

Reconnaissance



The world of prepping is constantly evolving. Just look at how far technological advancements in the past five to ten years have come and how it has benefitted not only the military and law enforcement but the prepper community as well. But alas, with every technological advance, the prior way of doing things and that knowledge tends to slowly slip away into an abyss.

One major change has been in how we view defensive operations. In the “ole” days one would have to reconnoiter if you needed to gather intel. Fast forward to today and you ask any MAG, tribe, or prepper group, and more than likely they will have one, if not two, drones along with highly skilled and knowledgeable operators. Drones have become a force multiplier for not only the military but civilians as well. The “eye-in-the-sky” is the new way of performing reconnaissance, but is it always the best way?

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RECONNAISSANCE, RECONNOITER, AND SURVEILLANCE:

Before going further, I want to take a moment to explain the difference between reconnaissance, reconnoiter, and surveillance. Many times, these words are used interchangeably, but there is a difference between reconnaissance and surveillance. Surveillance usually involves the use of electronic equipment (drones, surveillance cameras, wiretaps, etc.). Meriam-Webster Dictionary definitions are as follows:

Reconnaissance: (N) *a preliminary survey to gather information*

Reconnoiter: (V) *to make a reconnaissance of*

Surveillance: (N) *close watch kept over someone or something (as by a detective)*

For the sake of this article, this tertiary prepper skill is going to be focused on utilizing old-school reconnaissance teachings to get back to the basics and not have to rely on technology, other than a comms system. If comms is not available, you could use a two-person team where one is a runner and communicates back to the team the findings of the reconnoiterer. Lastly, there is nothing wrong with utilizing drones for surveillance or reconnaissance, however learning the manual way of collecting intelligence will help you and your group overall, if necessary, given an EMP event. Once learned, meshing both drones and reconnoitering skills during TEOTWAWKI will only broaden your offensive and defensive security plan.



The Prepper SKILLS OF RECONNAISSANCE:

The [GoArmy website definition for the military occupational specialty \(MOS\) 13F](#), or Joint Fire Support Specialist, is: *As a Joint Fire Support Specialist, you'll gather intelligence and enemy target location to help the Army determine where and how to deploy artillery in mission-based situations. You will set up and operate communications systems, encode, and decode messages, assist in the preparation of fire support plans, coordinate, and target, operate laser range finders, and target devices, and determine the target's location using computers or manual calculations.*

The first part where it states, “gather intelligence and enemy target location” means in layman’s terms, stealthfully seeking out your enemy’s location without giving away your position and then reporting it back to your base of operations. This is for FO’s (reconnoiterer) attached to light infantry and infantry airborne units (at least it was when I was an FO). Aside from getting to and setting up an observation post (OP), one must first be proficient in the art of stealthy reconnaissance. This is not an exhaustive list, but some of the skills a forward observer needs to possess for reconnoitering are:

- Topographic map reading
- Day and night land navigation
- Target / object distance estimation
- Stealth and concealment
- Radio operations (comms)
- Physical and mental stamina
- Ability to work autonomously
- Basic survival knowledge (water procurement, wild edibles, etc.)
- Intestinal fortitude

In my belief, it is here that these skills should be more of a primary or a secondary principle of prepping than a tertiary one. Although drones can play a significant role in OPSEC (Operations Security), physical reconnaissance has now become more of a TPS (Tertiary Prepper Skill), which needs to be practiced and developed. This is also one of the more elaborate tertiary prepper skills that need more attention than just a weekend or two to learn.

SCENARIO:

It has been 9 days since the U.S. descended into chaos and it is a true WROL situation. The president shortly thereafter declares martial law across the United States, and all cellular towers and internet services have been disabled. You hear chatter over the ham radio that there seems to be an estimated one-thousand-person caravan of starving people heading northbound on the major highway located five miles from where you live. The horde is 15 miles away to the south currently.

There is also a secondary highway off the major northbound highway that skirts to within one mile of your bugout location. If the caravan takes the secondary highway, you might have some serious problems, as scouts will be venturing out to scavenge. To add insult to injury, it is dusk and the wind is blowing at 30 mph. You are hearing reports on the NOAA alert that a hurricane is coming inland and there will be a tropical storm by the time it goes over your location. (Yeah, it is a little far-fetched but always try to incorporate Murphy’s Law into every scenario you develop. You will thank yourself later.)

This is where having reconnoiter experience as a tertiary prepper skill will come into play. There are some knowns and unknowns in this scenario.

The Knowns are:

1. No one in the group has prepared for this type of scenario. There is a potential threat three to five hours away heading northbound in your direction (depending on how quickly a horde of starving people can walk).
2. The size of the caravan is *reported* to be 1k people.
3. You have one drone that is a long-range waterproof machine and can handle intense winds, but you risk the loss of the drone if you chance it.

4. It is dusk and about to get ugly outside. A hungry horde may be looking for a place to wait out a storm that could jeopardize your current location.

The Unknowns are:

1. Is there really a large caravan of hungry people heading in your direction? Are there really 1k people or is it only 50? Is someone deploying psyop tactics in the hopes people in the surrounding area bug out and leave behind most their prepper possessions?
2. Does the potential caravan threat have current vulnerabilities? Are they armed? Are they mostly women and children? Are they all on foot or using other means of travel?
3. Your immediate group has not assessed and has had the time to process the risk of *their* vulnerability and potential of being exploited by a mass of starving people.
4. Is it feasible to put countermeasures in place in such a short amount of time?

The only way to address the unknowns is for someone from your prepper group, tribe, MAG, or even your family, to gather more intel to calculate this potential threat / non-threat and report it back to the team to take the necessary precautions.



ITEMS NEEDED:

Aside from the attributes above, to be successful at reconnaissance, one must start off with having the right equipment. Although this is not an exhaustive list, this is a great starting point of what you would need in the event you or someone from your group must perform these reconnoiter duties.

- A 12-hour rucksack ([5.11 Rush 12 2.0](#) is a good example)

- 1:50,000 waterproof grid map of your area
- [Lensatic or orienteering compass](#)
- [A good pair of binoculars](#) (w/ range finder reticle pattern if possible; 10×50 magnification is a good start)
- Two (2) [military protractors](#) (they are clear; two is one and one is none)
- [Pace count beads](#)
- Comms (Ham, CB, or GMRS radio with an earpiece and small microphone would be preferred to remain as quiet as possible. You will also want a long enough antenna to transmit across harsh terrains.)
- Range Cards
- State Highway map (check your state's dot.gov website for free visitor state highway maps)
- Camouflage face paint
- .3mm drafting mechanical pencils
- Grease markers (non-permanent)
- Large 4 mil sealing plastic bag or map case
- Flashlight or headlamp with red lens
- Write in the rain notepad w/ pen
- Rain Poncho
- Firearm (Long Rifle or sidearm depending on the mission and terrain)
- Proper seasonal clothing (camouflage preferably for your area, gray man if in the city or suburbs)
- Proper footwear and socks for seasonal conditions
- Water
- **Additional Items to consider:**
 - Night Vision or Infrared (depending on budget)
 - Water Filter (Sawyer mini or squeeze)
 - IFAK (Individual First Aid Kit)
 - Ammo (consider the additional weight as to how many magazines you think you will need)

This bag should always be packed to grab at a moment's notice. Do not confuse this bag with an INCH (I'm Never Coming Home) bag or a get-home / bug-out bag. This bag has one purpose and that is for reconnaissance. Try to avoid utilizing all the real estate on and inside the bag. Try to keep this bag around 15 lbs. if you can. Remember, ounces equal pounds, and pounds equal pain. Being stealthy is the key to the mission. Being a minimalist is also key here, so you will want just the essentials to get to your OP or area of reconnaissance so you can grab the intel and extract yourself quickly and quietly.

10 STEPS TO GETTING STARTED:

Developing reconnoitering skills takes time, since it involves various abilities essential for success—particularly during grid-down or WROL scenarios. If you are serious about having someone perform reconnaissance, here is a non-exhaustive list to get you pointed in the right direction.

1. Purchase as many of the above items on the list as possible (NOTE: Do NOT try to find the cheapest protractors or compasses. A protractor that needs to be “trimmed” is not worth buying. [A great Lensatic compass is Cammenga](#). Buy once / cry once).
2. Invest in a 1:50,000 grid map if you can. (<https://mapstore.mytopo.com/>)
3. Purchase (or download) Map Reading and Land Navigation ([FM 21-26](#)) OR ([FM 3-25.26](#)).

4. Study these manuals if you are unfamiliar with map reading and land navigation and figure out your pace count and commit it to memory.
5. Once you have acquired your reconnoiter materials and you have familiarized yourself with the information, figure out whom your tribe, group, MAG, or family has any experience map reading, glassing, and/or hunting and can physically manage the reconnoiter responsibilities for your group.
6. This one is not critical, but you might want to set up a code word cheat sheet for you and your group if you are planning to communicate on an unsecured radio channel during an SHTF situation. (NOTE: Please abide by all FCC regulations when utilizing open-air communication devices.)
7. Begin creating dry run scenarios with your group or family. Start off small, say, reconnoitering a half click (500M) to a location where you can set up a camouflaged Observation Post (OP). Use your preferred comms to call into your base station, group, or family what it is that you see.
8. Egress. Try to determine on your grid map an egress or two before committing to your OP. It is good practice to always think about your extraction plan as things might get squirrely once you get into position.
9. Red team everything. After your dry runs, get back with your group or family and assess the pros and cons of what you have just practiced. Do NOT fall into an echo chamber during this time and embrace confirmation biases. These dry runs need to be taken seriously, and they need to be dissected for both the good and the bad for them to be perfected. Getting captured (or even killed) while on a reconnaissance mission jeopardizes not only your well-being but the safety of the group as well.
10. Practice, practice, and practice some more because Murphy never takes a day off. Ever.

CONCLUSION:

Reconnoitering is a tertiary prepper skill that is going to take time to learn if you have never done it before. But be rest assured, thousands of soldiers every year learn the basic skills of land navigation and map reading and you can too. This is a skill that you will develop sooner rather than later, especially while time is still calm. Read up on your manuals, watch YouTube videos, and talk to military veterans to learn tips and tricks to better perform reconnaissance.

Stay strong, keep learning new tertiary prepper skills, and enjoy stealth reconnaissance!

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