

From Cowpens to the California Desert: *Integrating Reserve Component Units Into Tactical Operations*

by Lieutenant Colonel Aaron R. Kenneston

In any major future conflict, the downsized active Army will depend heavily on what Army leaders like to call a seamless integration of active and reserve forces. But this is hardly new. Brigadier General Daniel Morgan, the Revolutionary War leader of colonial forces on the southern front, accomplished this feat more than 200 years ago, at the battle of Cowpens, defeating Tarleton's British regulars in a well-orchestrated battle that ended in a classic double envelopment.¹

A recent rotation at the National Training Center (NTC) proved that this type of seamless integration is still possible. Soldiers from the Nevada Army National Guard's 1st Squadron, 221st Cavalry, served to augment the NTC's Opposing Force (OPFOR), just as they would if the Blackhorse went to war. In fact, the employment of the unit closely paralleled how Morgan used his citizen-soldiers at Cowpens two centuries ago. Fighting as an independent tank battalion for the feared Krasnovian OPFOR, and using visually-modified M1A1 tanks, the reservists were a major factor in the defeat of the visiting combat team.

Morgan would not have been surprised. In his classic battle, his small force of Continental infantry and cavalry, charged with defending a vast area of the American Southeast, were clearly outnumbered. Morgan realized that his success would depend on his wise use of citizen-soldier volunteers, yet there was a tremendous difference in the levels of training between the regulars and the militia. Knowing that he would be attacked, he planned a battle to maximize the strengths of different elements of his force.

The battle developed at Hannah's Cowpens, in rural South Carolina. Morgan's plan was to use three lines of defenders and a reserve. The first line of skirmishers included his best marksmen. The second line was his least experienced militia. His third line included experienced Continental infantry and his most experienced militia soldiers. And his reserve was the Continental cavalry.



Reserve unit's M1s were visually modified as Krasnovian Variant Tanks (KVTs).

As Tarleton's troops attacked, they took immediate casualties as the skirmishers fired, and as the first line drew back, Tarleton pressed the attack. The second line then fired two volleys, further attriting the British assault, before also falling back. Sure now that he had the colonial force on the run, he charged ahead. As he pursued the retreating militiamen, the third line took up the defense, stopping his force long enough for the cavalry reserve to begin its attack into Tarleton's right flank. Then the militia in the rear reorganized for a thrust into his left flank. Caught in a double envelopment, the British retreated from the field with high casualties.

Clever tactics and surprise were certainly major factors in Morgan's victory, but the real triumph was his preliminary training strategy that made the best of the different experience levels of his soldiers.

Much the same thing happened at the NTC last year.

The National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, is the Army's premier maneuver proving grounds. The OPFOR mission for the NTC is performed by the vaunted 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR). They portray a Former Soviet Union (FSU) style force from the fictitious nation of Krasnovia. A recent RAND study verified the need for citi-

zen-soldiers to augment the 11th ACR. Additional OPFOR capability is required to validate the number of units scheduled to deploy for Major Regional Conflicts (MRCs). Since a highly proficient force will be needed quickly, OPFOR training must be a primary peacetime mission.² The unit chosen in September of 1994 to round-out the 11th ACR (Blackhorse) was the 1st Squadron, 221st Cavalry (Wildhorse) of the Nevada Army National Guard.

This placed the commander of the 11th ACR in a situation similar to that of Daniel Morgan, determining how best to employ the citizen-soldiers within his command. Although many of the militia that Morgan inherited were amateurs, he managed to fully integrate them into his force. He was able to develop them into competent, capable, and efficient soldiers. Morgan did this by using his Continentals as role models and teaching simple maneuver. He also assigned missions that matched their levels of proficiency. As the 1-221 Cavalry began its train-up at the NTC, the regimen was strikingly familiar. To achieve an "OPFOR level of proficiency,"³ soldiers first attended the OPFOR academy. This is a basic three-day OPFOR soldiering course that provided a common point of reference between the Wildhorse soldiers and their Blackhorse brothers. To further ensure commonality between the 11th

ACR and 1-221 Cavalry, the State of Nevada purchased Desert BDUs, berets, and other accouterments of the Krasnovian OPFOR soldier.

The training progressed from individual tasks to crew drills. The Motorized Rifle Company (MRC) Handbook was used in conjunction with the OPFOR Tactical Standard Operating Procedures (TACSOP). These publications contain the essential collective, individual, and leader tasks that form the Krasnovian version of our Army's Mission Training Plans (MTPs). The 1-221 Cavalry began practicing simple OPFOR battle drills. Gunnery and maintenance were also emphasized. The focus began on section/platoon lanes, then shifted to troop-level operations. The 11th ACR provided like-sized elements to serve as sparring partners. The Wildhorse was then certified by Blackhorse evaluators on troop-level offensive and defensive operations. Now, the 1-221 Cavalry was able to fight with squadron-sized elements in the central corridor of the NTC. This validation had involved aggressive training from early 1995 to mid-1997. While Morgan had observed and trained his reservists for about four months prior to his amazing victory, the 11th ACR found that certification during peacetime was about a two-year process.

In the summer of 1997, the Wildhorse, with about 20 Blackhorse brothers, exported the NTC OPFOR experience to Gowen Field, Idaho. The exercise validated the 1-221 Cavalry as a viable training resource to prepare units for the NTC. The Wildhorse assisted the 116th Heavy Separate Brigade, Idaho National Guard, to get ready for their summer 1998 NTC rotation. The 1-221 Cavalry fought over 30 battles against various sized elements of the 116th Brigade. In true OPFOR tradition, the squadron was bested in only a couple of engagements during the entire two weeks. Daniel Morgan could have predicted the outcome. Citizen-soldiers given an active duty force to emulate, properly trained, well motivated, and doctrinally employed will always meet or exceed standards.

The 1-221 Cavalry was now ready for the final test — NTC Rotation 98-04. They would fight as part of the active duty OPFOR. Their opponent was an active duty brigade from Fort Stewart, Georgia. Just as Daniel Morgan wisely used his available time prior to the de-

struction of Tarleton's forces, the last six months leading up to the NTC rotation were carefully planned. Company lanes focused only on the most critical skills — obstacle breach, setting firing lines, and simple maneuver to positions of advantage. Boresighting MILES systems and target acquisition were constantly practiced. The squadron fought one last force-on-force battle against the uncoop-



erative, free thinking, 11th ACR. Training also included OPFOR ride-alongs, terrain walks, and continued study of "Decision Point Tactics."⁴⁷

In January 1998, almost 217 years to the day of Morgan's model employment of his citizen-soldiers, the 1-221 Cavalry arrived at the NTC for the moment of truth. The squadron had applied Visual Modifications (VISMODs) to their M1A1 tanks, and the resulting vehicle became known as a Krasnovian Variant Tank (KVT). The 1-221 Cavalry was given the OPFOR designation of the 60th Guards Independent Tank Battalion (ITB). As an asset of the 60th Guards Motorized Rifle Division (GMRD), the 60th ITB would fight under the control of the 125th Guards Tank Regiment (GTR).

The day before the first battle, the laager site, or assembly area, was a beehive of activity. The squadron worked at all echelons to prepare for the upcoming fight. While squadron leaders attended the regimental orders brief, troop executive officers worked supply and maintenance issues. First sergeants pushed support forward as tank commanders fo-

cused on maintenance, boresight, weapons test fire, and other pre-combat tasks. Squadron orders were issued mid-day. Then, once the afternoon brief-back at regiment was complete, the squadron rehearsal was conducted at the laager. Every member of every tank crew attended this event. Each tank commander was required to possess a map with the mission graphics posted. The rehearsal occurred on a giant sandtable and focused on orders and actions at each phase of the battle. After several walk-throughs, crews were released for final preparations.

Before the battle of Cowpens, Daniel Morgan moved from campfire to campfire, explaining his plan, answering questions, while talking and joking with his men. He stressed to his militia that they owed him "at least two fires."⁴⁸ With the example of Morgan in mind, the squadron leadership moved from vehicle to vehicle late into the night talking with soldiers about the next day's battle, reviewing required actions and discussing the responsibility of each crew member. Every soldier knew that he was personally accountable for the destruction of at least two enemy vehicles. Every Wildhorse trooper understood that the success of the squadron rested directly on his individual actions.

During the first fight, the 60th ITB was employed as an enveloping detachment for the regiment's attack against the defending Brigade Combat Team (BCT). *See figure 1.* The mission was to fix forces in the north, while the regiment attacked south. Just as Daniel Morgan discovered when his militia enveloped Tarleton's left flank, the citizen-soldier will rise to the occasion. When the squadron attacked, one tank threw a track near the Line of Departure (LD). The crew worked furiously to repair their vehicle. Once finished, they moved 25km to the sound of the guns, and aggressively entered the fray with the regiment. The Wildhorse soldiers accomplished their mission in good order. In fact, the enemy initially thought that the 60th ITB was the main effort. Their defenses were fixed, penetrated, and KVTs rolled into their Unit Maintenance Collection Point (UMCP).

For the second battle, similar preparations were made, and the results were just as impressive. The squadron was given another doctrinally correct mission that would surely have met with Mor-



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gan’s approval. Ten KVTs were detached to reinforce the Advance Guard (AG), then the “squadron minus” served as the second echelon for a regimental meeting battle. *See figure 2.* The enemy moved in a surprisingly aggressive manner, and the regiment’s Tactical Operations Center (TOC) was threatened. The second echelon was committed almost immediately from the LD. Once the bulk of KVTs joined the battle, the tide began to turn, and the regiment reinforced success. Because of lessons learned and confidence built during the first battle, the squadron experienced victory by a greater margin. By 0900 hours, the 60th ITB was poised with the rest of the

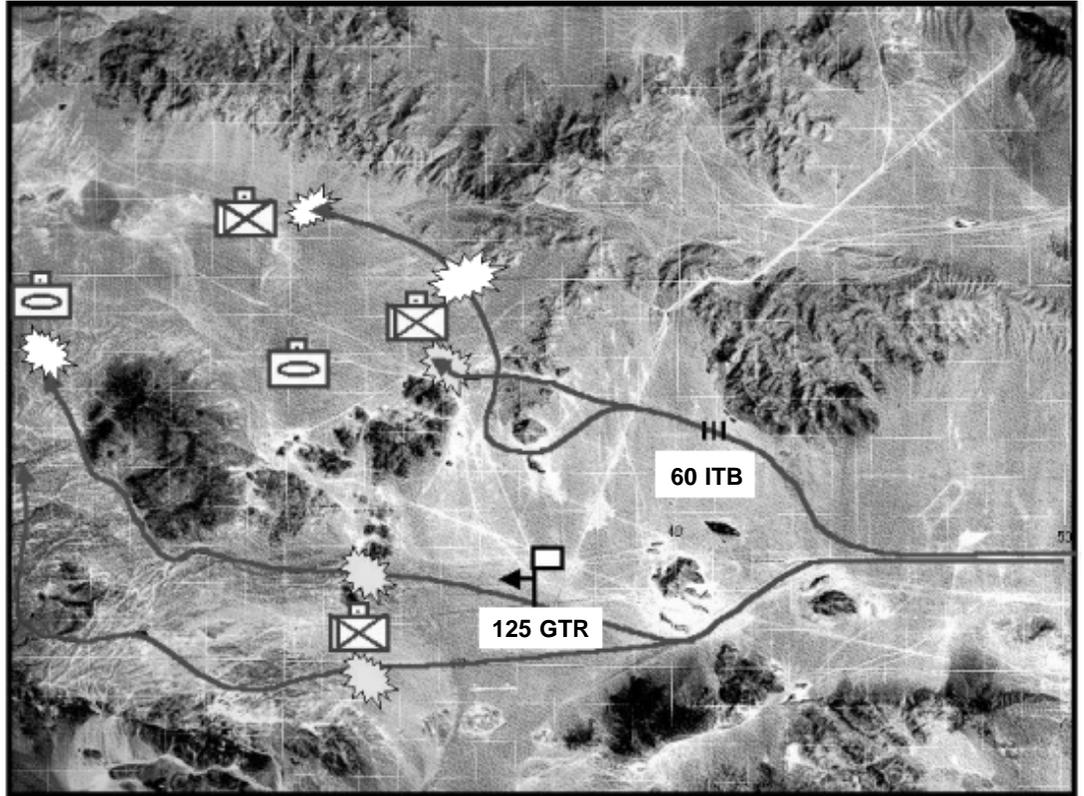


Fig. 1

regiment to send KVTs into the brigade TOC.

Much as Daniel Morgan reacted long ago, the 11th ACR commander, Colonel Guy C. Swan III, was very pleased. He said “The 1-221 Cavalry knew that they would have to fight as hard as the active duty OPFOR, and they did. They exceeded everybody’s expectations.” Like citizen-soldiers throughout history, after the battle the Wildhorse returned home to their families, communities, and civilian jobs. They were rightfully proud of their contribution to the Army’s readiness.

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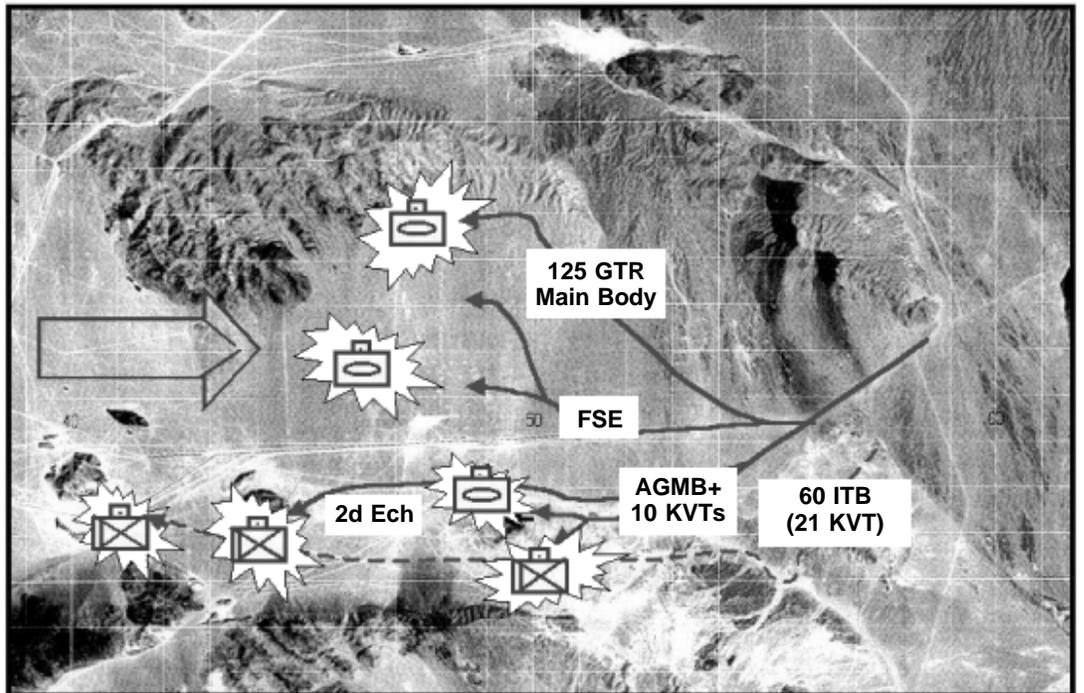


Fig. 2

COWPENS, *from Page 19*

The goal of Nevada's 1-221 Cavalry is: "to add value to both the 11th ACR and America's Army." While it takes a commitment of Blackhorse assets to work with the Wildhorse, the 11th ACR does receive training benefits in return. During occasional NTC rotations, the 11th ACR now also has improved force ratios for difficult missions against the visiting "Blue Forces" (BLUFOR). This is always within the Combat Battle Instructions (CBI) established in advance by the NTC. There are two factors that enhance this unique AC/RC partnership. Geography and the 11th ACR's CONUS sustaining force mission. The 1-221 Cavalry troopers are desert dwellers who live nearby in the Las Vegas area, and the 11th ACR has time to train with them since it does not have to deal with frequent deployments.

In conclusion, the spirit of Daniel Morgan certainly is alive at the NTC. Citi-

zen-soldiers are being provided with active duty role models, and given realistic training as part of a world class OPFOR. They are employed in a manner that complements and strengthens their abilities; thus, their motivation level is high. The Blackhorse/Wildhorse relationship is influenced by Morgan's historic precedent, and is historic in its own right. Thanks to the visionary leadership of the 11th ACR, Nevada senior officers, and Fort Irwin, seamless integration is a reality. An effective, mutually beneficial AC/RC relationship has been achieved. Daniel Morgan would be proud.

Notes

¹Don Higginbotham, *Daniel Morgan, Revolutionary Rifleman*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1961) pp. 133-141.

²Lippiatt, Crowley, Dey, and Sollinger, *Postmobilization Training Resource Requirements; Army*

National Guard Heavy Enhanced Brigades, (Arroyo Center: RAND, 1996) p. 85.

³LTC Jim Zanol, *Combat Training Center (CTC) Quarterly Bulletin No. 97-20*, "Training to Achieve an OPFOR Level of Proficiency" (Ft. Leavenworth, Kan., Dec 97) p. 57.

⁴LTC Pete Palmer, *Combat Training Center (CTC) Quarterly Bulletin No. 97-4*, "Decision Point Tactics (Fighting the Enemy, Not the Plan!)" (Ft. Leavenworth, Kan., Apr 97).

⁵Higginbotham, p. 134.

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