposed to provide the HMMWV with stand-off to observe the enemy essentially preventing the

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<sup>150</sup> HQDA, FM 3-20.96, xi.

HMMWV from being engaged by the enemy. In an environment like Iraq, where most operations took place in urban areas, it was impossible for the HMMWVs to achieve stand-off distance from an almost invisible enemy hiding in a city. During the early stages of modularity most units were still using lightly armored HMMWVs in Iraq. The Department of Defense was struggling to meet the demand of providing units on the ground with the new up-armored HMMWVs.<sup>151</sup> The squadrons struggled in urban areas with the lack of a robust dismount capability, which prevented them from conducting reconnaissance and information collection on the ground.

The ARS fared better than its IBCT RSTA counterpart in that the ARS was equipped with the M3 CFV that brought some more firepower and was the closest to resembling the old division cavalry squadrons. However, because the ARS possessed firepower and survivability many HBCT commanders viewed the ARS as an asset to fill the void of a third maneuver battalion. An after-action report from the 1st Cavalry Division emphasized this issue stating that “the lack of the third maneuver battalion is one of significant reasons why commanders and leaders have not been able to consistently see first, understand first, act first, and finish decisively. The employment of the reconnaissance squadron as a maneuver battalion eliminates the BCT's primary reconnaissance and surveillance capability.”<sup>152</sup> The HBCTs were assigned significantly large battlespaces that they could not cover with only two maneuver battalions let alone have only one element

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<sup>151</sup> Cameron, *To Fight or Not to Fight*, 498-500.

<sup>152</sup> Mark, “Effective or Efficient: The Conundrum of the Armed Reconnaissance Squadron,” 18.

to conduct reconnaissance over the entire battlespace. In this case it became the easy choice for brigade commanders to give the ARS its own battlespace.<sup>153</sup>

In March 2010, the revised version of *FM 3-20.96*, now titled *Reconnaissance and Cavalry Squadron*, was published. The revised version of *FM 3-20.96* was written to expand on not only the reconnaissance squadrons organic to the BCTs, but to expand doctrine to include the ACR squadron and the reconnaissance squadron in the new Battlefield Surveillance Brigades (BFSB).<sup>154</sup> The BFSB was an attempt by the Army to fill the void of a reconnaissance element at the division level, but it was short lived.<sup>155</sup> The revised version of *FM 3-20.96* established the role of the reconnaissance squadron is to conduct reconnaissance or security missions in support of its higher headquarters. The manual outlines the ability of the BCT squadrons and ACR cavalry squadron to conduct economy of force missions, but it specifies the tasks and conditions in which each organization can effectively be utilized to conduct operations outside of the fundamental reconnaissance role as seen in Figure 18. The manual emphasizes that the ACR has the only squadron with the combined arms capability to execute reconnaissance, security, and economy of forces tasks. However, this revised version of *FM 3-20.96* was published six months before the Army officially made the transition from Operation Iraqi Freedom to Operation New Dawn which focused the Army's efforts on downsizing the US

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<sup>153</sup> Mark, "Effective or Efficient: The Conundrum of the Armed Reconnaissance Squadron," 17-18.

<sup>154</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Field Manual (FM) 3-20.96, *Reconnaissance and Cavalry Squadron* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010), ix.

<sup>155</sup> Jennings, "Reconsidering Division Cavalry," 14, 40.

presence in Iraq and placing more responsibility on Iraqi Security Forces in hopes of eventually turning over full control of security operations to Iraq. Although, the manual emphasized the combined arms capability of the ACR cavalry squadron, the Army made the decision to convert 3rd ACR, the last ACR, into an SBCT.<sup>156</sup>

TYPE OF SQUADRON	ACR CAVALRY SQDN	HBCT RECON SQDN	SBCT RECON SQDN	IBCT RECON SQDN	BFSB RECON SQDN
<b><u>Reconnaissance Tasks</u></b>					
Zone Reconnaissance	F	F	F	F	P
Area Reconnaissance	F	F	F	F	F
Route Reconnaissance	F	F	F	F	P
Reconnaissance in Force	F	P	P	P	X
<b><u>Security Tasks</u></b>					
Screen	F	F	F	F	P
Guard	F	P	P	P	X
Cover *	X	X	X	X	X
Area Security	F	F	F	F	R
Local Security	F	F	F	F	F
<b><u>Offensive Tasks</u></b>					
Attack	F	P	P	P	X
Movement to Contact	F	P	P	P	X
<b><u>Defensive Tasks</u></b>					
Area Defense	F	P	P	P	X
Mobile Defense	F	P	P	P	X
Retrograde	F	P	P	P	X
<b><u>Stability Tasks</u></b>					
Civil Security	F	F	F	F	R
Civil Control	F	F	F	F	R
Restore Essential Services	R	R	R	R	R
Support to Governance	R	R	R	R	R
Support to Economic/ Infrastructure Development	R	R	R	R	R
<b><u>Civil Support Tasks</u></b>					
Support to Disaster/ Terrorist Attack	Capability depends on the specific missions assigned. Depending on the mission, the squadron may require augmentation.				
Support to Civil Law Enforcement					
Other Support					
F – Fully Capable      R – Capable when reinforced      P – Capable when enemy capabilities do not jeopardize mission accomplishment (permissive METT-TC)    X – Not Capable * <i>Note</i> : Cover is listed as one of the security missions even though the squadron is not doctrinally capable of performing this mission independently. The squadron can perform tactical tasks in support of its higher headquarters executing a cover mission (such as screening for a BCT assigned a cover mission).					

Figure 18. Squadron Mission Profiles

*Source:* Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-20.96, *Reconnaissance and Cavalry Squadron* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010), 1-3.

<sup>156</sup> Jennings, “Reconsidering Division Cavalry,” 40.

The Army invested vast amounts of time and money over more than a decade to provide brigades a reconnaissance element. The reality is that brigades wanted something that resembled the division cavalry squadrons, but the factors of budget, downsizing, and the non-existence of a near peer threat prevented this from being a possibility. New technology that digitally linked systems and units coupled with optics providing long distance surveillance and the ability to launch Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) provided Army leaders with a new method of conducting reconnaissance with the potential to avoid having to fight for information. Information collection technology and the desire to have a lighter and more mobile force along with the need for a reconnaissance element organic to the brigade became the basis for the development of the brigade reconnaissance troop. The criticisms from the armor and cavalry community of the BRT's inability to conduct the traditional roles of cavalry and its vulnerability because of its lack of combat power were found to be correct after the BRTs proved to be inadequate as a reconnaissance element during OIF. The same criticisms carried over to the new RSTA squadrons that stood up with the new modular BCTs. Operations in Iraq seemed to defeat the purpose of an all reconnaissance-oriented element. The doctrinal and organizational emphasis on reconnaissance contradicted the actual employment experience in Iraq. Overall the new brigade cavalry squadrons found themselves in the role of ad hoc maneuver units with far more requirements to assume responsibility for a broader range of actions than information collection.<sup>157</sup> The situation on the ground in Iraq for reconnaissance units was changing at a pace far more rapidly than what doctrine

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<sup>157</sup> Cameron, *To Fight or Not to Fight*, 517.

could keep up with. Training and equipping reconnaissance squadrons to execute new doctrinal roles while routinely rotating through combat deployments to Iraq made it nearly impossible for the RSTA squadrons to be effective in their designed role in a counter insurgency environment, which made it easier for brigade commanders to employ the squadrons as a third maneuver battalion. The result of these trends throughout OIF is a new generation of cavalry leaders that no longer understand the fundamentals of reconnaissance and the proper employment of the cavalry squadron.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS

#### Overview

The requirement of the “professional judgement of a soldier” in manned reconnaissance was TRADOC commander General Kevin Byrnes’ justification that there remained a role for cavalry in the modular force design.<sup>158</sup> The development of the modular force had some foundation in the tactical paradigm of the “Quality of Firsts” which is defined as the ability to see first, understand first, act first, and finish decisively.<sup>159</sup> Cavalry is an integral component to this paradigm in that cavalry serves as the eyes for a commander allowing them to see and understand the battlefield, while providing the commander with an element to act first to shape the battlefield. The issue facing those designing the modular force, regarding the cavalry, was determining what type of cavalry organization fit within the “Quality of Firsts” paradigm.

The image of a cavalry organization has long been that of a combined arms formation of Abrams tanks and Bradley fighting vehicles such as the armored cavalry regiments. The examples contained throughout the beginning of this thesis, drawn exclusively from Desert Storm, give context to this image of cavalry. Armored cavalry regiments and division cavalry squadrons roving across a desert with tanks, cavalry

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<sup>158</sup> William Donnelly, *Transforming an Army at War: Designing the Modular Force, 1991-2005* (Washington, DC: Center for Military History, 2007), 61.

<sup>159</sup> Thomas Cipolla, “Cavalry in the Future Force: Is there Enough?” (Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2004), 8.



fighting vehicles, and rotary wing aviation working as a combined effort to provide early warning and security to allow division and corps commanders to shape the battlefield.

The Desert Storm era cavalry were combined arms organizations with mutually supporting aviation assets that executed their missions according to the fundamental roles outlined in *FM 17-95*. However, the Desert Storm era cavalry organizations and cavalry doctrine were designed around an enemy that the Army never fought and never encountered in almost 30 years following Desert Storm.

The introduction of new technology in the post-Desert Storm era had a significant impact on the future organization of the cavalry and the rest of the Army. The designers of the new modular force wanted to capitalize on the new digital technology that provided units on the ground the ability to be digitally linked together enabling faster communication and command and control on the battlefield. Every echelon of command and tactical units could be equipped with technology such as the FBCB2 system enabling rapid distribution of orders while tracking near exact locations of every unit on the battlefield. For cavalry organizations, that primarily conducted reconnaissance and security, the benefit of new information collection technology paired with systems like the FBCB2 meant that there was a potential for less risk to expose soldiers to an enemy threat and provided them the capability of standoff to collect information to send higher. One can assume that having the capability to have significant stand off from an enemy while being able to observe the enemy undetected accomplishes the dual mission of reconnaissance and security. This was a significant factor in the overall development in both the organizational and doctrinal development of the future brigade cavalry squadrons.

New concepts such as the Stryker brigades coupled with the integration of new technology gave the Army a foundation from which to base the new modular force structure to build the lighter, more rapidly deployable force it had been seeking to operate in the evolving security environment. The post-Desert Storm security environment was one without a single threat to focus on, but instead was an environment that encompassed almost the entire range of military operations. This new environment required units with specific capabilities, but the Army rotated entire units such as division cavalry squadrons to absorb these missions around the globe. Eventually the Army began piecemealing units, such as deploying the aviation component of 1-4 CAV to Kosovo, to meet the ever-growing demands of rotating units through areas that required security force presence. This technique took combat power from divisions making it difficult to train or accomplish their overall combat mission if called upon. The concept of the Stryker brigade was a light, mobile, and rapidly deployable force structure that possessed a range of capabilities that made it suitable to meet the demands of a variety of missions the Army was seeing throughout the 1990s and into the early 2000s. The Stryker concept served as a base model for the modular force the Army was developing.

#### The Modular Cavalry in Iraq

The 2003 invasion of Iraq was a catalyst to set the Army on course for “the most far-reaching transformation of the Army’s operational forces since World War II and the most radical since the Pentomic reorganization of the late 1950s.”<sup>160</sup> The invasion of Iraq

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<sup>160</sup> Donnelly, *Transforming an Army at War: Designing the Modular Force, 1991-2005*, iii.

and the follow on operations prompted General Peter Schoomaker to initiate the expedited development and implementation of a modular force to meet the demands of an open ended global war on terrorism. The chosen structure for the modular force was the Brigade Combat Team. The Brigade Combat Team became the central focus for developing the modular force, and the former Army Chief of Staff saw value in the addition of a cavalry squadron to the new brigades as the brigade echelon had always struggled with reconnaissance previously.

Prior to modularization, the Army attempted to satisfy the need of an organic brigade reconnaissance element with the development of a brigade reconnaissance troop. The brigades and many in the armor community had hoped for some variation of the division cavalry squadron, but what was developed and fielded was the earliest version of the RSTA concept of cavalry. Integrated with the latest information collection technology and enhanced optics system, the brigade reconnaissance troop was a lightly manned, wheeled vehicle reconnaissance troop that was doctrinally intended to perform the cavalry role of reconnaissance, security, and economy of force missions. Early critics of the new reconnaissance element cited the light HMMWV and armament design of the troop decreased its survivability in security or economy of force missions while also lacking the ability to fight for information in the reconnaissance role if it had to. The performance of the brigade reconnaissance troops in OIF I and II proved these early critics to be correct. The brigade reconnaissance troops were essentially outgunned when operating independently out in front of the brigade and were lightly armored prompting brigade commanders to reallocate them to less threatening missions or hold them in reserve. If the brigades did employ their reconnaissance troops, then they ensured they

were augmented with additional combat power consisting of tanks or mechanized infantry meaning brigade commanders had to reallocate combat power to support the reconnaissance troops.

The new modular brigade combat teams that were being fielded between 2005 and 2007 were set organizations with two maneuver battalions, a field artillery battalion, an engineer battalion, a support battalion, and a cavalry squadron. The addition of a cavalry squadron increased the size of the reconnaissance force the new BCT now had to employ and it was structured with combat power similar to the rest of the BCT in regard to being a heavy or light organization. The Armored Reconnaissance Squadrons that were a part of the heavy BCTs were comprised of a combination of HMMWVs and Cavalry Fighting Vehicles while the infantry BCTs had a lighter cavalry squadron with HMMWVs. Despite the success of 3-7 CAV's reconnaissance and security operations during the invasion of Iraq as a division cavalry squadron, the new brigade cavalry squadrons found themselves facing an enemy that forced them outside of the role they were designed for. Organizationally and doctrinally, the cavalry squadrons were designed around the variety of unmanned aerial vehicles and other remote sensors to conduct reconnaissance. The doctrine written to support the new modular cavalry, *FM 3-20.96*, outlined that the squadrons did not possess the capability to serve in a security or economy of force role. In a counterinsurgency environment, such as Iraq from 2004 until 2009, the brigade cavalry squadrons could not achieve the standoff they needed to employ their information collection assets and they found themselves in close combat within urban areas.

During most operations throughout the OIF campaigns, the cavalry squadrons found themselves performing the same mission as every other unit in the Army which was owning a portion of battlespace and conducting counterinsurgency operations within that battlespace. The lack of a third maneuver battalion prompted brigade commanders to employ their cavalry squadrons as a third maneuver battalion to extend the brigade's capabilities. Common points of feedback from BCT commanders in Iraq was the fact that the RSTA squadrons were too small and improperly resourced to conduct full spectrum operations.<sup>161</sup> However, the squadrons still possessed combat power that the BCT commanders could employ to conduct counterinsurgency operations versus placing the squadrons solely in a reconnaissance role.

#### The Light Versus Heavy Debate

The examples and analysis throughout this thesis bring back to the fore front the ongoing light versus heavy debate originally discussed in the first chapter. Since the mechanization of cavalry, the light-heavy debate has been a part of the thought process for the organization and employment of reconnaissance forces. The reconnaissance units equipped with light vehicles represent stealth. The units equipped with heavy armored vehicles represent survivability.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Andrew Watson, "The U.S. Cavalry: Still Relevant in Full Spectrum Operations?" (Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2010), 51.

<sup>162</sup> McGrath, *Scouts Out!*, 198.

“If the forces are too light and, while stealthy, not survivable on the battlefield, or so perceived, commanders tend to use other units for reconnaissance operations.”<sup>163</sup> The lack luster performance of the brigade reconnaissance troops during the early campaigns of OIF demonstrate this half of the reconnaissance paradox in that the troops were designed to perform all cavalry roles, but in reality they were designed solely to conduct reconnaissance and to avoid enemy detection. In conventional operations the brigade reconnaissance troops could not survive without augmentation from additional combat power making it easy for commanders to place them in reserve. The light reconnaissance squadrons within infantry BCTs are organically the largest mounted element within the BCT making their mobility more valuable to the BCT commander than their ability to conduct reconnaissance.<sup>164</sup> They are larger in size than the previous brigade reconnaissance troops which made it easier for BCT commanders to employ the light cavalry squadrons as an additional maneuver battalion.

Two issues plague the second half of the reconnaissance paradox in that heavy reconnaissance elements that have mobility and firepower easily become a choice as an additional maneuver element and that commanders typically have a sense of shortage of combat maneuver units in relation to the missions assigned them.<sup>165</sup> The armored cavalry regiments and division cavalry squadrons were used in this capacity at times during Desert Storm and perhaps may be the reason that many brigade commanders and those

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<sup>163</sup> McGrath, *Scouts Out!*, 198.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

within the armor community hoped that the Army was going to develop something similar to the division cavalry squadron to serve as a reconnaissance force for brigades. Although the ARS developed for the HBCTs was nothing like the division cavalry squadrons, it did possess more mobility and firepower than its counterpart squadron in the IBCTs. This made it easier for BCT commanders to rationalize the use of the ARS as a third maneuver battalion instead of a reconnaissance asset.

The light-heavy debate must take the enemy into consideration. The light-heavy debate has always centered around reconnaissance forces in a conventional setting, but the modular reconnaissance squadrons were designed during a counterinsurgency war to fight an insurgency. The Army needed a force that could adapt to a variety of mission tasks. The role of the RSTA squadron was to conduct reconnaissance, but it was designed with enough mobility and firepower to effectively operate within a counterinsurgency environment. The modular force throughout was equipped with enough information collection assets and remote sensors similar to the RSTA squadrons making it possible for any element to conduct their own reconnaissance in Iraq. Therefore, the BCT commanders had no reason to employ their RSTA squadrons solely in a reconnaissance role.

### The Current State of Cavalry

As combat operations in Iraq ended and the Army renewed direct action training at the CTCs, it was time for the Army to assess itself and the reconnaissance force. Similar to the post-Desert Storm years, the armor and cavalry community began calling for the addition of combat power in the heavy reconnaissance squadrons. The two main

recommendations coming from those in Iraq was more dismounts in the squadrons and the addition of tanks specifically in the ARS.

Among those calling for additional combat power was LTC Jeff Broadwater. In an article for *Armor* magazine written in 2007 while serving as the squadron commander for 3-7 CAV, LTC Broadwater recommended increasing each reconnaissance platoon strength from 30 to 42 troopers and adding a tank company to the ARS in addition to the three reconnaissance troops already in the ARS. LTC Broadwater recognized the complexities of the counterinsurgency environment and acknowledged the use of the ARS as a third maneuver battalion, but he also recognized that the environment always changes noting the need for the recon squadron to be out in front.<sup>166</sup> In recent years LTC Broadwater served as the commander of Operations Group at NTC, and now Brigadier General Broadwater serves as the commander of NTC where he has influence on how the Army employs the future force.

In recent years the Army has transitioned back to a focus on conventional warfare, which has impacted the current organization of the Army. NTC rotations demonstrated the inability of the HMMWV and Cavalry Fighting Vehicle set in the ARS to effectively fight for information against an almost near peer threat. In 2014, 1-7 CAV executed NTC rotation 14-04 with their reconnaissance platoons organized with six bradleys whereas previously the platoons operated with three bradleys and five HMMWVs. This

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<sup>166</sup> Jeff Broadwater, "Reorganizing the Recon Squadron to Enhance Heavy Brigade Combat Team Capabilities," *Armor* (September-October 2007): 37.



configuration proved to be affective and prompted the Army to reevaluate the organization of the reconnaissance squadron.<sup>167</sup>

Many of the issues that plagued the early modular force and reconnaissance squadrons, such as overall lack of combat power, were resolved as a result of downsizing and budget constraints in 2015 and 2016. A requirement to cut spending resulted in a need to reduce the Army. The solution was to eliminate the fourth brigade from most of the divisions and relocate other brigades. The reduction from four brigades to three provided left over combat power to provide brigades with a third combined arms battalion. The Armored Reconnaissance Squadrons were able to convert their reconnaissance troops to Bradley pure troops and received an organic tank company. The 4<sup>th</sup> IBCT, 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division was one of the brigades eliminated from the Army inventory resulting in 1-4 CAV standing back up underneath 1st BCT, 1st Infantry Division as an ARS with three recon Bradley troops and a tank company. With the new addition of combat power to the ARS, the Army published *FM 3-98 Reconnaissance and Security Operations* reemphasizing the role of cavalry to be reconnaissance and security.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Robert Bove, Michael Kaness, and Jonathan Page, “The All-Bradley Scout Platoon at National Training Center Rotation 14-04,” *Armor* (July-September 2014): 31.

<sup>168</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Field Manual (FM) 3-98, *Reconnaissance and Security Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2015), 1-1.

## Conclusions

The role of cavalry is and will be an ongoing debate that will evolve as threats evolve. The light-heavy debate will continue to occur in the background whenever Army force designers look at the intended use of cavalry and its necessary organization. Since the success of Desert Storm, the Army continues to struggle to determine the right force structure to counter an evolving and unknown threat. This thesis specifically focused on the product that was produced by the Army's modularization regarding the brigade cavalry squadrons and how they were employed in Operation Iraqi Freedom. The Army's modular force satisfied the brigade need for an organic reconnaissance squadron. The early attempt with the implementation of the brigade reconnaissance troop never came close to providing the brigade with a reliable reconnaissance element. With the brigade reconnaissance squadron, the new BCTs had something equipped to meet the need of a reconnaissance element. However, BCT commanders really wanted something that was capable of performing reconnaissance, security, and economy of force missions like the division cavalry squadrons before. Based on the operations in Iraq highlighted in this thesis, it is highly more likely that BCT commanders really wanted a third maneuver battalion which they found in the reconnaissance squadrons.

The organization and doctrine at the outset of modularity and OIF failed the cavalry squadrons. The Army became over reliant on new technology that could enhance the ability to gather information and convert into actionable intelligence. This over reliance in UAV systems and other remote sensors eliminated the role of security and economy of force from the cavalry leaving it to serve in a reconnaissance role. The doctrine supported this role by outlining that the cavalry squadrons were not designed to

fight and the over reliance on the information collection technology created the illusion that the cavalry didn't have to fight to gather information. Unfortunately, doctrine does not always represent reality. The reality was that Iraq was a counterinsurgency fight that stripped the cavalry of its ability to effectively conduct its doctrinal role of reconnaissance. Understanding this almost made it necessary for BCT commanders to pull their cavalry squadrons out of the reconnaissance role and place them in a maneuver role to fill gaps in the BCT combat power. It is essential now that BCT commanders understand the doctrinal role of their cavalry squadrons to employ them using every tool available within the cavalry squadron to conduct fundamental reconnaissance and security.

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