



The US Army Reconnaissance Course, Maneuver Center of Excellence

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Last fall, the Army Reconnaissance Course (ARC) successfully moved from Fort Knox, Kentucky, to its new home in the Maneuver Center of Excellence at Fort Benning, Georgia. Since its establishment at Fort Benning, the ARC cadre reflected on its methods to train reconnaissance leaders.

“The Army must continually adapt to changing conditions and evolving threats to our security. An essential part of that adaptation is the development of new ideas to address future challenges.”

—*The United States Army Learning Concept for 2015ⁱ*

Using the 21st Century Soldier competencies, described within the Army Learning Model (ALM) 2015, this paper will demonstrate how ARC professionally develops the abilities of junior reconnaissance leaders to adapt to the changing environment.

What is The Army Reconnaissance Course?

“The purpose of the Army Reconnaissance Course is to prepare commissioned officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) to perform 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.”

—*Robert C. Perry and Kevin McEnergyⁱⁱ*

The typical ARC student is an Army staff sergeant, sergeant first-class, or lieutenant assigned to a reconnaissance formation. Assignment is immaterial to the Soldier’s military occupational specialty. ARC student classes are predominately composed of Army personnel but also have students from the U.S. Marine Corps and international military students. The ARC is a 27-day course divided into three training blocks.

Block I of the ARC focuses on individual competencies required for the reconnaissance leader. It covers land navigation, analysis of terrain, and introduction of the capabilities and limitations of

different types of reconnaissance formations. Block I concludes with Operation Bushmaster, a four-day field problem in which students apply their understanding of land navigation, terrain, and weather to individual and team dismounted movements.

Block II of ARC training introduces students to area reconnaissance operations and observations, post establishment. Students gain technical training on surveillance target acquisition, night observation sensors, and the employment of communication systems including high-frequency tactical communication. Block II concludes with Operation Goldeneye, a four-day field exercise in which students conduct a platoon area reconnaissance of an urban environment.

Finally, Block III training focuses execution of zone reconnaissance and security operations. Block III of ARC training also educates students on integration of additional assets, including air-ground integration and indirect fire planning in support of reconnaissance operations. Block III, and the course, culminates in a four-day field exercise, Operation Blackjack, in which the students conduct a platoon dismounted and mounted zone reconnaissance and security operation.

ARC graduates return to the force possessing several clearly identifiable talents required of junior reconnaissance leaders. They exhibit higher level application of the fundamental skills in land navigation, reporting, assessing terrain, and assessing enemy and friendly capabilities. Graduates now have greater understanding of their commanders' informational needs and can communicate observations that are relevant to commanders' decisional needs. Graduates are able to plan and execute operations without compromise through their abilities to anticipate enemy contact, to anticipate the consequences of their tactical decisions, and to apply assets to mitigate risks.

The graduate of ARC develops competence in the use of technical surveillance tools, the employment of air- and ground-based fires in support of security missions, and through the understanding of units and ranges or distances of systems employed to support the reconnaissance mission. With this expertise, a graduate of ARC gains an initiate's ability to solve complex problems and implement decisions while fulfilling reconnaissance roles.

Army Reconnaissance Course and the 21st Century Soldier

The ARC trains junior members of the profession to develop these 21st Century competencies through the cadre's ability to use the training principles listed below. Through the application of these principles, the cadre successfully assists students in their development of the competences expressed in ALM 2015.

- ***Training to grow problem solving***—teaching Soldiers to teach themselves after course completion.
- ***Training to increase intangibles***—developing the intangible attributes of confidence, accountability and initiative.

- **Training to increase understanding and awareness**—teaching through contextual understanding of the task and its mission application.
- **Training to increase deliberate thought**—conditioning Soldiers to always exercise a deliberate thought process while under stress.
- **Training to improve combat performance**—conditioning Soldiers to overcome the psychological and physiological effects of combat.

Army Reconnaissance Course and the Core Competencies of the 21st Century Soldier

ALM 2015 “meets the all-volunteer Army’s need to develop adaptive, thinking Soldiers and leaders capable of meeting the challenges of operational adaptability in an era of persistent conflict.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The 21st Century Soldier possesses several competencies to prevail in complex and uncertain environments:

- Character and accountability.
- Comprehensive fitness.
- Adaptability and initiative.
- Lifelong learner.
- Teamwork and collaboration.
- Communication and engagement.
- Critical thinking and problem solving.
- Cultural and joint, interagency, international, and multinational (JIIM) competence.
- Tactical and technical competence.

Character and accountability

The ARC targets a student’s character and accountability through the ambiguous design of missions. All orders that students are issued are written under the context of a reconnaissance push framework. This flexibility in the order provides students numerous opportunities to develop fundamentally sound courses of actions, rather than scripted checklists. Student plans will create conditions in which the students must then operate, and they are accountable for adapting to those conditions. For example, a student must determine his own recovery and resupply plans. When poor planning leads to his platoon’s inability to accomplish a reconnaissance mission, the leadership of that platoon is accountable for the platoon’s actions.

Students do not receive packing lists for field operations; they are briefed a fragmentary order on the type of mission and the expected duration of the field problem. The students must then assess weather forecasts and demonstrate their capabilities and limitations to develop a packing list feasible to accomplish the upcoming mission. With supervision from the cadre to ensure safety, the students’ decisions on what to pack or not to pack leads to conditions under which the students operate. During dismounted operations, for example, a student’s desire to pack additional items may increase his ability to maneuver for long durations. The improved outer tactical vest, the advanced combat helmet, eye protection, and gloves are essential for both the Soldier in a combat environment and for the ARC Soldier. Additionally, the Soldier must use his

professional judgment to arrange his ammunition and additional equipment to best accomplish his mission.

Comprehensive fitness

ARC physical fitness events require problem solving abilities as well as physical endurance. During one physical training event, for example, the students divide into teams of four or five students and are provided a map with three sets of points in a circular pattern. Red points, set along the ring closest to the start location, are worth five points each. White points, which are mid-distance from the start point, and are worth 10 points each. The third ring of blue points is set the farthest away from the start location, and each blue point is worth 15 points. Teams have five minutes to plan their routes and 45 minutes to execute the course. Students are instructed to return before time expires with the most points they can accumulate; the route and points they run are based solely on the teams' decisions. During the event, the cadre is able to determine not only a student's overall level of fitness, but also, more importantly, how students conceptually solve problems. Students demonstrate how they are assessing their own abilities and the abilities of their teams to accomplish the mission. Yes, the students do run for 45 minutes and conduct a physical fitness event, but the students' ability to problem solve, conduct land navigate skills, and persevere under physical and mental pressure build a more comprehensively fit Soldier.

Adaptability and initiative

“Many units and schoolhouses continue to train using rote methods only, fostering a checklist mentality among those who receive the training. Certainly, we must attend to the fundamentals, but our training should also include the unexpected aspects of warfare that develop the mental agility required in conflict. Agility can no longer be a training afterthought. To truly train as we fight, we must make Soldiers exercise mental agility consistently, for any contingency, and across the spectrum of operations.”

—Robert Brown^{iv}

ARC trains a sense of adaptability and initiative in students through the design of orders for Operations Goldeneye and Blackjack. Under a reconnaissance pull context, when the brigade is still developing its course of actions, limited information forces students to determine on their own what information is truly relevant for the brigade commander. For example, when the students receive an order that has them conducting reconnaissance for the brigade focused on an enemy threat and no threat presents itself to the students, each student must determine what additional information he should provide to assist higher headquarters to develop the plan. The student must show initiative and adaptability to make decisions when the mission variables change.

ARC trains adaptability through conducting student leadership changes during the mission. However, unlike some courses where student leadership changes coincide with a pause of the operation and a new order, ARC conducts one mission order and expects each successive student leader to conduct a quality reconnaissance handover to his peer. The oncoming student leadership has to show the adaptability and initiative to quickly analyze the current mission

variables and his organization's capabilities, and then make a plan that is fundamentally sound for the continuation of the operation. The ARC's approach to how and when student leadership changes creates vast improvements in student confidence and initiative.

Lifelong learner (includes digital literacy)

“The objective of the ALC 2015 is the creation of a learning continuum that blurs the lines between the operating and generating forces by more closely integrating self-development, institutional instruction, and operational experience. The learning continuum begins when one joins the Army and does not end until one leaves. It is learner-centric, not instructor-centric.”

—William Raymond^v

To increase student desire for lifelong learning, ARC students conduct independent research and self-development outside the classroom. Instructors introduce students to the professional forum maneuver net, and the students contribute their thoughts on several professional reading assignments. ARC students train in a variety of learning environments, including the classroom, the field, and Virtual Battlespace 2. Because they have been exposed to a variety of training environments, the students develop the insight that, as leaders, allows them continue their own development as well as the development of their Soldiers across training modalities.

Teamwork and collaboration

“Senior and organizational-level leaders must attain an awareness of how they personally influence learning organizations. They must take an introspective look and achieve an awareness of how they personally lead and influence others, especially as related to fostering learning processes.”

—Bill McCollum and Jim Thomas^{vi}

The student body within ARC is varied; NCOs and officers intermixed in small groups, providing the opportunity for insightful discussion. Student collaboration and teamwork during operations is encouraged by the cadre. This practice creates an environment in which students understand the importance of delegation and trust in subordinates, which is vital for successful reconnaissance missions.

Communication and engagement (oral and written; negotiation)

The ARC increases student communication skills through weekly self, peer, and instructor assessments. The “360 degree” assessments require students to apply professional judgment to their own abilities as well as to the abilities of their peers. The subordinates of a platoon leader or platoon sergeant do not take tests to prove their superiority. The leader's assessment of his subordinates' actions helps to determine the strengths and weakness of his organization. ARC fosters the students' ability to articulate intangible assets through written and oral reports.

ARC also conducts reconnaissance operations in which students conduct debriefs of the reconnaissance to the troop, squadron, and or brigade commanders. This activity forum provides

students the opportunity to develop oral and written communication skills. Clear and concise reports by reconnaissance leaders, who often operate at the extremes of the brigade's boundaries, improve the overall effectiveness of the unit.

Critical thinking and problem solving

The ARC introduces students to varying experiences that fosters the development of their critical thinking and problem solving skills. A professional's ability to critically analyze a problem comes through training and experience.

“The military will not be able to train or educate you to have all the right answers—as you might find in a manual—but you should look for those experiences and pursuits in your career that will help you at least ask the right questions.”

—Robert M. Gates^{vii}

Knowing that there is no end to all checklists for the success of being a leader, ARC exposes students to situations where the question of how they got to a solution is more important than the end state.

For example during the course's culminating event, Operation Blackjack, the students receive an ambiguous brigade order framed as a reconnaissance pull mission with an enemy military force moving south into Benning and a U.S. brigade moving north on the attack. The ambiguousness of the operations order comes from the lack of a clear timeline or well-defined enemy force. Students do not receive a timeline from higher to be on the objective or a clear enemy situation template. The lack of information forces the students to analyze their capabilities and terrain to determine when and where they need to be on the battlefield to conduct effective reconnaissance and security for higher headquarters. This method is a great forcing function to drive home to the students the critical thinking required to serve as a reconnaissance leader.

Cultural and JIIM competence

The ARC targets JIIM competence through diversity of the student body. As stated, the student body integrates NCOs and officers from the Army, the Marine Corps, and international militaries. The variety of experiences and knowledge the students provide increases overall understanding of other organizations and their roles on today's battlefield.

Tactical and Technical Competence

The students gain tactical and technical competence throughout their time in ARC; they gain competence through the application of communication and sensor equipment, for example. The students learn employment of communication systems such as Harris radios with field expedient antennas as well as employment of sensors, such as the Long-Range Advanced Scout Surveillance System, vectors, and the Improved Target Acquisition System. The science behind the tools is learned in the classroom, but students are also provided the opportunity during the

field exercises to employ the art of using the tools, which increases their proficiency and confidence.

Conclusion

“Our ability and will to win any fight cannot be open to challenge. As part of a joint force, we must be clear that we can fight and win across the full spectrum of conflict. That means realistic training, expert leaders, modern equipment, and quality Soldiers.”

—*GEN Raymond Odierno*^{viii}

Within the framework of ALC 2015, the ARC’s professional cadre assists students to develop expertise in reconnaissance operations through the students’ ability to solve complex mission context problems. The leaders who graduate this course are prepared to face the challenges of the 21st Century battlefield.

ⁱ TRADOC Pamphlet 525-8-2, *The United States Army Learning Concept for 2015*, 14 September 2010.

ⁱⁱ Robert C. Perry and Kevin McEnery, “Army Reconnaissance Course: Defining the Aim Point for Reconnaissance Leader Training.” *Armor Magazine* July-August 2009, p. 1.

ⁱⁱⁱ TRADOC Pam 525-8-2, *The United States Army Learning Concept for 2015*, 14 September 2010, p. 3.

^{iv} Brown, Robert. “The Agile-Leader Mind-Set: Leveraging the Power of Modularity in Iraq.” *Military Review*, July-August 2007, p. 4.

^v Raymond, William. “The Criticality of Captains’ Education, Now and in the Future.” *Military Review*, November-December 2010: p. 55.

^{vi} McCollum, Bill and Thomas, Jim. “Leading a Learning Organization—How do you Influence Success?” p. 2. <usacac.army.mil/cac2/cgsc/repository/dcl_LeadingALearningOrg.pdf>

^{vii} Gates, Robert M. Address to the United States Military Academy. West Point, New York, 25 February 2011. pages 2-3.

^{viii} Odierno, Raymond. “Gen. Raymond Odierno: Prevent, Shape, Win.” *TRADOC This Week* 15 December 2011, p. 1.