

National Guard Cavalry Squadron Executes on SIMNET

by Captain Patrick M. Hamilton

In April, the 1st Squadron, 124th Cavalry, the divisional cavalry squadron for the 49th Armored Division, was the first unit from the Texas Army National Guard to conduct SIMNET training. Boarding C-130 Air National Guard aircraft, they flew from Waco, Texas to Fort Knox, Kentucky (ground troops) and from Austin, Texas to Fort Rucker, Alabama (air troops). The mission was to conduct combined troop-level SIMNET operations (ground and air), using a long haul link between Fort Knox and Fort Rucker. The exercise enabled troop commanders to evaluate their platoons (ground) and scout weapons teams (air) on platoon-level ARTEP tasks and on their ability to work as an air and ground combined arms team. In completing this training, the squadron paved the way for other units in the 49th Armored Division to use this outstanding training opportunity.

Conception

In June of 1993, the squadron held a training meeting to finalize the Fiscal Year 1994 yearly training plan. Due to the fielding of the M1 tank to the division, OPTEMPO costs increased. This, in conjunction with funding restraints, spawned a recommendation to determine whether SIMNET could be a viable alternative to a three-day practice ARTEP at Fort Hood. The squadron commander tasked the S3 to conduct a cost analysis as a basis for justification (see Figure 1). OPTEMPO figures were compiled from several sources,

including the Mobilization and Training Equipment Site (MATES) at Fort Hood, the U.S. Army Aviation Center at Fort Rucker, and the 136th Airlift Wing, Texas Air National Guard.

Planning

Once the concept of conducting the long haul SIMNET exercise was cost-justified and endorsed by the division, the planning process began. Packets containing airlift requests and requirements for training simulators, billeting, mess, and ground transportation were sent through channels to each respective installation. These initial requests were submitted in September, 1993. After months of almost daily phone contact to each training site to facilitate scheduling changes and to add concurrent training events, the training schedule in Figure 2 was solidified in February 1994.

Execution

Advance parties consisting of S3 and S4 representatives were sent to each installation a day early to draw vehicles and billets and to finalize mess arrangements. At 0600 on 28 April 1994, the first of four C-130s lifted off and the mission was under way. At 1400 hours local time at Fort Knox, the last C-130 containing the majority of Bravo Troop touched down at Godman Field. All units reported in at both sites with no soldiers left behind and everything going according to schedule.

Alpha and Charlie Troops began on SIMNET with a two-hour train-up on the simulators Friday evening and two more hours Saturday morning, with mission execution scheduled from 0800-1400 hours Saturday. Both troop commanders had developed the operations order and issued it to their platoon leaders during the March drill. On Friday the first order of business was to build two rock drill areas — one at the SIMNET, and one at the billets. Then the process of briefbacks and rock drills took priority when not conducting simulator train-up.

The mission was built around several collective ARTEP tasks which were to be evaluated at annual training in June at Fort Hood. These tasks are listed in Figure 3. Using the National Training Center database, the two troops would conduct a four-phase operation. Phase I was to conduct a tactical road march from an assembly area to passage lanes. Phase II was to conduct a forward passage of lines through an armor brigade. Phase III was to conduct a zone reconnaissance. Phase IV was to establish a screen forward of the brigade and to fight a counterreconnaissance battle.

Although the tasks and overall missions were the same for both SIMNET iterations, each air and ground troop commander who worked together developed an order based on their mission analysis and training objective. On Saturday at 0800, the first ground elements departed the Alpha Troop assembly area on time. However, due to technical difficulties with the long haul link, Charlie Troop aircraft were slightly delayed. As the mission continued, it became painfully obvious that the simulation train-up time available was grossly inadequate and became a

MUTA 5* ARTEP Training Ft. Hood

#	Vehicle Type	OPTEMPO Cost	Miles/Hours	Cost
14	M1	\$121.38/mile	40 miles	\$67,916.80
31	M113 FOV	\$29.33/mile	40 miles	\$36,369.20
10	OH-58	\$320.00/hour	8 hours	\$25,600.00
6	AH-1F	\$1,267.00/hour	8 hours	\$60,816.00
13	HMMWV	\$.23/mile	120 miles	\$358.80
			Total Cost	\$191,060.80

*MUTA 5 (Multiple Unit Training Assembly) is five 4-hour periods of training.

NOTE: Costs do not include operation of M939 5-ton trucks or HEMTT Fuelers as OPTEMPO figures were not available.

Figure 1

SIMNET COST

(Ft. Rucker)

Equipment Cost	Man Hour Cost	Service Fee	Cost
WAIVED \$15,000 (C-130 cost)	\$5,300	WAIVED	\$5,300.00 \$15,000.00

(Ft. Knox)

\$45,000 (C-130 cost)			\$45,000.00
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Total Cost \$65,300.00

Figure 2

Cavalry Team Lane Tasks

<u>Scout platoon tasks:</u>		<u>Tank platoon tasks:</u>		<u>Aer scout Weapons Teams tasks:</u>	
MISSION (ALL LANES)	TASK NO.	MISSIONS (ALL LANES)	TASK NO.	MISSIONS (ALL LANES)	TASK NO.
Occupy an Assembly Area	17-3-1013	Perform Assembly Area Activities	17-3-0200	Move to and Occupy Assembly Area	01-2-0101
Perform Pre-Combat Checks	17-3-1033	Perform Pre-Combat Checks	17-3-0102	Prepare for Future Operations	01-2-0501
Perform Rehearsals	17-3-1034	Employ C&C Measures	17-3-0105	Report Intelligence Data	01-2-0502
Prepare for Tactical Operations	17-3-1040	Prepare for Tactical Operations	17-3-0101	Conduct Screening Operations	01-2-6106
Employ C&C Measures	17-3-1036	Perform Tactical Planning	17-3-0100	Conduct Route Recon	01-2-6103
Perform Tactical Planning	17-3-1035	Conduct Rehearsals for a Mission	17-3-0216	Conduct Area Recon	01-2-6101
MISSIONS (LANE 1)	TASK NO.	MISSIONS (LANE 1)	TASK NO.	Engage Targets	01-2-0105
Perform a Tactical Road March	17-3-1012	Conduct a Tactical Road March	17-3-0212	Conduct Zone Recon	01-2-6102
Perform Passage of Lines	17-3-1014	Perform a Passage of Lines	17-3-0215	Perform Actions on Contact	01-2-6104
MISSION (LANE 2)	TASK NO.	MISSIONS (LANE 2)	TASK NO.	Detect/React to OPFOR	01-2-0103
Recon Obstacles & Bypass	17-3-1020	Execute Traveling Overwatch	17-3-0210		
Perform Route Recon		Conduct Hasty Occupation of BP	17-3-0227		
(Includes Bridge Classification)	17-3-1017	Execute Actions on Contact	17-3-0221		
Execute Actions on Contact	17-3-1021				
MISSIONS (LANES 3, 4, & 5)	TASK NO.	MISSIONS (LANES 3, 4, & 5)	TASK NO.		
Conduct a Screen	17-3-1024	Execute Actions on Contact	17-3-0221		
Perform a Zone Recon	17-3-1018	Produce a Plt Fire Plan	17-3-0104		
		Occupy a Plt Battle Position	17-3-0222		

Figure 3

key point in after-actions reviews. It was quickly discovered that maneuver, command and control in "SIMNET land" is in many ways more difficult than the real thing. However, after about four hours of execution with some quick AARs from the OCs, the troops began to work through the problems. At the end of the eight-hour operation, the soldiers had become proficient at fighting their vehicles and were eager to stay and execute more missions.

Bravo and Delta Troops experienced many of the same problems, and in the final after-action review for SIMNET, it was determined that eight to twelve hours of train-up should be conducted prior to mission execution.

Concurrent training, conducted when units were not in SIMNET, consisted of UCOFT for M1 and Bradley crews, M1 Platoon Gunnery Trainer, M1 Driver Trainer, and Army Safety Center briefings for the air troops. Concurrent training opportunities are very limited at Fort Rucker on a weekend.

The squadron and troop maintenance sections conducted rigorous M1 hull and turret (STE M1) training (see Figure 2) conducted by the Armor Training Brigade. Several of the more experienced mechanics commented that this was without a doubt the best maintenance training they had ever received.

On Sunday morning, the priority was to clear the billets, get the vehicles turned in, and get the soldiers to the airplanes. We scheduled visits to both the Patton Museum at Fort Knox and the Aviation Museum at Fort Rucker, and both were very worthwhile. The

Patton Museum, at the request of the unit, opened early to accommodate departure schedules, which we greatly appreciated. The squadron chaplain held worship services in the memorial garden on the north side of the Patton Museum just prior to the final bus ride to nearby Godman field.

The return flight was a blur. Most of the soldiers slept when they could, relived SIMNET battles, or discovered who had reached a higher "reticle aim" in the UCOFT. A predominant comment made by many of the soldiers before they were released that day was, "My friends at work won't believe what I did this weekend."

Lessons Learned

The major lesson learned during this exercise was that SIMNET train-up requires at least eight to twelve hours. The optimum training could be received by National Guard and Reserve units if they could spend a week of their annual training in SIMNET. Another observation was that Fort Knox's policy of total support of the Guard and Reserve has created more training opportunities than there is time to use them. Therefore, a unit must have definite training objectives established and then schedule training opportunities which are focused on those objectives.

The air and ground coordination possible in SIMNET can greatly improve it in the real world. This was confirmed during annual training when the squadron TAMS evaluators from the 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry at Fort Hood consistently commented on the out-

standing air and ground coordination during the ARTEPs. However, the current communications link in the SIMNET long haul is not adequate and needs to be improved.

Finally, SIMNET is a great training opportunity in itself, but there is one factor that makes it especially attractive to the Reserve Components. It is an opportunity to do something different. Many units tend to go to the same training sites month after month and year after year. The recruiting and retention value of this type of training is immeasurable. As the squadron commander stated upon our return to Texas, for years the soldiers will talk about the time they got on C-130s and flew to Fort Knox and Fort Rucker and received some of the best training they had ever had.

Captain Patrick Hamilton was commissioned through ROTC at Texas A&M University in 1986. He has attended AOBC, M60A3 and M1 Tank Commanders Course, AOAC, and is currently enrolled in CAS³. His duty assignments have included scout platoon leader, troop XO, and S3 (Air) in 1-124 Cavalry, TXARNG. He is currently the A Troop commander and has been the full-time squadron training officer since 1990.