

An NTC For the Next Century

by Lieutenant Colonel Martin N. Stanton

This article was prompted by the superb work done by two other authors in *ARMOR* Magazine and one in the *Naval Institute Proceedings*. In the May-June issue of *ARMOR*, Captain Mark H. Salas questions the necessity of a permanent OPFOR at the CTCs. His letter argues that (1) Army force structure cannot afford a regular brigade-sized force that does not fight, (2) deployable forces can get as much training out of going to the CTC to be OPFOR as they can to be BLUEFOR, and (3) with the demise of the former Soviet Union there really isn't an opponent left that follows the lockstep doctrinal model of the Krasnovian OPFOR. I heartily concur with all three of his major points.

In the same issue, LTC Aaron R. Keneston presented a useful article on how the 1-221 Cav (Nevada Army National Guard) was integrated into the OPFOR at the NTC.

Finally, Captain H.A. Petrea Jr., USN, wrote an interesting article in the *Naval Institute Proceedings* proposing the creation of a Naval NTC. His suggestions included proposals for the improvement of USMC training on NTC lines.

I will try to expand upon the thoughts of these three gentlemen. The NTC is an integral part of the training readiness of our Army. It was the most visible evidence of the post-Vietnam renaissance of the U.S. Army, and played a prominent role in training the Army for the Gulf war. Now, however, it presents an out-moded scenario based upon a type of enemy that doesn't exist anymore. It is also expensive, in terms of monetary and material resources and personnel resources.

We have been trying to exist in a 10-division (and shrinking) over-committed Army with an 18-division cold war NTC. Something had to give, and it has: the number of training rotations has gone down. However, the overhead at the NTC — infrastructure, OPFOR, and controller group — has remained the same. We need to look at how we can derive more benefit from the treasure that is the NTC.

I have five modest proposals.

- Create a non-permanent OPFOR, using heavy brigades on 90-day rotations to participate in CTC rotations as OPFOR.



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- Develop a more non-doctrinal model for OPFOR, with the integration of different vehicle types and organizational models.
- Reorganize the 11th ACR as an armored cavalry regiment and reallocate the 11th ACR into real world OPLANs.
- Increase integration of the National Guard.
- Increase integration of USMC elements, and start USMC BLUEFOR rotations.

Create a Non-Permanent OPFOR

With the advent of the Krasnovian variant tank OPFOR modification to the M1A1, the requirement for a specialized OPFOR vehicle (à la the M551 Sheridan) becomes a lot less significant. If a similar VISMOD could be devised for the Bradley Fighting Vehicle (i.e., no armor side skirts and minor body and turret attachments, such as fake Spigot launchers) then both mech and tank units could fight as OPFOR in their organic vehicles. Even if no VISMOD to the BFV could be created, the OPFOR Surrogate Vehicle M113 modification could still be available for mech units to draw. The only time the entire regiment rolls is during a regimental attack. This would leave plenty of time for the mech battalion detailed to OPFOR to conduct useful training in their Bradleys. The OPFOR brigade would deploy to the NTC for a quarterly rotation. Each year, one quarter

per year would be dedicated to the 11th ACR in an OPFOR role. The rotational (OPFOR) brigade could bring all three of its battalions and rotate them through the OPFOR role. The Ft. Irwin reservation is large enough for the OPFOR rotational brigade units not actively involved in supporting the current OPFOR mission to conduct training and not be in the way. This will have the following positive effects on the Army and readiness.

- It will create another brigade-sized element (the 11th ACR) that can be allocated forward in the TPFDD for current OPLANs.
- It will increase the number of brigade headquarters trained at the NTC per year by three and task forces by nine (or six if a two-battalion brigade option were exercised)
- If the nine-battalion option was used, it would allow the 'out of OPFOR' third battalion of the OPFOR rotational brigade to act as an adjacent unit. Elements of the battalion could take the place of the infamous notional 1-23 (Allow All Penetrations) Cav.
- It will shorten the amount of time between NTC rotations. OPFOR rotations would count as NTC rotations. Another possibility is it would open up additional space in the training schedule to train the National Guard enhanced brigades.

Such a concept would not be without its cost. Additional barracks space and infra-

structure would have to be constructed on Ft. Irwin and additional vehicle sets would have to be pre-positioned. Balanced against this would be the cost saved by eliminating the fleet of special OPFOR vehicles, the creation of a deployable ACR, and the increased benefit of training U.S. Army units in the hard school of the NTC.

As Captain Salas pointed out, the perfect OPFOR that can fight in absolute congruence with its published doctrine is becoming less and less relevant in the post-Cold War world. In 1988, the Krasnovian model made sense because we were still facing the Soviet Union. In 1998, it really doesn't. We don't need an OPFOR that will perfectly replicate a foreign military doctrine found nowhere else but in the NTC. We just need an OPFOR that will give the BLUEFOR a good, knock-down, drag-out fight and defeat them if they're not proficient.

Having the world-class OPFOR was swell. It was one of the things that made the NTC. It also provided priceless *Maskirovka* prior to the Gulf War because media hacks focused only on the fact that the OPFOR won most of its fights, instead of how the overall quality of the Army was skyrocketing due to the CTCs. We could afford the dedicated OPFOR then. It was sure worth it. It's worthwhile now, but we can no longer afford it. With our number of divisions shrunk to ten and getting smaller, and with our increasing commitments, we just can't afford a permanent OPFOR anymore. We can deploy brigades to act as OPFOR and still give a good fight. They would still have most of the advantages of the present OPFOR (i.e., friendly orders timelines, notional artillery, admin resupply and reconstitution, etc.) so the BLUEFOR unit would still have an uphill fight. The difference being that unlike now, deployable U.S. soldiers would be trained on both sides of the fight.

Develop a Non-Doctrinal Model for the OPFOR

The best Iraqi defensive position I ever encountered was in the Mojave Desert in December of 1991. It sure as hell didn't look anything like the ones I saw in the Gulf War. Those Russians in Chechnya put an interesting twist on old Soviet doctrine as well. My point is that the OPFOR in the NTC was more faithful to the published doctrine of our enemies and former enemies than they themselves were. The enemies we face in the world today are not as lockstep in their interpretation of doctrine as the Krasnovian army at the

NTC. Our intelligence on these enemies will include pretty exhaustive information on equipment and order of battle but relatively incomplete analysis of their published doctrine (if for no other reason than they might not have any). We need to get away from complete doctrinal templates for our enemy's actions in the NTC. We need to create a battlefield where the S2 is uncertain as to how the enemy will maneuver/defend and has no doctrinal template to rely on as a clue.

The OPFOR could take several flavors and have several different "faces" they could portray. It could portray Krasnovians with rigid and well-defined doctrines, or it could portray Krasnovian allies whose doctrine we know little about. It could even include variations on unit tactics and doctrine based on whether the portrayed OPFOR commanders were Western-trained or Russian-trained. We need, above all, to add an element of uncertainty to the enemy that we face at the NTC. The Krasnovian OPFOR is so well documented and defined that scenario writers and OPFOR planners used to argue over what the OPFOR would or would not do, much like Hebrew scholars arguing over the Talmud. We need to get a bit more doctrinal unpredictability into the OPFOR.

Make the 11th ACR an "ACR"

Currently, the 11th ACR has two maneuver battalions, one tank and one mech. One of the additional benefits of doing away with the permanent OPFOR is that the 11th ACR could be reorganized into an actual armored cavalry regiment with two squadrons active, and one National Guard (1-221 Cav NVARNG). As an infantry officer, I am naturally loathe to lose infantry battalions from the Army's force structure. However, the existence of only a single ACR (I mean a real ACR, not the reflagged survivor of the 9th High Tech Division that is currently called the 2nd ACR light) in the Army's active force is not a state of affairs that should be allowed to continue. The creation of a second ACR would give the Army two ACRs on active duty, in the worst case one per major regional contingency. This ACR could still conduct one complete quarter of OPFOR duty each year (I would suggest the summer months as the 11th ACR has permanent billets on Ft. Irwin). They could still be used on a case by case basis throughout the rest of the training year to conduct special OPFOR missions. However, they would be available for Intrinsic Action rotations to Kuwait and for other training deployments OCONUS. They

would have more time to train up to their U.S. Army training tasks at NTC while out of OPFOR rotation density, and they might even (gasp) get a little more time off.

Integration of the National Guard

Using 90-day rotation OPFOR units would work in peacetime, or during a limited war that does not utilize a large part of the Army's strength (like Somalia). It would not work in a Desert Storm-level deployment because the 11th ACR and/or the active brigade scheduled to be rotational OPFOR would be deploying to combat. This does not mean the NTC will close down. The NTC will still be used to train activated "Enhanced Brigades" and other activating National Guard units, as it was with the 48th Brigade in 1990-1991. We need to keep the NTC in business even when the whole regular Army has deployed. The controller group and base operations would be easy enough to keep on hand, but where would the OPFOR come from?

Short answer. 40th Division, California Army National Guard. Here we have a whole mech division looking for a real world mission. In his article about the 1-221 Cav, LTC Kenneston described the OPFOR certification training undergone by the 1-221 Cav over a period of three years. This training culminated in the unit's participation as OPFOR in an actual NTC rotation. The 40th division could do the same thing. Starting in FY2000, and using the same timeline for training as described by LTC Kenneston, by the year 2003 the 40th Division could be ready to assume an OPFOR mission upon activation. The 40th Division is a natural choice for this mission. They're close at hand, they have the people to staff it, and they even have some unit equipment stored at Ft. Irwin itself. The proximity of the National Guard units to Ft. Irwin would mean they could probably be formed and out in the desert, ready to train troops, in about two weeks. Only one brigade of the division need be dedicated to the OPFOR mission. The others could still be called upon for activation, post-mobilization training, and deployment.

In addition to being the full mobilization OPFOR, the 40th division OPFOR units could act as "special guest star" augmentees for specific missions, just as 1-221 Cav of the Nevada National Guard was used by the OPFOR for a regimental attack mission. They could also be used on short-term activation to act as adjacent U.S. Army BLUEFOR or allied units.

The 40th Division Brigade assigned to the NTC support mission could have variations of uniforms and markings that would allow them to act as allied nation units as well as OPFOR. If you really wanted to add a twist to coordination with "allied" units, have the Spanish speakers in the NG units do all the adjacent unit coordination in a language other than English.

Having an entire brigade from the California National Guard dedicated to the NTC mission would solve the problem of where a post-general mobilization OPFOR comes from. It would also provide a ready source of OPFOR augmentation (on an individual or unit basis up to battalion level) for limited rotations during peacetime. It would also provide a meaningful mission for one of the underutilized National Guard divisions.

Integration of USMC Units

Currently, the NTC is only doing 9 or 10 rotations a year. This is far less than the 14 per year we were executing in 1985 and the 12 per year we accepted as the standard in 1986. This is due to both budgetary and OPTEMPO considerations. In his recent article in *Naval Institute Proceedings*, Captain Petrea of the USN suggested the creation of a Naval NTC. Although he was referring mainly to Navy assets, Captain Petrea suggested that the USMC could improve its training in several ways (particularly AARs) by emulating an NTC-type exercise. Since the Marine Corps almost certainly does not have the money to build an instrumented battlefield similar to the NTC's,

why not hold one or two USMC rotations per year? With their OPTEMPO, it's probably all they could do anyway. This would allow them to practice some of their concepts, such as operational maneuver from the sea, in a mid- to high-intensity environment. It would also present the possibility of attaching an Army light TF (Airborne, AASLT, Mountain, whatever) to the Marines. This is a way we often fight in contingency operations (the author has worked beside the Marines in two combat deployments). It would also give the brigade detailed as OPFOR another rotation to fight. More training for everyone, everyone learns a lot about how the other guy works, a lot of joint warfighting, C2 and logistics stuff gets worked out, and the NTC gets utilized at max capacity. The costs? The OC teams would have to go to school on USMC Organization and Doctrine (not really that different). Some vehicle instrumentation and MILES issues would have to be addressed, but I doubt they'd be insurmountable. Funding issues from the Navy would probably be one of the biggest drawbacks, but with reallocation of funds from training exercises that would be canceled to accommodate this training density, the Navy should be able to cover it. The NTC is a national treasure. If the Army isn't going to use it for 12 rotations a year, we should make the down time available to the Marines.

Summary

The NTC will continue to be one of the cornerstones of our training readiness. Unfortunately, the current NTC is stuck

in the cold war — not only in the OPFOR that it portrays but in the resources that it requires. Were it the best of all possible worlds, I would keep the dedicated OPFOR. However the realities of the Army's situation today simply cannot justify the dedication of an active duty heavy brigade-sized unit to a non-deployable role. The present OPFOR is the perfect instrument. We can't afford it. Unfortunately, we are living in a world where "good enough" will have to do.

Lieutenant Colonel Martin N. Stanton was commissioned in Infantry in 1978 from Florida Tech. He served as a company XO with 1st Infantry Training Brigade, Ft. Benning; rifle and TOW platoon leader with 1-9 Infantry in Korea; assistant G3 staff officer in 9th ID and commander D Company, 2-2 Infantry, both at Ft. Lewis, Wash. He served as company and S3 observer/controller at the NTC, Ft. Irwin, Calif., and was senior brigade advisor to the Saudi National Guard. He was also S3 of 2-87 Infantry, Ft. Drum, N.Y. His combat service includes the Gulf War in 1991 and Somalia in 1992-93. He graduated from the College of Naval Command and Staff, Newport, R.I., and is currently assistant J5 Policy, USCENTCOM.