
Defense Report

AUSA



The National Training Center — At Last, A Way to Train Soldiers to Fight a Real War

There is nothing better than realistic, challenging training to keep a soldier mentally and physically ready to do the soldier's ultimate job—fighting a war. Conversely, there is nothing worse for soldier morale than constant repetition of dull, unimaginative “dry runs” passed off as training. Sometimes, though, there isn't much choice. Army posts around the nation are almost always close to civilian communities where the sounds and dust clouds of realistic training—not to mention the safety hazards of live firing—would threaten the ecological and neighborly balance.

But now the Army has found a way to inject almost total realism into ground combat training. The service is in the process of establishing a National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, in the heart of the Mojave Desert, where there is enough room and sufficient separation from population centers to closely simulate combat without ecological or neighborly impact. The State of California and concerned federal agencies are satisfied with the Army's plans for Fort Irwin. The Post's 643,000 acres are about the same size as the State of Rhode Island and will support full-ranging exercises for units up to brigade size.

Troops from all the Army's stateside divisions will spend two weeks at the NTC every 18 months. They will draw tanks, personnel carriers and artillery from a pool kept at Ft. Irwin and will be sent into the field to maneuver against troops stationed at the NTC and trained in the tactics of the most likely adversary, the Soviet Army. The “enemy” will wear communist-bloc uniforms and use either Soviet equipment or disguised U.S. equipment. The battlefield will be instrumented to record and evaluate the effects of the actions taken by both sides, to assess personnel and materiel casualties and to provide a record of unit performance. The two-week period at the NTC is to be completely under field conditions with few concessions to creature comfort.

There is also a bonus available from Ft. Irwin's proximity to Nellis Air Force Base, the home of the Air Force “Red Flag” program which simulates the aerial tactics of the Soviet Air Force. Air strikes flown against the training troops will use Soviet tactics while those flown in support of the troops will use USAF methods.

After the NTC becomes fully operational—this is planned for Fiscal Year 1984—a total of 42 Active Army battalions will spend the two-week training period there each year.

Those responsible for training our army are truly excited about the potential benefits of the National Training Center. It will cost some extra money to get it going but over the long run it will produce combat-ready troops who have experienced concentrated doses of this most realistic training. Now we must assure the support needed to bring the NTC fully into reality.