

# Remember the Road to Bataan:

## Training for War in a Resource-Short Environment (Reserve Component)

*How a California Army National Guard Tank Battalion derived a reduced-OPTEMPO training strategy based on the inspiration of its historic legacy.*

**by Lieutenant Colonel John M. Menter and First Lieutenant Michael R. Evans, CARNG**

At 2100 hours on 8 September 1941, the 194th Tank Battalion, composed of National Guard divisional tank companies from California, Minnesota, and Missouri, sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge from San Francisco harbor aboard the *USAT President Coolidge*. Under darkened ship conditions, the gray hulls slid west, guarded by the sleek dark shape of the cruiser *USS Astoria*. Their destination was Manila harbor in the Philippines.

After what must have seemed an eternity, almost exactly four years later, on 12 September 1945, the survivors embarked again, this time from Yokohama, Japan. While in various prison camps in the Philippines, Taiwan (Formosa), and Japan, these citizen-soldiers had suffered terribly. As a case in point, of the 108 men of Company C from Salinas, California, only 47 returned home in the fall of 1945.

Yet their sacrifice had not been in vain. From December 1941 to May 1942, the 194th and 192nd Tank Battalions, comprising the 149th Tank Group (Provisional) defended central Luzon and then the Bataan Peninsula from units of the invading Japanese 14th Army. These National Guardsmen were part of the first U.S. tank unit to go overseas in WWII, the first U.S. tank unit to engage the enemy in WWII, and the first U.S. tank unit to engage enemy tanks in the history of the U.S. Armored Force. In the process, they earned three Presidential Unit Citations in a five-month period. The only mechanized force available to the U.S. Armed Forces, Far East (USAFFE), they repeatedly blunted Japanese infantry and tank assaults, extending the Japanese seizure of the Philippines far beyond the timeline Japanese planners expected.

The Japanese 14th Army, tied down by this tenacious defense, was unavailable for the Japanese drive south in that dark spring of 1942. That drive was stopped, only barely, by the courageous last-ditch defenses of Port Moresby, on the island of New Guinea, and at the Battle of the



Coral Sea. It wouldn't have taken much more for the Japanese to turn the tide and to continue their advance to the shores of Northern Australia. But for the sacrifice of those brave men on central Luzon, with their untried or worn-out equipment, shortages of every type of supply, and with starvation their constant companion, World War II in the Pacific might have gone very differently.

Now, consider the context. Imagine, if you will, the Army fallen on hard times. A conservative Congress bickers with a liberal President over fiscal conservatism versus deficit spending while the national economy struggles. The national interests are turned inward; feeling no threat from a world that they had recently saved in a victorious and popularly acclaimed war for the ideals of freedom. Elsewhere, nations little regarded in the press muster massive armies fueled by a global economic and technological surge and begin programs of slow but inexorable military expansion and modernization. Economic turmoil and corruption rule in Latin America while ethnic hatreds simmer in southern Europe and Africa. The Pacific Rim nations begin amazing leaps of industrialization, fueled by cheap labor and raw materials. The Army, cut to its smallest size in decades, struggles on with aging equipment in the face of an ever-more evident revolution in military technology brought on by new advances in communications and weapons. Debates rage over the very existence of the Army, while the Navy consumes disproportionate resources in a capital ship building program and the Air Force suggests that future wars will be won by air power alone. And the strength of the Army drains away in small-scale stability and support operations across the world.

Sound familiar? It should...it's the mid-1930s. Eerily familiar today, our grandfathers faced similar concerns of changing world orders, old hatreds coupled with new opportunism by militarized enemies, discord and confusion at home, and a climate of having to "do more with less" in the face of defense budgets which had been cut to the bone. As our country has always done, in the fall of 1940 it turned to the citizen soldier. National Guardsmen from across America answered the call of freedom and began their post-mobilization training as war clouds loomed. Overnight, the Army doubled and then tripled in size, and grew even larger as the nation's first peacetime draft began to create Army Reserve divisions filled with draftees while their more ready National Guard brethren began

overseas embarkation. And so sailed the men of the 194th Tank Battalion, with their brand-new, and as yet untried, M3 Stuart light tanks.

That these men did so well is a tribute to their esprit, professionalism, and courage. It is also, however, a tribute to careful planning, dynamic leadership, and innovative approaches to existing tactics, techniques, and procedures in the Army training program.

Those brave men faced many challenges. Their tanks were untried, new designs with many flaws which became evident only in combat. Their flat decks allowed easy placement of thermite grenades. Their riveted armor created spalling hazards from kinetic energy impacts. The tanks' armament was complicated by extraneous and unneeded hull machine guns. They were penalized by the high fuel consumption rates of the tanks' aircraft engines, which burned only highly volatile aviation gasoline. And the 37mm guns of the M3s, on arrival in the Philippines, were supplied only with kinetic energy AP shot, not the high-explosive rounds they needed against an infantry-heavy enemy.

Their doctrine was new and likewise untried: an ambitious Armored Force encouraged tank-pure charges into the enemy with the aggressive spirit of the Cavalry. But this approach clashed with an entrenched Infantry-dominated hierarchy that remembered the tanks from World War I days as slow and unreliable infantry-support gun platforms.

### Here and Today

In the summer of 1997, similar concerns were at the forefront of planning by the professional descendants of those heroes, the modern citizen-soldiers of the First Battalion, 149th Armor. Earlier in the year, they had successfully transitioned from their tried and tested, but obsolescing and road-weary, M60A3s to the newer and more glamorous, but as yet unknown M1 (IP) Abrams (105mm gun). But planning for FY98 was not easy. Operational Tempo (OPTEMPO) cost estimates were skyrocketing... tank mileage costs had multiplied five-fold, to nearly \$105 per mile, and there was no Class IX stockpile to fall back on in the event of their inevitable breakdown with use. The tanks had arrived from their previous owners in, at best, worn condition with some little better than hangar queens. And in the face of these daunting demands, the budget had been slashed yet

again... a 60 percent reduction from the previous year's budget. Even funds for commercial buses to make the two- or three-hour road trip to the equipment and training sites at Camp Roberts and Fort Hunter-Liggett had drained away.

To make matters worse, the transition of Fort Hunter-Liggett from Regular Army to Army Reserve control ignited a bitter and acrimonious turf battle between the National Guard and the Army Reserve over control of and access to training areas. Road marching the tanks from the MATES site at Camp Roberts, some 35 miles one way, had become prohibitively expensive (almost \$140,000 for 20 tanks), and the USAR refused to allow parking in the M1 tank park located only five miles from the MPRC (recently vacated by the 1-40th Armor when they deactivated). This battle even now has not been resolved and has frozen into a stalemate. As a result, California Army National Guard (CAARNG) units are denied access to Fort Hunter-Liggett facilities, with the only tank range in Northern California.

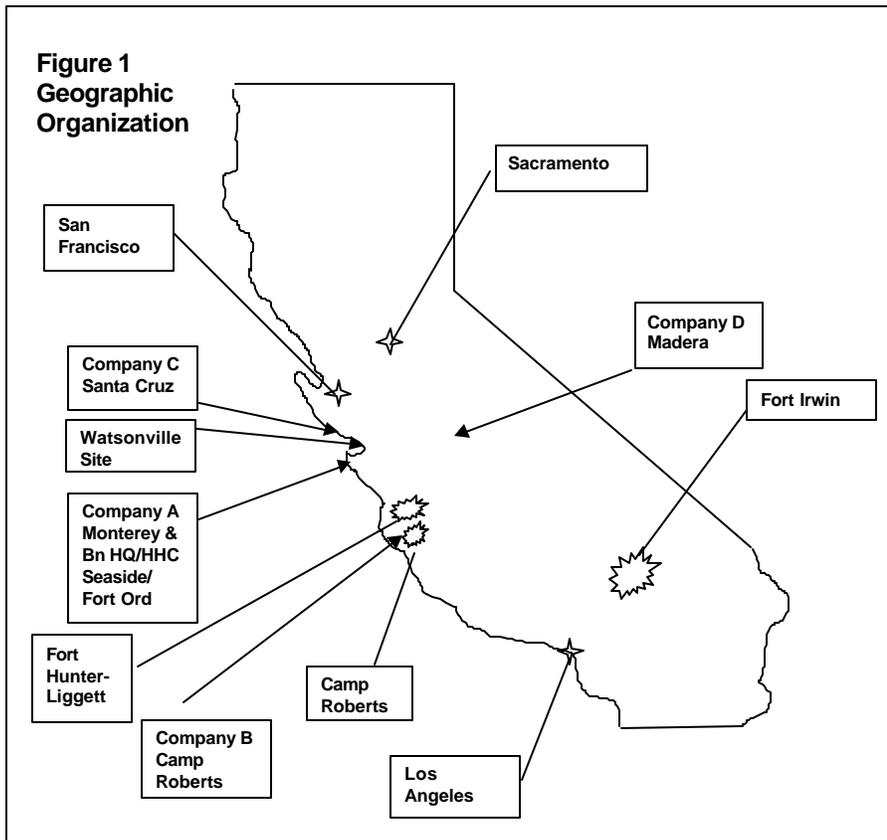
### Then and Now

At first, it seemed that the battalion could not slip this one-two punch. They had tanks, but no money to operate them. And, even if they had the money, they had no range on which to train. Survivors of the 194th Tank Battalion, retired men like CWO Ero (Ben) Saccone (the C Company First Sergeant in 1941), understood their plight only too well. The unit had trained in the 1930s with their World War I vintage Renault FT-17s, no ammunition, broom handles simulating machine guns, and Ford Model-Ts with cardboard armor to simulate enemy tanks. Without ammunition during peacetime, the first opportunity the men of the 194th had to fire their brand new 37mm main guns was in combat. But "Do more with less" becomes worse than a bad joke with time. Wishes and positive thoughts don't fuel tanks, refurbish track pads, or punch holes in targets. "Hooah" only goes so far. In 1998, a new concept had to be found.

### A Training Center is Born

That new concept took root in a convergence of several factors. In 1996, Company B had been relocated from its traditional armory in rural Watsonville to new accommodations in a conventional orderly room/office block and supply facility on Camp Roberts itself. This move,

**Figure 1  
Geographic  
Organization**



undertaken to improve manning by spreading the battalion across a wider geographic population base, had been successful and had also brought improved access to Camp Roberts' training facilities. But the old armory stood vacant. A nearby mech infantry battalion tried, and failed, to establish a detachment there... and so the battalion had a vacant building.

At the same time, two new valuable training tools became available: an M1(IP) Mobile Conduct of Fire Trainer (MCOFT), a trailer-mounted gunnery simulator, and an Abrams Full-System Interactive Simulation Trainer (AFIST). These systems could have been parceled out to a couple of company armories, based on the usual criteria of who had the necessary installation of pads and wiring, or they could be massed for maximum effect.

The Watsonville Armory had a pre-existing MCOFT pad and 220v wiring for an AFIST, and was centrally located to the members of the battalion. Company D, in Madera, has the longest distance to commute — about three hours by truck, Company B a two-hour commute, and HHC and Companies C and A have trips of an hour or less.

### The Lay of the Land

At Watsonville, the drill floor is big enough for two tanks, so the idea of a

tank for stationary training (e.g. TCGST) came to mind. In discussions by the battalion staff, the ideas of multi-echelon (individual through Company Team Mapex) and cross Combat Arms -Combat Service Support training entered the picture.

As it eventually took root, the concept is multi-echelon tank company team training, based around four fields:

**1. Simulation Training.** One crew at a time (TC and gunner only in the MCOFT) can each train in the MCOFT and AFIST. With restrictions on gunnery access and funding for operation of tanks, this is frequently the best company-level access to tank gunnery and maneuver. With 24-hour-per-day operations from 2100 Friday to 1500 Sunday of a typical drill, this allows each crew in the company three hours in each simulator.

**2. Stationary Tank Training.** This tank is available for TCGST and Armament Accuracy Checks training, with the addition of a boresight panel, "snake board," and solution board set up outside the building and visible when the overhead door is opened. It is also available for maintenance training: not only crew -10 tasks (e.g. track maintenance), but also for basic -10 and -20 hull and turret classes.

**3. Maintenance Training.** Having a real tank to work on takes on new mean-

ing for hull and turret mechanics. With removal of the AFIST tank engine and its placement on a wheeled engine stand, this becomes far more valuable for a systemic approach to M1(IP) maintenance with TMDE and "ground-hop" kits. Additionally, turret mechanics conduct trouble-shooting on turret electrical systems using "Bob" box multimeters.

**4. Platoon-Company Team Leader MAPEX:** With the soldiers engaged in crew duties, the officers and senior NCOs have a classroom available for conduct of sand table and map exercises using terrain models of Camp Roberts and Fort Hunter-Liggett, the battalion's main pre- and post-mobilization training sites. This makes it possible to wargame and conduct sand table rehearsals using task force orders generated for the terrain on which the battalion conducts its maneuver during IDT and AT.

Additionally, a separate classroom is available with both audiovisual and hands-on training aids for class instruction on armored fighting vehicle identification, ammunition identification, gunnery-course procedures, etc. A supply room and arms vault for storing sensitive items (machine guns for TCGST, muzzle boresight devices, diagnostic equipment, plus some pilferable training aids) solves storage problems. The company administrative offices allow the installation of phones, fax machine, and photocopier; and a kitchen and latrine with showers allows easy soldier support for the typical three-day drill weekend. (See Figure 2 for the armory layout.)

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### Old wine in New bottles?

The key here is not simply to do the same old thing at a new location, but rather to find a new way to use existing resources in such a way that the value is more than the sum of the parts. Machine gun training, TCGST, maintenance training, MAPEXes, and simulator time, taken individually, aren't very glamorous or

exciting. Indeed, they are routine tasks for all tank units. What is new and innovative about this approach is the regional focus at its heart and the end run that this center performs around the twin blocks of time and funding constraints. By concentrating these assets at a single, centrally managed, centrally located site; by making this location remote enough to eliminate distractions (e.g. not in an in-use armory); this site becomes a time-efficient “one-stop” point for basic individual and crew level tanker tasks and for critical leader tasks.

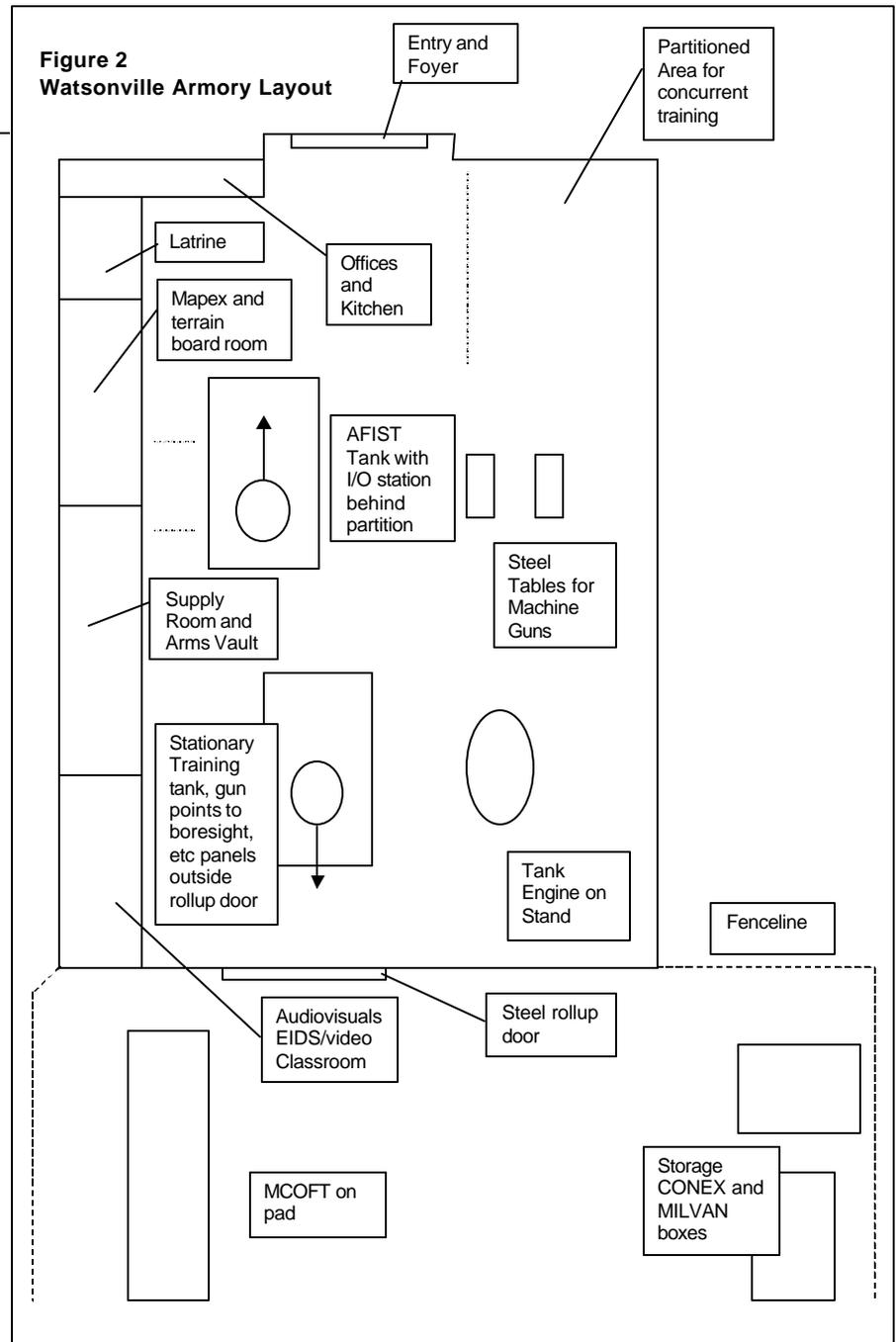
As planning developed into execution, armory and tank security became a major hurdle. The armory would not be regularly manned by Full Time Unit Support (FTUS) personnel, and higher echelons were concerned about the possibility of break ins or even theft of the tanks (a major pre-occupation in California since the infamous San Diego M60A3 theft in 1995). A four-layer approach adequately addressed the concerns:

- 1) The tanks are inside the armory building, behind locked steel doors. The grounds are surrounded by a perimeter fence meeting *FM 19-30* and *AR 190-51* standards. The armory is floodlit at night, with one side patrolled by local police on an irregular schedule and the other side adjoining the Watsonville Community Airport aircraft parking ramp, a controlled-access facility.
- 2) The tanks' loader hatches are padlocked and other hatches combat-locked.
- 3) The tank electrical systems are disabled with maintenance-installed electronically keyed shutoff systems (aka “Clifford” devices).
- 4) The tanks, even the one with its engine removed, are mechanically disabled by disconnection of key components.

To add unit accountability, battalion FTUS personnel check the armory twice daily on their commutes to and from their duties in the morning and evening. Also, a roster of unit personnel who reside in Watsonville provides for immediate response and random, unannounced checks.

### On-Call Unit Readiness Activities

When fully equipped as envisioned, the center will provide training from a systemic approach. It is multi-echelon in



nature and crosses combat arms and support specialties. On request, the battalion S1 provides a team of clerks to conduct updates of soldier personnel issues, to include DEERS and pay actions, DA Form 2-1 and SIDPERS record reviews, and updates of SGLI and records of emergency data. Costs are essentially zeroed: with the major items of equipment positioned, the only recurring cost is the utility costs associated with the building and operating the simulators. The tanks don't even have to be run: the AFIST tank, with its engine removed, is powered from a 220-volt power connection to the building, and the stationary training tank will ultimately be powered

by connection to the building 110-volt system via a “rectifier” transformer.

Costs are essentially negligible. Armory utilities cost about \$250 per month, assuming three drills using all the simulation devices. Compare this to the \$105 cost per tank per mile for field training, and the “constrained resources” advantages of this facility become readily evident.

Work continues. With the tanks and simulation devices present, the centerpiece events are possible. Future items planned for acquisition include main gun breech trainers, a turret electrical net-

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works troubleshooting board, VIGS and EIDS computer self-trainers, additional terrain boards and maps of training areas with “micro-armor,” and pre-arranged class slides, transparencies, charts, and posters. Another possibility is the addition of a platoon-level SIMNET maneuver trainer. The armory floor is easily large enough to accommodate four SIMNET tank simulators and associated hardware. The California Office of the Adjutant General (OTAG) is currently pursuing this concept. The supply room is already well-stocked with graphic training aids (GTAs) and sub-scale tank models for target acquisition training, and with steel tables for machine gun training (the units bring their own machine guns from home stations).

It is important to keep in mind that this facility is not a panacea. Nothing is as good as training on the tanks, in the field. Essentially, this facility is the 1998 version of the broomsticks and cardboard tanks with which our predecessors of 1938 trained. Field training at Camp Roberts is our GREEN cycle, where we can conduct gunnery through Table IV (subcaliber) and Table VI, plus platoon maneuver. Watsonville allows us to conduct essentially zero-cost AMBER training, with crew-sustainment gunnery training, leader “rock drill,” and Mapex training, and simulated gunnery through Tank Table VIII.

“Do more with less” is subject to diminishing returns. At Watsonville, we “Do more with what we have.”

What began as an initiative based on the battalion’s wartime experiences has now turned full circle. On 2 May 1998, the center scheduled an open house and formal dedication ceremony. At that time, it was renamed the CWO Ero “Ben” Saccone Armor Training Site. CWO Saccone served as first sergeant of Company C (from Salinas, Calif.), 194th Tank Battalion on Bataan and attended the ceremony. Each classroom was dedicated in honor of a CAARNG Bataan survivor from the original C Company from Salinas.

As an example of the esprit to which the battalion now gives homage, consider the case of the tattered blue guidon. With a representation of an old Renault FT-17 tank and the numerals “40,” it hangs today in the “Men and Steel” conference room, at the battalion headquarters on the former Fort Ord reservation (Presidio of Monterey Annex). This is the original guidon of the 40th Tank Company of the 40th Infantry Division, from its creation in Salinas on 18 June 1924 out of the old Troop C, 1st California Cavalry. This is the guidon that was carried through drills and Annual Training through the giddy 1920s and through the desperately poor 1930s, when the guardsmen drilled with broom handles. And this is the guidon which was carried by the company when it left the 40th Infantry Division and became Company C of the 194th on 1 September 1941. It was carried, in homage to their old lineage, overseas on that fall day in 1941. It fluttered bravely in the dark, early days of WWII as the Japanese pressed home their onslaught against those brave men who carried it. And, when the day came when the 194th was ordered to surrender (it was never defeated), MSG Earle Braye, the company maintenance sergeant, wrapped that guidon around his waist to hide it from the Japanese. Risking instant torture and execution if discovered, he carried that flag through the Bataan Death March into captivity at the Japanese PW enclosure at Camp O’Donnell. When MSG Braye was sent out to be worked as a virtual slave in the mines, he gave it to 1SG Saccone. And when 1SG Saccone was also sent away, he left it with SSG Emil Morello, the tank commander whose legendary exploits are recounted in the National Guard Heritage Series painting entitled “At a Roadblock on the Road to Bataan.” And so on. Until, one day after the war, it was finally brought home.

Those men trained with virtually nothing, against popular belief that “There will never be another big war,” and “the National Guard is just a bunch of weekend warriors.” Today, seven out of ten U.S. Army tankers is a National Guardsman. These men, and their fathers and

grandfathers before them, have proved those beliefs wrong, time and time again.

The California National Guardsmen of 1938 found solutions to the resource constraints of their time, and they proved the effectiveness of those solutions in battle, in America’s darkest hour. Their esprit and professionalism are an inspiration to us all. It is in their honor that this center has been created... and in the hope that, if called upon, our solutions will be as effective as were theirs.

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LTC John Menter is a 1979 ROTC graduate of California Polytechnic University. He served in the Regular Army as armored cavalry platoon leader and troop XO in the 11th ACR. His other assignments include battalion tactical intelligence officer, tank company commander, battalion S4, S1, S2, S3, and XO, bde S2, and S3, and deputy division G2. He is a graduate of AOBC, JOMC, AOAC, MIOBC, MIOAC, ENOBC, ENOAC, M60A3, and M1 TCC, CGSC (with honors, 1988) and the Armor PCC. He is the commander and full-time (AGR) administrative officer of 1-149th Armor.