
Defense Report

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Opposing Forces Concept; A Training Breakthrough?

Without any publicity fanfare, the U.S. Army has adopted a new training concept which many experts expect will provide the Army with its most realistic training in history. Called the "Opposing Forces" Concept (OPFOR), it will stress training against the most probable future U.S. adversaries by giving soldiers detailed personal knowledge of enemy strengths and weaknesses and training them to exploit the weaknesses so that they can win in battle even when outnumbered. Implementation of the OPFOR concept is already underway and should be Army-wide by early 1979.

Designed by the Army's Training and Doctrine Command, the OPFOR theory is not new, but the program itself is remarkably different. OPFOR training begins with the individual soldier in a combat unit when he is taught in detail how his counterpart in a foreign army, such as the Soviet Army, operates. For example, the infantryman learns all about how the individual Red Army infantryman lives and fights, his equipment, his tactics, his strengths and weaknesses. Later the infantry squad learns the same things about the Red Army infantry squad and so on up the line.

Individuals and crews will also be trained to recognize the potential enemy, how he employs his combined arms teams, and the types of terrain and climate that will be encountered if they have to fight this enemy. Training will also emphasize at what distances enemy weapons can begin to fire and be effective under various conditions.

For purposes of realism, unit training will always assume that the enemy has numerical superiority, making it essential that the knowledge gained of enemy vulnerabilities be exploited. Moreover, unit personnel will also act as the specific potential enemy which will provide solid opportunity for the soldier to practice the enemy's tactics and techniques as well as permitting the soldier to see how he looks from the enemy's standpoint.

The Army is seeking sufficient quantities of foreign equipment, including tanks, tracked vehicles, and crew served weapons to provide true realism in field maneuvers. Troops acting as the potential enemy will use enemy maps, communications procedures, and even the language as much as possible.

The Army's objective is to make its officers and men aware of how best to employ their weapons and combat skills to make optimum use of their capabilities and at the same time minimize those of the enemy. The program will help ensure the maximum combat readiness of the U.S. Army.