

# Army Reconnaissance Course: *Defining the Aim Point for Reconnaissance Leader Training*



by Major Robert C. Perry and Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Kevin McEnery

*“The old method of training one simple task at a time, discretely, doesn’t push soldiers and leaders to become the kind of agile, adaptive thinkers who can perform successfully across the entire spectrum of operations.”<sup>1</sup>*

— Brigadier General Robert Brown

The new Army Reconnaissance Course (ARC) was specifically designed to meet the demands of today’s reconnaissance units. The ARC, which conducted its pilot course from 23 March to 21 April 2009, is completely new and unique and not based on reorganization or revision of an existing course. The intent for the course remains consistent with the original vision of Colonel (Retired) J.W. Thurman, who saw a need to fill the gap be-

tween baseline institutional training and higher skill-level expectations that are required for junior leaders to meet the unique dynamics of reconnaissance units.

In the 20-plus years since Colonel Thurman’s initiative, operating environments, organizations, equipment, and combat experiences of officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) have changed dramatically. The scope of the institution’s responsibility for training recon leaders has also expanded greatly. While the intent for training leaders to a higher level has remained valid over time, the methods used to achieve that intent must reflect new realities for the institutional base.

The purpose of the ARC is to prepare commissioned officers and NCOs to per-

form effectively as leaders of recon platoons in the modular force. This is achieved through developing the fundamental tactical and technical skills and adaptive leader qualities needed to face current and future operations across the spectrum of conflict. Recon skills and leader attributes transcend the type of parent organization or platform. Leaders must be well grounded in fundamentals that allow them to adapt quickly to the operational circumstances that dictate why a particular type of brigade combat team (BCT), such as infantry, heavy, or Stryker, has been deployed.

## **The Purpose of the New Army Reconnaissance Course**

*“Traditional training and education may not meet all the needs of an expedi-*



tionary Army... *developing new approaches may be necessary.*"<sup>2</sup>

— U.S. Army Field Manual 7-0

The Army's transition from a division-centric force to modular BCTs has not only increased the total number of dedicated reconnaissance units Armywide, it has changed long-standing assumptions about how such units fit into operational constructs. While the recon scout military occupational specialty (MOS) resides in the armor branch, leaders must be confident and competent in adapting their skills to the reconnaissance demands of commanders whose professional experiences may have been strongly influenced by branch-specific experiences. The Army cannot afford to have three courses individually tailored to the specifics of each platform-based organization; it requires one course focused on the most important attributes for recon leaders, regardless of platform, while simultaneously sustaining and enhancing individual skills and knowledge.

Transition in a complicated and complex organization, such as the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), demands individual agility, initiative, adaptability, and accountability no less than that demanded in the operating force. The methods on which TRADOC courses are designed and delivered have been institutionalized over the course of three decades. Perhaps they have been too well defined — possibly over-engineered to a point where the separation between *how* leaders are educated and trained in the institutional base has grown too far from *how* leaders actually lead, train, and develop subordinates in the operating force. Instructional methods require a new look. Army and TRADOC leaders have been championing a shift from "what to think" to "how to think" for several years; however, the methods used to teach, train, and assess leaders in TRADOC professional schools still predominantly reflect "what to think."

Building a course around doctrinal tasks or operational techniques leads to a disjointed and, all too often, checklist approach to institutional training and evaluation, which is in direct contrast to the course's desired intent. Analysis of scout skill levels 3 and 4 reveals approximately 230 individual leader tasks for 150 supported collective tasks. The sheer number of discrete tasks has exceeded their utility for use as a key instructional design element. A one-time performance of a task to a universal standard does not equate to the ability to apply or adapt in combat or



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during unit training. The time allotted for institutional courses is limited, and while students are certainly exposed and tested on certain tasks, it is impossible to provide the extensive time and coaching necessary for individuals to develop the ability to apply these tasks. Shifting away from "tasks" as the focus of instructional design for courses *beyond the basic level*, and instead defining the *skills* and *attributes* that are the basis for subsequent performance of complex tasks is a change made out of necessity and relevance. The demands of the operating force for relevant and timely institutional training cannot be met by creating longer or more comprehensive task-based courses.

The platform differences found among reconnaissance organizations in the infantry BCT (IBCT), heavy BCT (HBCT), and Stryker BCT (SBCT) have also expanded the range of technical knowledge, defined as "tasks," required of scouts. The list of tasks the institution uses to define a scout has become too large and less focused on mastering fundamental skills and attributes that are prerequisite to adapting new tactics, techniques, and technology to solving reconnaissance problems. Instructional courses must be based on fundamental and enduring principles developed to a higher level and enhanced by current and emerging technical capabilities. Unit training focuses on the mission-unique requirements for that organization or type of unit. Institutional and unit training domains are not an either/or

relationship; instead, they depend on each other. In short, the institution provides leaders who are prepared for "a" war, while unit training focuses on developing leaders for "the" war.

#### Outcome-Based Training Principles

*"We've gone to outcomes-based training... What we've learned in this fight is that Soldiers really need to be able to figure things out."*<sup>3</sup>

— General Martin Dempsey

In an effort to manage increased demands and better focused resources, the ARC was designed on the principles of outcome-based training (OBT), which is not new and *is not* unstructured student "discovery learning" without standards.<sup>4</sup> It is also not simply "scenario-based training," as some observers have suggested. There are also some who argue that Army training has always been outcomes based under the existing design process — that meeting published standards are the outcomes. The process used to develop the ARC differs from the norm, but follows formal guidelines to ensure relevance between course design, instructor and student responsibilities, structured learning experiences, and most importantly, the outcomes the course is intended to achieve on behalf of the Army. OBT was selected for use in the ARC design because it provides a holistic approach, linking training design and execution in a way that promotes mastery of fundamental skills,



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while developing the attributes expressed in Army values. OBT is an *approach* to training and education, rather than a technique or system, because it considers:

- The purpose of training and education.
- The role of soldiers (as students, as leaders).
- The role of instructor cadre.
- The role of commanders.
- The role of the institutional domain.

These considerations are far more beneficial than creating a universal technique that assigns a one-size-fits-all approach to recon training and education. They also support the existing TRADOC program of instruction (POI) resource management processes. Other officer and NCO education system (OES/NCOES) courses provide the ARC cadre a foundation to build on, while unit training methods provide a backstop to link outcomes.

Applying OBT principles to the ARC development requires three elements:

- Mastering fundamental recon skills so students can solve problems by

improvising and adapting existing knowledge in unique situations.

- Developing leader behaviors through mission-relevant problemsolving exercises; focus on demonstrating Army intangible attributes useful in establishing relevance between warrior ethos and other values and characteristics essential in conducting military operations.
- The ability to relate skills and knowledge to other tasks in the execution of military operations so students learn to think in terms of missions and problemsolving, rather than discrete activities.

#### The Doctrinal Base

*“Leaders and individuals master the basics of their profession in institutional training.”<sup>5</sup>*

— U.S. Army Field Manual 7-0

Two new field manuals, U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 3-20.98, *Scout and Reconnaissance Platoon*, and FM 3-20.971, *Reconnaissance Platoon*, were published in February 2009.<sup>6</sup> FM 3-20.971 captures

the doctrinal similarities and capabilities differences of the BCT, armored cavalry regiment (ACR), and battlefield surveillance brigade (BfSB) troop types. One analyst notes:

*“The [troop] manual writers acknowledged the different capabilities of each troop type throughout the text, noting where appropriate those qualities that made a particular unit either more effective or constrained in the conduct of a particular mission type.*

*“The [platoon] manual consolidates guidance for the platoons found in the brigade combat teams, the BfSB, and the armored cavalry regiment. Each different platoon type, however, receives coverage oriented upon its particular capabilities, although a general set of principles applied to all. In this manner, it differs sharply from the 2002 version, which superimposed concepts intended for the RSTA squadron recon platoon upon all reconnaissance and scout platoons without respect to their varied capabilities.”<sup>7</sup>*

Of particular interest in these new publications is the recurring requirement for

the quality and ability of tactical recon leaders to rely on adaptability and a mix of employment methods, more so than knowledge of specific reconnaissance, surveillance, and security tasks. “Reconnaissance and scout platoons must be prepared to operate beyond the traditional roles of reconnaissance, surveillance, and target acquisition of enemy forces.”<sup>8</sup> The new FMs avoid a prescriptive approach that locks a leader into a singular course of action. A mental flexibility, able-to-adapt method to evolving tactical conditions is preferred.<sup>9</sup>

In 2006, publishing FM 3-20.96, *Reconnaissance Squadron*, marked an effort to address doctrine associated with all three BCT types and the ACR.<sup>10</sup> The manual attempts to capture the common principles of the different organizations, but according to a recent analysis of mounted reconnaissance development, it emphasizes reconnaissance techniques and principles that contradict the experiences of units employed in combat overseas. Similarly, this manual makes little distinction among the specific capabilities of the different BCT types. These concerns triggered the manual’s revision to more accurately reflect actual employment of reconnaissance organizations. The revised FM 3-20.96 is currently under review with a tentative publication date of 2010.<sup>11</sup>

### **Defining an Aim Point for the ARC: Teaching Reconnaissance or Leadership?**

Doctrine and training publications include volumes on tasks that are conducted by recon units, but there is little that outlines the training and education for the development of “agile and adaptive” leaders. To better understand how to develop a course that creates this outcome, we must first realize what sets recon leaders apart from other leaders in the force, and how to increase their tangible abilities in addition to their knowledge.

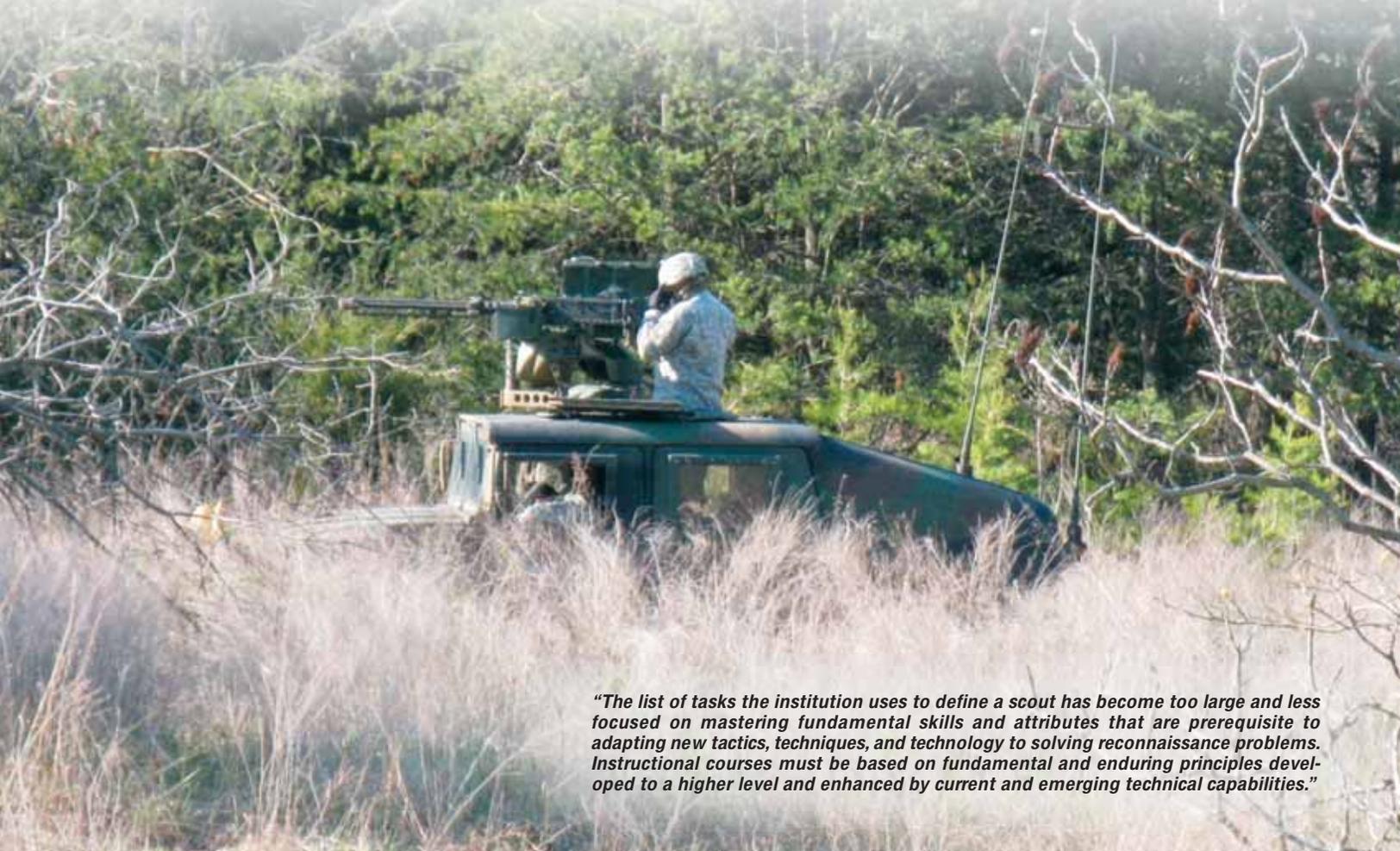
The following characteristics reflect the skills and attributes of a recon leader:

*Observably higher fundamental skills.* Leaders assigned to recon units are expected to be highly capable at the foundational skills — navigation, communications and reporting, and tactical analysis — necessary for all higher level reconnaissance mission tasks. Exceptional navigation skills are essential to planning, movement, reporting, employing support assets, and maintaining freedom of action. Meeting the basic Army standards for land navigation is just the starting point for recon soldiers, not the minimum acceptable objective. Communications and reporting include technical skills associated with communications hardware, as well as effective communications of ob-

servations. Tactical analysis is the basis for effective anticipation and is a tangible skill for recon soldiers, not an administrative planning process. Recon soldiers are expected to develop an advanced sense of how and where the enemy may reveal himself for observation before making physical contact.

*Better understanding of higher commanders’ information requirements and how to find and communicate information.* As the “eyes and ears” of the commander, scouts are expected to “see” what the commander needs to see and communicate observations relevantly. Understanding what the commander needs to know to develop situational understanding means recon leaders must understand why the commander needs to know and that his decisions depend on knowing. Comfort with the ambiguity of helping a commander find enemy information required for initial planning through reconnaissance pull operations is a demanding requirement. The information associated with route, area, zone, and point recon objectives must be relevant to those commanders who make decisions on how, when, and where to employ larger forces.

*Better at planning and executing without mission compromise or loss of freedom of action.* Planning and execution re-



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*“Of particular interest... is the recurring requirement for the quality and ability of tactical recon leaders to rely on adaptability and a mix of employment methods, more so than knowledge of specific reconnaissance, surveillance, and security tasks. Reconnaissance and scout platoons must be prepared to operate beyond the traditional roles of reconnaissance, surveillance, and target acquisition of enemy forces.”*

quire a high level of understanding of planning and employment factors that define the higher headquarters’ capabilities, limitations, and intent. Recon soldiers must have the technical knowledge required to continuously evaluate the effects of terrain, enemy, and population dynamics on friendly operations. For internal mission planning, the technical knowledge and situational understanding of where a platoon is located, with regard to friendly supporting ranges and distances, is critical.

*More competent with employment of organic and attached assets such as air, ground, and technical.* Scouts operate at the edge of organic support system ranges and reinforcement distance. They are routinely expected to employ systems, such as technical surveillance, fires, and aircraft, effectively and often without the aid of attached specialists.

*More confident at problemsolving, deliberate thought, anticipation, initiative, and risk management.* The overall outcome of the ARC is to provide recon squadrons with soldiers and leaders who have not only been exposed to new information and tactics, techniques, and procedures, but who can enter into unit training and operations at an observably higher level. Recon leaders have developed the skills required to solve problems on their own when conditions do not conform to the “book solution.” The intangibles of confidence, initiative, problemsolving, deliberate thought, and mission-focused risk management are what unit commanders want to see in their scouts

and small-unit leaders. Those intangibles do not have predetermined quantifiable standards in the same sense as purely mechanical tasks. These intangibles are, however, observable when soldiers are exceptionally competent in higher level fundamental skills that empower them to adapt and improvise under pressure.

Recon leaders are expected to demonstrate mastery of their unique tactical contributions to BCT operations. Mastery is not simply a function of time in service or number of deployments; it is an individual’s ability to use the skills he has been taught to develop increasingly higher levels of proficiency on his own and in his subordinates through training and during combat under varying conditions. For individuals to develop mastery over time, they must have a model for skill development that exhibits an understanding of the fundamentals and technical dynamics (techniques, procedures, capabilities, and limitations) for applying fundamentals and experience and solving complex tactical problems (METT-TC dynamics) using fundamental skills within the context of a recon mission.

The ARC outcomes are the skills and attributes that distinguish an ARC graduate from other soldiers and leaders. The outcomes below each have specific associated performance measures used in formal student counseling and assessments:

- Observably higher fundamental reconnaissance skills — land navigation, communications and reporting, and tactical analysis.

- Better understanding of higher commanders’ information requirements and how to find and communicate information.
- Better skills at planning and executing without mission compromise or loss of freedom of action.
- Competence with employment of organic and attached support assets — air, ground, technical.
- Confidence at mission-relevant judgment, problemsolving, anticipation, initiative, and risk management.

#### **Training to the Aim Point: The ARC Pilot Course**

The ARC pilot was a 27-day course, 17 of which were conducted in the field. Exercises were designed to be physically, as well as mentally, demanding. Application required students to assess their situations relative to the mission, confidently make decisions on what tasks to apply to solve problems, effectively communicate decisions to others, and competently execute. Out of 40 students, 36 graduated from a course of 28 lieutenants and 12 NCOs. The pilot course focused primarily on cadre development and its ability to apply OBT principles and methods. The ARC cadre consisted of experienced active duty and retired 19D senior NCOs, all with combat experience, who demonstrated an ability to teach, train, and lead others in the operating force.

Over the past few years, a gap has emerged between how leaders lead, train, and develop subordinates in the operating force and how instructors teach students in the schoolhouse. Leaders, who have demonstrated effective agility and adaptability in combat, are required to suppress personal experiences and follow a system designed to ensure standardization. Using OBT methods empowers senior members of the reconnaissance profession to teach and develop the more junior members of the profession by combining experiences and expertise to produce the desired student outcomes within the course intent and construct.

To prepare and change their mindsets about instruction, the ARC cadre participated in several months of workshops, training courses, learning activity development, and, ultimately, a live pilot course to refine and assess their teaching skills. They learned new methods for designing activities, delivering instruction, and assessing performance, which, ironically, were not really new. These “new” methods closely reflected application of the very leader attributes and recon skills they applied as section sergeants, platoon ser-

geants, and first sergeants in the operating force — the same skills they applied to lead, train, and formally assess their subordinates in unit training and combat. The cadre's most challenging aspect was overcoming strong institutional traditions on how platform instructors should teach and test. An important benefit of this training was not introducing it as a one-time NCO professional development session, a new handbook, or a new checklist — the cadre learned the intent behind the methods and, as an added benefit, continually challenged each other to perform to higher professional standards.

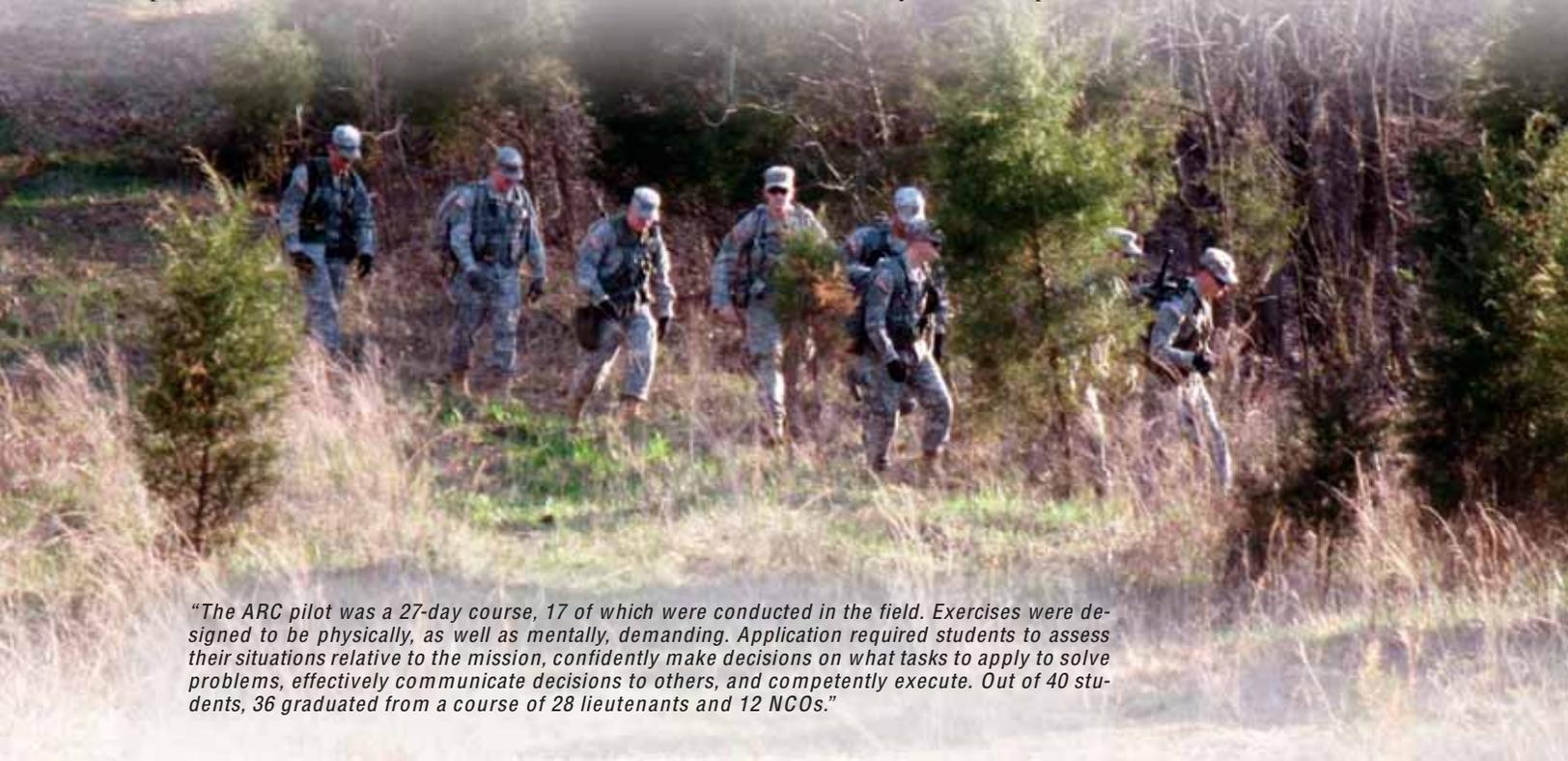
BNCOC and able to perform Army Warrior Leader tasks relevant to their rank.

The ARC is deliberately focused on developing skills that unit commanders can expect an ARC graduate to demonstrate at *observably higher levels and with greater competence than other soldiers*. This helps focus limited institutional domain resources on those areas that will make a difference in mission performance when graduates return to the operating force.

In the ARC, *skill* is distinguished from doctrinal *task*. "Task" is defined as an identified, measurable activity, while

ability, confidence, and judgment) by presenting skills and tactical activities as problems to solve within defined principles. There are revisions and refinements that will occur over the next two course iterations to address lessons learned and assess overall course effectiveness, but the core design and construct remain valid.

Intangible attributes are evaluated by officers and NCOs in operating force units everyday and are fairly simple to observe in the ARC. The decisions made, or not made, when presented with a problem, provide cadre with an assessment of a



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### Student Accountability for Performance

The ARC is not an "introduction to recon" course; it is designed for junior officers and NCOs who are assigned, or pending assignment, to reconnaissance units in HBCT, SBCT, IBCT, ACR, and maneuver battalion scout platoons. They are graduates of the Maneuver Basic Officer Leadership Course (BOLC) III, Maneuver Captain Career Course (MCCC), 19D/11B Basic NCO Course (BNCOC), or 19D/11B Senior Leaders Course. The ARC course schedule does not allocate time for re-teaching doctrinal reconnaissance information or refreshing baseline task standards already achieved in OES/NCOES courses. Students with other reconnaissance-related specialties are also invited to attend ARC, but they must be a graduate of their respective BOLC III/

"skill" is defined as the *ability*, coming from one's knowledge, practice, and aptitude, to do something well. Further, "ability" is defined as competence in an activity or occupation because of one's skill. The outcome of the ARC is not discrete task performance to a universal Army standard (which is also covered in OES/NCOES); it is individual skill development through mission-relevant problem-solving that enables leaders to develop mastery, competence in subordinates, and the confidence to adapt to changing mission conditions.

The ARC course, executed by 3d Squadron, 16th Cavalry cadre, teaches core recon skills (enhanced by new technical tools and tactical techniques) using an approach that develops individual leader attributes (particularly initiative, account-

student's confidence, accountability, and thought processes. The tactics chosen by students, in various situations, provide insight into the student's problemsolving abilities and level of judgment (a combination of knowledge and experience). The communication of orders, or reports, and the application of specific recon techniques selected by students provide insight into their competence. The after-action review process, self- and peer assessments, and cadre counseling all instill a sense of student self-awareness and personal accountability. The observable behaviors related to a student's performance against course outcomes are clear, regardless of the student's specific duty assignment for the day.

The ARC cadre represents senior members of the recon profession, who share

hard-won experience and expertise with junior members of the profession, who will soon have the responsibility for training and leading soldiers in combat. In short, the ARC cadre teaches students to:

- Understand the commander's intent.
- Assess the conditions.
- Select tactical methods appropriate to their assessment of the conditions.
- Overcome obstacles and exploit opportunities.
- Demonstrate competence and confidence during execution.
- Accomplish their mission.

Each day builds on skills, knowledge, and lessons learned developed during the previous day.

### Current and Future Capabilities

Under current resourcing, the ARC encompasses a 27-day training cycle. Training 6 days a week, students are assigned to the course for approximately 30 days. A total of eight resident courses are scheduled per year at Fort Knox, for an annual output of approximately 250 students. Classes are operated at an optimal level of 30 to 36 students per class, but can be resourced for up to 45 students per class as necessary. This optimal level ensures that student-to-instructor ratio is maintained at approximately one instructor to six students, with many events having one instructor to three students.

The course's goal is to have a 50/50 mix of NCO/officer in each course; however, there are a variety of factors that influence this dynamic. The course is open to Active and Reserve Component U.S. Army and Marine Corps NCOs and commissioned officers who have successfully completed required courses (BNCOC/BOLC III) in armor, infantry, engineer, aviation, military intelligence, and field artillery branches. The ARC is also open to international allied forces and additional service branches as space is available. Dates and registration requirements are available at the Army Training Requirements and Resources System (ATRRS) website, [www.atrrs.army.mil](http://www.atrrs.army.mil), school code: 171; ARC course code: 2E-F137/521-F2.

As a part of the Armor Center's relocation to Fort Benning's Maneuver Center of Excellence, the ARC is scheduled to depart Fort Knox in July 2011 and resume classes by September 2011. This move will mark a significant growth in the course's capabilities; by 2011, the ARC will serve more than 500 students per year with another course growth estimated at more than 850 students by FY12. These projections are based on forecasted de-

*"With 8 years of experience behind us and the prospect of persistent conflict before us, the task at hand is to find an "aim point" along the spectrum of conflict against which to organize, train, and equip our formations and develop our leaders. What the nation needs is a balance of capabilities that can be applied by agile leaders when we confront an adaptive enemy. Or, if you prefer, a balance of capabilities that can be applied by adaptive leaders against an agile enemy. The point is: the enemy gets a vote how he confronts us. We can only consider ourselves truly prepared for war when we have achieved balance in our capabilities and in our leaders to overcome that vote."<sup>12</sup>*

— General Martin Dempsey

mands from the force and assessments conducted by TRADOC in 2008.

### ARC Contact Information

The course's administrative offices are currently located in Building 1726, Phantom Division Road, Fort Knox. Additional information about the course can be obtained online at [www.knox.army.mil/school/16cav/slc1.asp](http://www.knox.army.mil/school/16cav/slc1.asp), which is a secure AKO site and offers information on reporting requirements, class schedules, mobile training teams, and resources related to reconnaissance operations and training. Any additional inquiries may be addressed to the ARC senior instructor at (502) 624-6199 (DSN 464); or the ARC course manager at (502) 624-3023.

As part of a greater coalition force, the U.S. Army approaches its 9th year of op-

erations in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, and more than 5 years of operations in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The conflicts of Hezbollah and Israel in 2006, and Russia and Georgia in 2008, provide depictions of the conditions that our tactical leaders may very well continue to face in future operations.

The ARC prepares recon leaders for full-spectrum operations in the modular force through developing fundamental skills and leader qualities that build on the foundations set by the officer and NCO education systems. Leaders who are well grounded in these critical fundamentals and attributes can adapt quickly to changing operational circumstances. It is these leaders who contribute effectively to unit training and combat operations, regardless of the particular type of BCT or mission along the spectrum of conflict.



### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Brigadier General Robert Brown, "The Agile Leader Mind Set: Leveraging the Power of Modularity," *Military Review*, July-August 2007, pp. 32-44.

<sup>2</sup>Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 7-0, *Training for Full-Spectrum Operations*, U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO), Washington, DC, 12 December 2008.

<sup>3</sup>General Martin Dempsey, "TRADOC Focuses on Leader Development," *Army News*, 16 April 2009, available online at <http://www.army.mil/news/2009/04/16/19773-tradoc-focuses-on-leader-development>, accessed 8 May 2009.

<sup>4</sup>The application of outcomes-based training (now outcomes-based training and education) principles used in the Army Reconnaissance Course is drawn from application by the U.S. Army's Asymmetric Warfare Group (AWG). The AWG has provided advice and support in transforming instructional methods at Fort Jackson, Fort Benning, Fort Sill, Fort Hood, Fort Campbell, Fort Bragg, and the U.S. Military Academy. The AWG has also hosted outcomes-based training workshops and conferences attended by commanders, instructors, and training developers across the Army. The ARC design also drew heavily on work done by Major (Retired) Don Vandergriff, whose adaptive learning model (ALM) principles for effective teaching and training are incorporated into the delivery model.

<sup>5</sup>FM 7-0, *Training for Full-Spectrum Operations*.

<sup>6</sup>HQDA, FM 3-20.98, *Reconnaissance and Scout Platoon*, GPO, Washington, DC, February 2009; and HQDA, FM 3-20.971, *Reconnaissance Troop*, GPO, Washington, DC, February 2009.

<sup>7</sup>Robert S. Cameron, PhD, "To Fight or Not to Fight? Organizational and Doctrinal Trends in Mounted Maneuver Reconnaissance from the Interwar Years to Operation Iraqi Freedom," manuscript, publication pending, U.S. Army Armor Center, 2009, Chapter 9, pp 43-44.

<sup>8</sup>HQDA, FM 3-20.98.

<sup>9</sup>HQDA, FM 3-20.98 and FM 3-20.971.

<sup>10</sup>HQDA, FM 3-20.96, *Reconnaissance Squadron*, GPO, Washington, DC, 20 September 2006.

<sup>11</sup>HQDA, FM 3-20.96, *Reconnaissance Squadron* (Revised edition), GPO, Washington, DC, TBP, 2010.

<sup>12</sup>General Martin Dempsey, *Small Wars Journal*, "Blog," posted by SWJ editors on 6 March 2009, available online at <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2009/03/on-war-modifiers>, accessed on 11 May 2009.

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