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Reaching Our Army's Full Combat Potential in the 21st Century: Insights from the National Training Center's Opposing Force

by

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Introduction

Few in our Army would dispute the assertion that the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, the Opposing Force (OPFOR) at the National Training Center (NTC) is, very good at what they do. The commanders and soldiers in the OPFOR are seldom defeated in battle. For years, this unit has been the anvil upon which we have hammered and forged the combat power of our Army. Have you ever wondered how they do it?

How does OPFOR develop and sustain its ability to fight and defeat its opponents in almost every battle at the National Training Center? How does the regiment, fighting with 1960s-1970s technology, routinely defeat brigade task forces equipped with the most modern weapon systems and technology our Army can provide? How can the regiment do it given the same soldiers, the same personnel turbulence (about 40 percent turnover each year), the same leader development challenges, and the oldest fighting equipment in the active Army?

It's my premise in this essay that these are not trivial questions, simply answered by the fact that the regiment has the opportunity to train and fight more frequently, or that the OPFOR knows the terrain. Just the opposite: I believe the answers to these questions are critically important to a force-projection Army that is growing ever smaller, and they are absolutely *key to achieving the full combat potential of Force XXI and the Army After Next*.

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Realization of Combat Potential

Bottom line up front: It's my conclusion, after fighting against it, observing it for 12 years and now commanding the OPFOR, that the fundamental reason this remarkable military organization is able to dominate its opponents is because *the OPFOR has achieved the full combat potential residing in its doctrine, organization, training methods, leaders, soldiers and the capabilities of its equipment*. The brigade task forces they oppose have not. Moreover, they cannot achieve their full combat potential, given existing *conditions* within our Army today. Understanding this premise, and the disparity, must begin with a discussion of how the OPFOR is organized.

It Is How the OPFOR Is Organized

Fundamentally, the warfighting ability of the OPFOR stems from how it is organized. It is organized as a combined-arms team. It lives together as a combined-arms team, it trains as a combined-arms team, and it fights as a combined-arms team—all the time. It is not a collection of units, thrown together on an ad hoc basis from various divisions and installations, who have never trained together, or a collection of units within a division which task organize and train infrequently as a brigade combat team.

On the battlefield, habitual fighting, training and support relationships matter. They matter a lot in combat, and historically, the most combat effective organizations our Army has ever put on a battlefield share this organizational characteristic. Our military history is replete with examples. This comes as no surprise to those who know and understand what it takes to win in combat—teamwork, mutual trust and absolute confidence in every member of the team. To achieve these essential feelings, combat, combat support and combat service support units have to train and fight together as *one team* for long periods of time.

Habitual team relationships foster incomparable *teamwork*, a prerequisite to success on any modern battlefield, where multiple units, with multiple capabilities, must be artfully integrated and employed simultaneously. A football analogy works well to describe this critical dynamic.

In the great professional football teams, because they live together, train together and play together, every member of the team understands every other role and responsibility and every member knows the others' capabilities and limitations. In every play (battle), every player has a specific task and purpose to achieve; he knows when and where his task must be achieved in order to set conditions for success. Equally important, he also understands what every other member of the team will do, when he will do it, and where he will do it. This common understanding develops an incredible sense of unity and purpose, and the most powerful effect of all, *a common visualization of the play (battle) and how it will unfold*. Each player sees how he fits in the big picture, thereby giving him a sense of purpose. Having a sense of purpose, and knowing your team is counting on you to do your job, produces a powerful motivation to succeed. Moreover, the plays executed by a professional team are a display of artful synchronization, achieved through *constant, repetitive practice as a team*—something completely unachievable by any other means. This same kind of teamwork is at the heart of the OPFOR's performance, and historically, the performance of our best combat units.

Habitual team organizations also foster mutual trust and confidence throughout the force. Nobody in combat is comfortable fighting with strangers, fighting with an ad hoc collection of units whose leadership and capabilities are not proven and known. Mutual trust and confidence are absolutely critical in combat. When a team lives together, trains together and fights together all the time, leaders and units get to know one another very well. They learn who they can count on, who

can do the job. They learn who can pull their weight. They immediately recognize the others' voices on the radio; they are talking to friends and comrades. They learn to trust one another, and from this trust comes an unshakable confidence. Though confidence is intangible, that's what wins in combat, and that's what brigade task forces are up against in the OPFOR at the NTC. It is a tremendous advantage.

In contrast, the brigade task forces the OPFOR opposes each month are not, by Table of Organization and Equipment (TO&E), organized as combined-arms teams. Instead, they are a temporary or ad hoc collection of units from different divisions or installations, thrown together for training, who have not had the opportunity to train together or to train as one team at the frequency necessary to develop their full combat potential. They are strangers, trying to do their best but handicapped by a variety of conditions that do not foster or develop the kind of teamwork the OPFOR brings to the battlefield. Consequently, it's like a neighborhood pick-up team stepping on the field with the Denver Broncos.

In sum, the OPFOR provides us an important warfighting insight. Habitual combined-arms organizations (combined-arms teams that live together and train together permanently vs. temporarily) are fundamental to achieving the *full* combat potential of a force. But this is only a partial answer to the questions.

It Is How the OPFOR Trains

The training program and methods employed by the OPFOR to sustain proficiency in mission essential tasks are the catalysts for its success—the way you take potential and turn it into capability. Notably, these methods differ from the training methods employed by the brigade task forces they oppose.

The regiment trains and adheres to proven doctrine, tactics, techniques, and procedures honed through years of trial and experience. Only three bedrock training manuals are used: U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Pamphlet 350-16, *OPFOR Doctrine*, the *Regimental Tactical Standing Operating Procedures*, and the *Motorized Rifle Company Handbook*. These three manuals serve as the blueprint for success. They establish clear performance standards and expectations. They foster simplicity in training, a common understanding of how we fight as a team and, consequently, an incomparable unity of effort during performance of combat missions. Every trooper learns how to fight from the pages of these three manuals.

There is nothing fancy about how the OPFOR trains. Bottom line: The OPFOR stays focused on the fundamentals of warfighting at the tactical level of war. The entire training program is designed to *sustain mastery of a few fundamental tasks and battle drills at each level of command*—individual to regiment. For example, the *first* thing an OPFOR soldier or leader is taught is how to use terrain and all its features to accomplish the mission. Terrain walks are the bread and butter of the training program—low cost, but the most influential training tool in the kit bag. Learn how to see the terrain and how to use it, and you can't be whipped.

Motorized rifle, antitank, engineer, military intelligence, air defense and tank companies constantly practice only a handful of battle drills—those actions on the battlefield which assure dominance in the close, direct fire fight. Tank and mechanized infantry platoons continually practice set-move techniques, providing overwatch for one another as they bound from one intervisibility line to the next. Regimental battle staffs constantly practice a set of planning and wargaming drills which set near-perfect conditions for synchronization of the combined-arms teams. Blocking and tackling—the *fundamentals*—that's what the regiment trains to do. By staying focused on the fundamentals, units are able to achieve the full capabilities and effectiveness of their combat systems on the battlefield.

As to training methods, the OPFOR adheres *religiously* to the training doctrine and methods espoused in Army Field Manual (FM) 25-101, *Training the Force*—the entire process. Individuals and units are trained and measured against established performance standards at every level. After-action reviews are always conducted, and if an individual or unit fails to meet the standards, they retrain and execute the task until standards are met, plain and simple. Time is *always* allocated for retraining. The regiment trains until standards are met all the time. It's an ingrained habit. Moreover, and this is a critical point, the regiment trains to perform individual and mission-essential tasks at the *frequency* necessary to sustain performance standards. *Nothing is more important to developing full combat potential, in the kind of Army we have, than training soldiers, leaders and units at the frequency necessary to sustain performance standards.* Why is that?

Simple: Every unit in our Army faces two enemies every day, enemies which sap the combat potential of the force. First, as a result of how we man the Army, every year we turn over about 40 percent of the unit at every level. For the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, that's about 1,000 new noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and soldiers we have to train and prepare to fight as members of the team. We're continuously in the business of training new soldiers and leaders. Second, warfighting is an extremely complex business these days, with complex tasks to learn and master. And because we're human, we forget how to do things as time goes by. The more complex the task, the sooner we forget how to do it. It follows, then, that the more complex the task, the more frequently you need to train. For these two reasons—we're constantly training new soldiers and we forget how to do things—the *frequency of training* individual, leader and unit tasks is absolutely critical to developing and sustaining full combat potential. In other words, get the frequency right, and you can sustain high levels of performance. Within our Army today, for a host of reasons—lack of money to train at the right frequency, lack of time, shortages of leaders and soldiers, installation support, and peacekeeping missions—brigade task forces, unlike the OPFOR, do not have the opportunity to train under tough, realistic *field conditions* at the *frequency* required to develop, much less sustain, their full combat potential at every level within the organization. It shows on the battlefields at NTC.

Perhaps the most influential and discriminating difference between the OPFOR and the brigade task forces they fight is the *leader certification program*. Unlike the units they face, the OPFOR *confirms* that every soldier and every leader possesses the knowledge, skill and ability to perform his/her duties *before* they are permitted to fight with the regiment. Every soldier and leader is compelled to undergo a rigorous series of written exams, oral exams, terrain walks, apprenticeships and hands-on demonstrations of their knowledge, skill and ability *before* they are allowed to fight or lead. That's right—every soldier and leader, from section to regimental level, is *tested* and must prove they can execute their individual and leader tasks.

Platoon sergeants, platoon leaders and company commanders must demonstrate their ability to execute their platoon and company march formations and battle drills, and to orchestrate fire support. The regimental chief of reconnaissance must demonstrate an absolute mastery of intelligence preparation of the battlefield. The regimental chief of staff must demonstrate his ability to conduct deliberate wargaming and set conditions for synchronization of the combined-arms teams. The regimental commander must demonstrate his ability to see the terrain and how to use it, see the enemy, see himself, and visualize how to shape his battlefield and effectively employ every capability of the combined-arms team to defeat his opponent. Only when the commander is assured of a leader's tactical and technical competence, through testing and examination, is the subordinate leader permitted to serve in his position. This is a process foreign to the remainder of our Army, and in my opinion, at the root of the performance differential we continue to observe here at the NTC. It is a glaring disparity.

The point of all this? These training methods, and the opportunity to train repetitively, are the way the OPFOR is able to achieve and sustain its *full* combat potential. Unfortunately, the conditions necessary to implement this proved training strategy and methodology, the training resources, and opportunity for the remainder of our Army do not exist. Units at home station do not have the money, time and other resources necessary to train at the *frequency* required to develop and sustain proficiency in mission-essential tasks, platoon to brigade level. As an Army we do not train and confirm that battalion and brigade staff officers are competent to perform those duties before they assume their duties. For that matter, combined-arms battalion and brigade commanders are not required to prove and demonstrate a mastery of battle command skills and tactical competence before being placed in command. It is not, and has not been, a prerequisite for command selection. It shows at the NTC, year after year.

To sum up, the OPFOR provides us another important warfighting insight: How you train soldiers, leaders and units, and the frequency of training, are key to achieving the *full* combat potential of a force. But again, this is only a partial answer to the questions. There is another important reason.

It Is How Commanders Become Masters of the Art and Science of Battle Command

The OPFOR regimental commander (alternately the 1st and 2d Squadron commanders), the regimental staff, and motorized rifle battalion commanders set conditions for effective employment of the regimental combined-arms team. Their ability to do it is a function of their mastery of the *art of battle command*, as we now call it. Indeed, the regiment can fight no better than the regimental commander's ability to see the terrain, see the enemy, see himself, and see the battle unfold in his mind. Granted, the ability to inspire and motivate soldiers, the ability to impose his will, tenacity, compassion, patience and so forth are also important. But these are elements of effective leadership, not tactical competence.

Commanders and battle staff in the OPFOR quickly develop the ability to *see the terrain* and its effects on combat operations. By that, I mean the map talks to them. They see more than the Go and No Go terrain, key terrain, or decisive terrain. They see and envision the effects of terrain on the enemy's ability and their own ability to move, generate momentum, disperse, mass, observe, deploy, shoot, or protect the force. They can envision, at a glance, where the enemy would be most vulnerable to the diverse capabilities of their force or where terrain provides them an opportunity to seize the initiative or control the tempo of the battle. Equally important, they can perceive where terrain would restrict or constrain the employment of their combined-arms team.

On a higher plane of thinking, they can see how to use the terrain to create conditions where the enemy would be vulnerable to the fires they can bring to bear. In other words, they can see, within their battlespace, where the enemy would be most vulnerable to destruction by close air support, delayed by artillery-delivered minefields, vulnerable to antitank fires, blocked, turned, disrupted or fixed by obstacles, disrupted by jamming, or where terrain would provide them a relative firepower advantage in the close fight. Armed with these skills, they can *shape the battlefield* to set conditions for success—the adept use of terrain to control the tempo of battle, create favorable force ratios, create vulnerabilities, optimize the effects of their own capabilities, control the enemy's direction of movement, and protect the force.

Additionally, OPFOR commanders develop a masterful ability to *see the enemy*. They can envision with remarkable clarity how the enemy commander would employ his combined-arms team. They can envision the sequential and simultaneous actions and combat systems the enemy commander would use to shape his battlefield for success. They can perceive the critical tasks the

enemy commander has to accomplish, how he will probably employ his combined-arms team to accomplish the tasks, or how the enemy commander will seize and retain the initiative. As the battle unfolds in their minds, they can immediately recognize the high-value and high-payoff targets and when those targets would be most vulnerable to attack by the capabilities of the OPFOR combined-arms team. They can easily visualize the rate of enemy movement, the organization and depth of his formations, and the location of high-payoff targets. Even more important, they can see which combat functions or capabilities have to be attacked to disrupt the synchronization of the enemy's combined-arms team—the first step to victory under combat conditions.

Commanders can also *see themselves*. By that, I mean they are expert in the capabilities and limitations of every system in their combined-arms team. They have mastered the science of warfighting. Moreover, they know how and when these capabilities can be used most effectively against the enemy. For example, they know the type and volume of artillery munitions required to achieve the effects they want, the range of various artillery munitions, and every gun's sustained rate of fire. Consequently, they know how many batteries are required, where they should be placed relative to the target, and the time required to shoot the munitions necessary to produce the desired effects. They also know the time required to shift a battalion of artillery from one target to the next, the actual occupation times of their artillery battalions, and an artillery battalion's rate of movement relative to the terrain. Consequently, they can create effective sequential and simultaneous engagements throughout the depths of the battlefield and decide when to move to protect the force and when to move to sustain fire support through the depth of the operation.

The OPFOR commanders also know the capabilities and limitations of their collection and jamming teams, comprised of soldiers with an unparalleled ability to protect the force and change the outcome of battle. Consequently, they know how and where to establish a baseline to obtain accurate direction-finding, radio intercept, and effective jamming. More important, they master the ability to focus and use these capabilities to answer their priority intelligence requirements and to jam the enemy when he is most vulnerable to its effects.

Commanders are also expert in the employment of obstacles. They have a keen sense of what their engineers can realistically accomplish. For example, they know how long it takes their engineer company, given their manning and level of training, to install an effective blocking or turning obstacle, the quantity of material required, the man-hours required, the transportation involved, the number of fighting positions they can realistically dig in the time available, and so on. Armed with this mastery of the science of warfighting, they can easily envision how to effectively employ these engineer capabilities to shape the battlefield, protect the force, and establish conditions for success in the deep and close fights.

At the same time, commanders develop and possess the ability to see themselves from the enemy commander's perspective. They can almost read their opponent's mind. They have the cognitive ability to recognize where they are strong and where they are weak from the enemy commander's point of view. Moreover, they are adept at perceiving their own vulnerabilities and recognize their exposure. Coupled with real-time human intelligence (HUMINT), this ability lifts the curtain of uncertainty off the battlefield, exposes the enemy's most likely course of action, and illuminates weakness and vulnerabilities in their opponent's fighting posture.

Finally, OPFOR commanders learn to think in terms of *force protection*. By that, I mean they learn to fight the battle in their minds and immediately discern the active and passive measures necessary to protect the force. They do not think simply in terms of safety, radio listening silence, raising the air defense warning status, repositioning of reserves, and so forth. They take passive and active measures to protect their forces from observation by air and ground reconnaissance systems,

electronic location, thermal detection systems, the effects of enemy indirect and direct fire systems, special munitions, fratricide, and the effects of weather, disease and injury.

When you are up against combined-arms commanders like these, it doesn't get any tougher. The point is that it takes these kinds of commanders and staffs to bring a unit to its *full* combat potential. They are simply indispensable. The problem is that conditions required to develop combined-arms commanders and staffs of this caliber do not exist within the remainder of our Army. These kinds of commanders and staffs are developed through constant study and application of the art and science of warfighting, terrain walks, situational training exercises, repetitive opportunities to fight and learn from their mistakes *in the field, not in simulations*, and most important of all, repetitive combat-like experiences which develop *battlefield intuition*—an immediate feel for the battlefield situation and what must be done to win. Unfortunately, these conditions don't exist for soldiers and leaders anywhere else in the Army today. This is an insightful lesson the OPFOR provides as we ponder how to maintain landpower dominance in the Army of the 21st century. But again, this is only a partial answer to the questions. Here's another reason.

It Is How the OPFOR Plans Combat Operations

The truth be known, the OPFOR *wins its battles before it fights them*. Very few battles ever unfold in a way substantially different from what the OPFOR team envisioned or planned to accomplish. Moreover, the incomparable ability of the OPFOR to get every dog in the fight at the right time at the right place is legendary. The reason? The OPFOR has learned how to set conditions for synchronization of the combined-arms team in the planning process, and learned how to preserve it during execution of battle as the situation evolves. The conditions for victory are set by their planning process. It's safe to say that no leader in the OPFOR would agree with the old adage that plans change at the first contact with the enemy, or that planning is a rather useless endeavor and performance in execution is really what matters.

The regimental orders process is a disciplined battle drill, characterized by strict time management. It follows the same military decisionmaking process outlined in FM 101-5 *Staff Organization and Operations*. Complete METT-T (mission/enemy/terrain/troops/time available) analysis is the foundation, and no shortcuts are taken. The regimental staff, working as a team, prepares *detailed* enemy situational templates which graphically depict the enemy's most likely course of action, array and presentation of forces on the battlefield, and probable locations of high-payoff targets, such as fire direction radars, artillery units, command posts, aircraft rearming and refueling points, or reserves. Once this analysis is presented, the regimental commander conducts his own commander's estimate of the situation, visualizes the battle unfolding in his mind, sees it unfold on the terrain, then develops several courses of action for employment of his combined-arms team that will ensure defeat of his opponent.

From this analysis and visualization, the commander develops his commander's intent, and he spends a lot of time ensuring he gets this right. He issues his intent by first stating the task and purpose the regiment must achieve. Next, he describes in clear doctrinal language the few critical tasks which must be accomplished sequentially, some simultaneously, in order to win. He wraps this up by describing the end state he wants the force to achieve—what success looks like when the fight is over.

Next, he issues planning guidance to his staff—guidance which clearly describes how he wants the combined-arms team employed, his critical information requirements by phase, how he wants to shape the battlefield for success, the means he wants to use to control the tempo of battle, and the *effects* he expects at critical times and locations in the fight. After just a couple of months in the

saddle, a regimental commander can do this in minutes. It becomes intuitive. As a minimum, he will direct his staff to deliberately wargame three courses of action, sometimes four.

With these things in hand, the chief of staff assembles the staff and conducts a detailed, deliberate wargame of each course of action—the most important step in the planning process. Why? The deliberate wargaming process sets conditions for employment and synchronization of the combined-arms team to produce the effects and outcome the commander expects. Moreover, the wargaming process produces the few critical products necessary to employ and control the force: the operations order, with specific task and purpose assigned to each unit; the reconnaissance and surveillance plan; a synchronization matrix for each course of action (the score for the orchestra); movement and positioning plans for the artillery groups; and operational graphics. Interestingly, the targeting process is embedded in the wargame, so as another outcome, the staff produces the plan for simultaneous and sequential attack of enemy high-payoff targets through the depths of the battlefield.

A distinguishing feature of this planning process is the *control* imposed by the plan, and the synchronization which stems from it. At the regimental level, the plan tells every member of the combined-arms team *what* to do, *when* to do it, and *where* to do it—but *never how*. As the OPFOR has learned, synchronization cannot be achieved any other way. Synergy of the combined-arms team cannot be created in other way.

The process used by the OPFOR is much like writing a score for an orchestra. In an orchestra, if the trumpets, the flutes and the violins play whatever notes they want, when they want, you get nothing but noise. The musical score (synchronization matrix) specifies which instruments will play *what* notes, *when* in relation to other instruments, and *where* in the sequence of time. If done properly, you get Beethoven's 5th Symphony. The same goes for military operations. Consider motorized rifle battalions, artillery groups, close air support, and jamming systems as instruments of war. Firm control is required at regimental level to ensure all capabilities are employed at the right time and place for maximum effect. On the other hand, down at the maneuver company level, much less control is imposed and initiative is prized, once the unit makes direct fire contact. In short, this planning and synchronization process is how the OPFOR achieves its *full* combat potential during the execution of battle. But there are other significant factors that differ from most units they oppose.

Take the operations order: Only one written operations order is published for the regimental combined-arms team which addresses multiple courses of action. Tasks to subordinate units are always expressed in the form of task and purpose. Only one set of graphics is produced and every leader in the regiment, from top to bottom, uses this one set of graphics. Subordinate units do not develop their own, unique graphics. In other words, every member of the combined-arms team is looking at the same sheet of music. Subordinate commanders issue oral operations orders, based on a clear understanding of what they have to do, when they have to do it, and where they have to do it.

The graphics are a wonder of simplicity. Only a few graphic control measures are used: report lines, lines of maneuver, artillery/rocket fire boxes and targets, smoke lines, firing lines, and air battle positions. That's it. Fire boxes, or firing lines, are used as battlefield reference points to adjust direction of maneuver, identify current locations, or shoot artillery. This technique of controlling forces is the source of the impressive flexibility the regiment is able to achieve in every battle. It's the principal reason the regiment is able to quickly change direction and shift the main effort, sustain common situational awareness throughout its battlespace, and preclude fratricide. In sum, the regiment's planning process lies at the heart of its ability to achieve its *full* combat potential. Nonetheless, it is only a partial answer to the questions at hand. There is another good reason.

It Is How the OPFOR Prepares for Combat Operations

How a unit *prepares* to execute its mission directly affects the battle outcome. The OPFOR has learned this and devotes most of its available time preparing for battle, not planning.

Once the operations order is issued, the preparation phase for combat begins. The regimental commander gives everybody a ten minute break; then all commanders return and backbrief him, which assures the commander that all subordinate commanders clearly understand what he expects them to do and achieve, when he expects them to do it, and where he expects them to do it. In short, he checks to ensure all subordinate commanders understand his intent.

Immediately after backbriefs, the regimental staff assembles and conducts staff rehearsals of each course of action. The chief of staff leads a mapboard exercise, placed flat with all staff officers surrounding, and they literally fight each battle from beginning to end, reviewing the employment and synchronization of every element of the combined-arms team, by phase of the operation. They rehearse every action each staff officer will take, and every action they must supervise for the commander during the battle given any course of action.

For example, they rehearse when and where rockets and close air support will be employed against high-payoff targets during Phase I fires, what positions they must occupy to place the batteries within range, when they must move to occupy in sufficient time to accomplish their task, and the number of volleys required to achieve expected effects. They rehearse when and where scatterable minefields will be employed to ensure reserves are interdicted prior to the enemy commander's decision to commit them. They rehearse where artillery batteries from the division artillery group must be positioned, and the trigger point for shooting nonpersistent chemicals against forces at the point of penetration, just prior to closure of the forward detachment. They rehearse when the jamming systems will begin jamming enemy fire support FM nets to achieve maximum disruption and force protection. Watch this process and it's easy to see why OPFOR staffs are considered an element of combat power whose performance is key to success. It is their hard work in the planning and preparation phases which sets conditions for synchronization of the combined-arms team, and ensures it is preserved during battle.

While this is going on, subordinate commanders are back at their units issuing oral operations orders to their units, with every vehicle commander in attendance, always supported by hastily constructed terrain boards which facilitate quick visualization of what they are expected to do, and how they will do it.

Seven to eight hours after the regimental order is issued, the regiment conducts a regimental combined-arms rehearsal—a disciplined battle drill that affords the opportunity to conduct detailed rehearsals of at least two, usually three, courses of action in a two-hour period. Attendants are the regimental commander and staff, all commanders of subordinate units, and all team commanders in the regimental reconnaissance company. The chief of operations directs the rehearsal, the chief of staff adjudicates the outcome of engagements by phase, and the regimental commander observes intently to ensure synchronization is correct, his intent is clearly understood, and all units are doing exactly *what* he expects them to do, *when* and *where* he expects them to do it.

The rehearsal is conducted on a large-scale terrain board, configured to scale, with known and expected enemy forces indicated by markers, and all regimental graphic control measures. On the board are the chief of reconnaissance, chief of rockets and artillery, chief of air direction, chief of signal, and all subordinate commanders—*only* those leaders who command and direct forces in battle. The rehearsal always begins with a detailed depiction of how the reconnaissance company will conduct their tasks to achieve their purpose. Recon team leaders physically move along the

infiltration routes they've chosen, describing their actions en route, the observation posts they will establish, what critical information they will acquire, and the fire support targets they are responsible for shooting. Once it is clear to all how observation of the regiment's entire battlespace will be established, the rest of the combined-arms team follows and briefs their actions in detail, beginning with their statement of task and purpose.

The value of this rehearsal method cannot be overemphasized. It is critical to successful accomplishment of the mission. While the operations order and graphics may be clear, the battle really doesn't come to life in the minds of subordinate leaders until they rehearse together as a team. In the rehearsal, they can visualize the employment of the entire combined-arms team, understand the key elements of synchronization that must be achieved, and clearly see how their unit fits into the operational concept relative to their teammates. Everybody knows what everybody else is doing. This produces a powerful synergy, seldom matched by their opponents.

Finally, after the regimental rehearsal, subordinate commanders return to their units and conduct their own detailed rehearsals with every leader in their unit present, not just the officers. *All* vehicle/crew commanders participate in the unit rehearsal. This technique guarantees complete knowledge of the operation through the ranks of the unit, and ensures the execution of the mission is not affected by loss of the company commander, platoon leaders or platoon sergeants. In fact, it is not uncommon to find a junior sergeant or corporal commanding a platoon or a company at the end of a battle, organizing his remaining force on the objective.

Meanwhile, and equally important, as the officers work through the orders and rehearsal process, the NCOs across the regiment are conducting detailed inspections of their equipment and soldiers ensuring both are prepared for combat. Hundreds of things are checked and double-checked to ensure all is ready: fluid levels, track tension, radios, fire control systems, maps and graphics, night-vision devices, boresight, ammunition, weapons, the list goes on.

The point to this discussion is that extensive and detailed *preparation* for combat, conducted by the officers and NCOs of an organization, is also indispensable to achieving the *full* combat potential of a unit. Incidentally, this preparatory process is seldom embedded with *discipline* throughout the brigade task forces the OPFOR oppose—another substantial advantage the OPFOR enjoys. Here's the final reason.

It Is How the OPFOR Executes and Controls Combat Operations

Although their planning and preparation techniques and procedures create the ability for the OPFOR to win their battles before they fight them, there are certain techniques employed during the execution of battle which also serve as means of achieving the full combat potential of the combined-arms team. First and foremost is the regiment's aggressive conduct of reconnaissance and surveillance operations.

The first condition any commander must set on the battlefield, if he wants to win, is the ability to see through the depths of the battlefield. If any reconnaissance team fails to reach its assigned observation post, a replacement team is immediately dispatched to replace it, or other teams are repositioned to reestablish coverage of that portion of the battlefield. In contrast, the brigade task forces they oppose are inadequately equipped with reconnaissance capability and have been for years. Brigades have never been provided the reconnaissance forces and capabilities necessary to establish and maintain complete and continual observation of their battlespace. From the OPFOR's perspective, it's the most serious organizational flaw and warfighting deficiency in our brigade task forces today. The OPFOR knows, through hard experience, that effective reconnaissance and

surveillance are the *key* to success during execution of the battle, and remain the most powerful of many advantages they enjoy over their opponents.

Equally as important as reconnaissance, the OPFOR establishes multiple FM radio retransmission teams on terrain which will ensure FM communications capability is provided through the depth and width of the battlespace. Immediate, responsive FM communications are absolutely required to sustain common situational awareness, prevent fratricide, preserve flexibility, control the tempo of operations, and preserve synchronization of the combined-arms team in the close fight. If you can't talk, you can't fight on the modern battlefield. It makes no difference if you can see the battlefield in perfect detail. Forces at the tactical level of war cannot be accurately employed without sustained, reliable, instantaneous real-time communications.

Another key to the remarkable synchronization the OPFOR is able to achieve, and consequently its overwhelming combat power, is the use of a small staff to control the combined-arms team, and preserve synchronization. Positioned forward, working out of a one-vehicle command post, off one map, are the chief of staff, chief of reconnaissance, chief of rockets and artillery, and chief of air direction. This small team, the same team that planned and rehearsed the operation, orchestrates the entire battle, thereby freeing the regimental commander to move to a position where he can see the critical events unfold on the battlefield, see his decision points, and control the employment of his force as the situation develops. This technique of command and control—a small, mobile staff, armed with near-perfect situational awareness, empowered to direct the combined-arms team—virtually ensures the regimental commander can operate at a tempo of decisionmaking his opponent cannot match, and a level of synchronization his opponent cannot match.

Having said this, nothing is quite so influential to the outcome of a battle as the constant *cross-talk* between all commanders and the regimental staff. Listen to the regimental battle command net during a fight, and what you hear is a constant exchange of information between subordinate commanders. Occasionally, you will hear the regimental commander on the net, usually to seek clarification, or get specific information required to make his anticipated decisions, or issue the one or two decisions he must make during the course of battle. Most of the time, you will hear adjacent and following commanders talking to one another describing the enemy and friendly situation as it unfolds on the battlefield. Often, you will hear regimental reconnaissance leaders passing them critical information about enemy actions. That's it. The regimental commander spends most of his time eavesdropping on his net, tracking the progress of the fight from the voices of his most trusted agents, his commanders on the ground. The chief of staff does the same thing, picking up his cues from commanders' descriptions, and directing employment of lethal and nonlethal fires at the time and place required to set conditions for their success.

This cross-talk between commanders and staff is the principal reason the OPFOR is able to sustain accurate, real-time situational awareness of what's happening on the battlefield. Nothing is more important during the execution of battle, amid the smoke, confusion and chaos. If a commander can see his battlefield, see the strength and disposition of his enemy, and see the strength and disposition of his own forces in near-real time, he can't be whipped, if he has a speck of tactical competence and the forces available to win. Moreover, cross-talk virtually eliminates fratricide within the combined-arms team. Through eavesdropping, everyone knows where everyone else is located on the battlefield.

And finally, when all else fails, when subordinate units lose communications, when the key leaders are killed or injured, all units continue to fight guided by the commander's intent—the overarching concept of what all must do to achieve success. Commander's intent is an indispensable means of imposing control on the battlefield. Many battles are won each year based solely on

adherence to commander's intent, stated up front in the planning process, and reiterated to all leaders in the preparation phase. Leaders know what to do, what must be accomplished, and they do it, despite the fact they can't talk to their commander.

In sum, techniques for imposing control and maintaining common situational awareness during the execution of operations are also key to achieving the *full* combat potential of a combined-arms team. It is disturbing that few of these techniques are observed or routinely practiced by brigade combined-arms teams the OPFOR opposes. This takes lots of training as one team under actual field conditions. Our brigade task forces do not have the opportunity under the conditions we serve in today.

Implications for Our Army and Landpower in the 21st Century

How does the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (the OPFOR) develop and sustain its ability to fight and defeat its opponents in almost every battle at the National Training Center? How does the regiment, fighting with 1960s-1970s technology, routinely defeat brigade task forces equipped with the most modern weapon systems and technology our Army can provide? How can the regiment do it given the same soldiers, the same personnel turbulence (about 40 percent turnover each year), the same leader development challenges, and the oldest fighting equipment in the active Army? There are the answers. There are the insights. From my perspective, the implications for our Army today and into the 21st century are profound. Why? Because the conditions which have afforded the opportunity for the OPFOR at NTC to achieve its *full* combat potential do not exist in our active Army today.

As an Army, we don't organize the way we intend to fight. We have decided to bring the full weight and combat power of the combined-arms team to bear at brigade level, yet we don't organize the brigade as a combined-arms team. It doesn't matter that much for peacekeeping and humanitarian operations, but it matters in combat. It's the only way to achieve the full combat potential of the enormous investments we've made in combat systems and capabilities. Although nobody can match us on the current battlefield, we're far less effective than we can be.

We don't train anymore with the rigor and frequency *in the field* necessary to develop and sustain full combat potential. Shortage of money, shortage of time, shortage of leaders and soldiers, peacekeeping operations and other factors conspire against us and deny us the ability to train soldiers, leaders and units at the frequency necessary to develop and sustain proficiency in mission-essential tasks. For that matter, we don't measure our combat readiness in terms of our ability to accomplish our mission-essential tasks, which is a direct function of the frequency with which we train. We measure it in terms of the number of leaders and soldiers we have, the amount of equipment we have, the maintenance posture of equipment, and available training resources. Granted these are components of readiness, but it is training that turns these resources into combat capability, and it's the frequency of training that develops and sustains a unit's *full* combat potential.

We don't train and *certify* that combat-arms commanders and their staffs at battalion and brigade level have the knowledge, skill, ability and intuition to employ a combined-arms team in combat *before* we place them in those critical positions. None must prove their competence through objective examination of any kind. It's not a requirement for selection. Moreover, we have no training programs within our Army which will develop and provide our soldiers fully competent combined-arms commanders, S-2s (intelligence officers), S-3s (operations officers), S-4s (logistics officers), fire support officers, and other key members of combined-arms battalion and brigade staffs. It's ironic. We wouldn't let a surgeon touch us with a knife unless we were absolutely sure he or she had earned the credentials and was certified competent and skilled by tough, rigorous board certification. Yet we entrust the lives of our soldiers to officers who are not required to undergo

equivalent competency evaluation. Consequently, we are far from being what we can be and need to be to achieve the *full* combat potential of the soldiers we lead.

We teach our officers to plan combat operations, but we don't teach commander and staff teams how to win our battles before we fight them, nor how to set conditions for effective synchronization of the combined-arms team during the planning process. At advance courses, Combined Arms and Services Staff School (CAS³), and Command and General Staff College (CGSC) we teach officers how to conduct METT-T analysis and write a five-paragraph order, complete with a dozen annexes, but we don't teach them how to synchronize employment of the combined-arms team—the most critical outcome which must emerge from the planning process; the thing that brings the *full* combat potential of the force to bear on the battlefield. Nor do we train and teach the critical preparation and execution techniques the OPFOR has learned and continues to employ, which are really nothing more than what our best warfighting units learned to do in combat throughout the last half of this century. We're good, but we can be better.

Also implied in this essay is the pressing need for our Army to develop new organizational, resource and training strategies which can restore or create the conditions we need to achieve our *full* combat potential in the years ahead. In short, we must strive to create the same conditions the OPFOR enjoys—conditions which have become unique in the force. No positive enhancement in our combat capability will occur unless we do. It matters little if we throw Crusader gun systems, the tactical internet or Comanche helicopters into the force. They will lie there only as combat potential. Their effective employment and effectiveness on the battlefield will hinge upon a couple of imperatives. First, it will hinge upon mastery of the *fundamentals* of warfighting at crew and small-unit level, the opportunity to learn these fundamentals under realistic field conditions, and training at the frequency necessary to develop and sustain performance standards. In turn, this demands and compels us to change the way we measure combat readiness. Second, it will hinge upon combined-arms commanders and staffs who possess a proven complement of tactical knowledge, skill, ability and intuition, derived through long experience. We will have to change the way we develop and train combined-arms commanders and warfighting staffs.

In conclusion, in the context of this essay the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment—the Opposing Force at the NTC—serves only as an example of what our Army can be and illuminates many of the components of warfighting necessary for a combined-arms team to achieve its *full* combat potential at the tactical level of war. You can choose to dismiss, agree with or dispute these things. But one thing is certain. If we ignore the insights provided by the soldiers and leaders of our OPFOR regiment these past few years, then we will be far less than we can be. We will fall far short of our *full* combat potential, and we just might jeopardize our landpower dominance in the years ahead. Let's roll up our sleeves.

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