

**Reports from the Field:**

## THE RESERVE COMPONENTS



# Tank Battle at Gowen Field, Idaho Prepares the 116th Cav Brigade For Its Rotation to the NTC

Ask who shall fight America's next war, and the answer will depend on who you talk to. Right now, over 50 percent of the Army's combat arms are in the National Guard. Some active component generals would like to change that. They believe combat arms should be the realm of the active army. National Guard leaders say they have tradition on their side. They say America only lost one war — a war for which the National Guard was never activated.

After Vietnam, the Army adopted the "Total Force" concept. This plan, sometimes referred to as the Abrams Doctrine, called for the quick call-up and use of Reserve Component soldiers in future wars. As everyone knows, this doctrine received mixed reviews after Desert Storm. Thousands of Reserve Component soldiers were called up and sent to the desert war, but some high-profile National Guard combat arms units languished at mobilization stations in the United States while active duty soldiers liberated Kuwait.

Why those National Guard units never made it to the fight is still being debated. But that debate is now being overshadowed by something much more serious. The new debate strikes at the heart of America's warfighting plans. Put simply, the question is, who should fight our country's next war: the active army or a total force?

With the defense budget shrinking, military planners on all sides are looking

for ways to increase their share of the pie. National Guard leaders believe the active army has targeted the Guard as a whipping boy. "Guard units can't cut it on the battlefield, so high-visibility, well-funded combat arms units ought to be taken away from this quasi-military organization," or so the argument goes.

Take a look at the headlines in a recent *National Guard* magazine, and you'll see the seriousness of this struggle. "TAGS Unite in Face of Active Army Leaders' Continued Attacks on ARNG Force Structure... Governors and Guard Leaders Call for Presidential and Congressional Intervention... We Don't Like It and We Won't Take It."

The 116th Armored Cavalry Brigade, a high-profile National Guard unit, is scheduled for a rotation at the National Training Center next summer. To prepare for this important test, the brigade recently went through a dress rehearsal at Gowen Field, Idaho. The exercise involved more than 4,000 soldiers, including OPFOR from the NTC. In this case, the OPFOR was the 1-221 Armor, a National Guard roundout battalion for the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment.

Most soldiers in the tracks at Gowen Field didn't pay much attention to all the commotion and politics swirling around them. They fought battle after battle, day and night, for two weeks straight. During the first week, the OPFOR repeatedly bloodied the 116th. But by the second week, the brigade improved dramatically.

After-action reviews (AARs) followed every engagement. In this particular battle, three OPFOR M1s (modified to look like T-80s, complete with reactive armor, barrel-mounted searchlights, rear deck fuel barrels, snorkels, and sans track skirts) and five Bradleys (BRDMs) took on 12 of the 116th's Bradleys. The OPFOR zeroed out the 12 Bradleys while losing only two BRDMs and a T-80.

Fifth Army soldiers from the 1st Regional Training Brigade at Ft. Carson, Colo. led the after-action reviews. This AAR is recorded exactly as it took place. It may seem somewhat disjointed, but everyone there knew the op order, the terrain, etc. The discussions were fluid and spontaneous. Judging by the 116th's performance, the AARs were effective as well.

**5th Army Advisor:** Do you think you were prepared when you approached the battle?

**TC #1:** No, they caught us totally off guard.

**5th Army Advisor:** What could you have done differently?

**TC #1:** Prepped the hill.

**5th Army Advisor:** What else could you have done?

**Platoon leader:** We could have moved one section up to the butte to suppress fire, and pushed out west and come up where they were from the back side.

**5th Army Advisor:** Well, we know what happened. Let's talk about what didn't happen.

**TC #2:** I was the lieutenant's wingman when that T-80 came around us.

**5th Army Advisor:** Did you cross-talk with the platoon to tell them that something was coming around the side?

**TC #2:** What happened was, we were dead so quick.



Nevada Army National Guard soldiers in their OPFOR uniforms show off an M1 tank they modified to look like a T-80. The M1's skirts were removed, "reactive armor" blocks were added, along with drum-like auxiliary fuel tanks, a searchlight, and a snorkel tube at rear of turret.



**TC # 3:** We were right next to the lieutenant's element. We couldn't see anything off to our right except the rest of the element engaging, and so we looked to the left. Then a BRDM popped up right in front of us, twelve o'clock.

**5th Army Advisor:** Once you noticed everything dying out there you should have realized something was taking your guys out and started cross-talking with the platoon. "We got something out here. I can't see it. No eyes on it, but it's killing us." Once you notice everyone starts dying, you need to cross-talk! If you can't see anything, you need to talk.

**TC # 3:** And then a BRDM popped up on us. We called in; we engaged and destroyed it. Then a T-80 pulled up right next to the BRDM and caught us in the open. We fired; they fired. We got killed.

**5th Army Advisor:** Back up to the BRDM. You called in?

**TC # 3:** Yea.

**5th Army Advisor:** Once it pops up and you identify it in front of you as not one of yours, engage it.

**TC # 3:** Right. The T-80 that killed us was the one that no one could see.

**5th Army Advisor:** Once the T-80 came around and killed two of your Bradley's...

**TC #2:** Three...

**5th Army Advisor:** Did anyone call in?

**Platoon leader:** Roger that. Just before he died, White Three told me to get my butt out of there. I turned around and saw a lot of smoke and a big-ass barrel. I took off and tried to engage on the run. I got to a place where I could stop. Tried to engage with the TOW. We had a missile

failure. We were on the run again. I called Red One, and let him know where I was at.

**5th Army Advisor:** So you were on the run, trying to get away, reporting back when they got you.

**TC # 3:** After they killed our Bradley, we were looking at our casualty cards when a T-80 pulled up toward our position. Our dismounts spread out. He didn't even double check us and our Dragon team lit him up.

**5th Army Advisor:** Did your dismounts have a radio?

**TC # 3:** Yes.

**5th Army Advisor:** Were they on the platoon or company net?

**TC # 3:** Platoon.

**5th Army Advisor:** Did you call up to your platoon leader?

**Platoon leader:** I was already dead.

**TC # 3:** Didn't make any difference. Just about everybody was dead.

**5th Army Advisor:** Don't wait to call forward. Call in artillery. If just about everybody is dead, you may be the company commander.

**Soldier:** I was the dismount leader. We were just about to call for artillery when they "endexed."

**5th Army Advisor:** What was the key event?

**TC # 1:** We pushed the LD time back an hour, which allowed the OPFOR to move much farther than we expected them to be. That was the difference.

**5th Army Advisor:** Another key event?

**TC # 2:** I was in the middle. Most of the action was to the left and right. I tried to move up and help the lieutenant out on the left, and then they came right toward us down the middle. They caught us. It was like they pulled a quarterback sneak.

**5th Army Advisor:** Another key event.

**Platoon leader:** Once we went down-range, we tried to find their Viper team. We dismounted and spent too much time trying to find the Viper team. We focused too much on that. We should have blown right through there.

**5th Army Advisor:** Give me an improvement.

**TC #2:** We need to work on our avenues of approach. We were sitting ducks. Everywhere we went, they popped up, and they were right there. We had nowhere to go. They caught us in the middle of no man's land. There's not much out there, but we need to haul ass and use the terrain better to mask our movements.

**5th Army Advisor:** Another improvement?

**TC #3:** We could have called up artillery. If nothing else, we could have had smoke to cover our movement. I think today shows how important it is to have eyes forward. I don't think they would have caught us like this if we had sniper teams out in front of us.

**5th Army Advisor:** OK. Let's learn from the mistakes. These Nevada guys do this for a living. You need to be at the LD for the next iteration at 19:00.

*(This report was prepared by COL Phil Gustafson and CPT Terry L. Conder)*