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THE ENHANCED BRIGADE COMBAT LEADERSHIP DILEMMA

BY

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ABSTRACT

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The requirement that all fifteen Enhanced Brigades be prepared for mid to high-intensity warfare within ninety days of mobilization is unrealistic. The soldiers and company-sized units can attain that standard, but it expects too much of their senior leadership and commanders due to their relative inexperience in battlefield synchronization and command and control for larger units. This study looks at two ways to mitigate this experience deficit. The first is to require the Enhanced Brigades to prepare for and conduct missions like Peacekeeping Operations, thus freeing the Regular Army to focus on warfighting while giving the National Guard a tangible mission. The second is to place either full-time National Guard or Regular Army officers and senior NCOs in command and key staff positions within the Enhanced Brigades upon mobilization.

THE ENHANCED BRIGADE COMBAT LEADERSHIP DILEMMA

The United States Army National Guard combat forces' unpreparedness during Desert Shield/Desert Storm along with the subsequent Bottom Up Review gave rise to the tiered defense and Enhanced Brigade concepts. While increasing resources and manning priorities on these few units and improving their training strategies¹ will undoubtedly improve their readiness, the requirement that all fifteen brigades be prepared for mid to high-intensity warfare within ninety days of mobilization is unrealistic and expects too much of their senior leadership and commanders. The experience deficit of these leaders suggests a need to explore alternatives to the current solutions for getting more efficiency for the money invested in combat arms units. This brief study looks at only two, changing the missions or the leadership of the Enhanced Brigades.

A more feasible goal than preparing for almost immediate deployment to a mid-intensity conflict is to focus the Enhanced Brigades efforts on operations at the lower end of the warfare spectrum such as peacekeeping, which give the Enhanced Brigades, and possibly the National Guard divisions, viable missions while freeing Regular Army units to concentrate on warfighting. An alternative solution to the leadership challenge is to replace commanders and other key leaders with qualified Regular Army or full-time National Guard cadres upon mobilization.

Reorganizing the National Guard and innovatively resourcing hand-picked Enhanced Brigades answer many of the shortfalls

revealed during the Desert Shield call-up.² Fewer units now compete for scarce training dollars, equipment modernization is more focussed, and their elite status will probably help in recruiting and retention. The single resource that is not substantially improved is time. Arguably, ninety days is enough time for a reasonably well-trained, manned, and equipped brigade to mobilize and train on deficiencies for deployment to a combat theater. Tank and Bradley Fighting Vehicles crews and platoons can stabilize and qualify; squads, platoons, and companies can become proficient in selected mission-essential tasks targeted at the potential theater of deployment; and support units can hone their skills. The glaring deficiency is in the commanders' and staffs' abilities at battalion and brigade level to master the complex synchronization skills required in today's battlefield environment.³ This is not meant as a condemnation of the character, intelligence, courage, or commitment of the officers and senior noncommissioned officers filling those command, leadership, and key staff positions. Exceptional talent in the National Guard rises to and seeks those positions just as in the Regular Army. Combat support and combat service support units and commanders deployed early to the desert and acquitted themselves admirably. The problem with maneuver combat arms leaders is that there is simply not enough time for them to gain sufficient experience to adequately prepare for "the most difficult doctrinal leadership task in the Army."⁴

Consider this comparison of a full-time professional soldier

whose avocation is, for example, football officiating and a full-time professional businessman whose avocation is the National Guard. The word avocation is more appropriate than hobby as both football officiating and the National Guard are not the primary vocations in this case and both require a considerable amount of time, skill, and effort. Both also provide monetary compensation although the amount is insignificant when compared to the primary profession. The measure of success in football officiating is selection for assignments of increasing importance and responsibility such as moving up from youth organization ball through high school sub-varsity and varsity, major college, and eventually to the National Football League (NFL).

Success in the National Guard also is measured in promotions and assignments of increasing importance and responsibility culminating in duties such as battalion and brigade command. The types of people that are at the top of their career fields, commanders in the Army and mid-level executives in the civilian world, are also the type that tend to be successful in their avocation. They do not rise to that level by considering their assignment as merely a means of making a living or working only forty hours a week. Significant investments of time and effort, often to the detriment of their families were rewarded with promotions, pay raises, and increased responsibility and opportunity. To be successful in their avocation, they must also devote much time and effort, but obviously and understandably, less than for their chosen profession.

There are no professional Army officers officiating in the NFL today.⁵ The reason is that they must limit their involvement in officiating because of their commitment to the Army and the awesome responsibility of providing national security. There just is not enough time for them to immerse themselves in football every evening and weekend from August through January and devote additional time throughout the remainder of the year to individual study, seminars, and clinics in order to develop the skills necessary to compete at that level. Ninety days is not enough to bring them to the level of proficiency to work an NFL game if their experience is all at high school or small college level. They would simply be out of their league with the other members of the crew having a minimum of 15 years in preparation. The situation could be exacerbated if all the officials were inadequately experienced and it would be a disservice to the players and fans.

Serving as a an Enhanced Brigade battalion or brigade commander does not automatically make one capable of commanding it in a mid-intensity war. Thirty-nine training days per year supplemented with as much of their "spare" time as they can afford is not enough time for those commanders to prepare their units and themselves in ninety days to compete at a high enough level to put them on an equal footing with professional soldiers whose mission is daily preparation. Football is certainly not as serious as going to war; no one loses their life if a mistake is made. Expecting the leadership of the Enhanced Brigades to be

able to achieve a C-1 training rating and accomplish the most complex and important missions for the country with the amount of time they can devote to their avocation is a bankrupt policy.

The Enhanced Brigade concept attempts to mitigate the training time availability deficiency with innovative training strategies and greater efficiencies. Some innovative training strategies being studied include "gunnery alternatives; simulations; increased maneuver and staff training; and concentrations on core skills from individual through brigade level."⁶ Alternative gunnery strategies would save training time, especially since all of those skills are focussed at the individual, crew, dismounted squad (for mechanized infantry), and platoon level. This potential training time savings for platoons and below does not address the higher level command and staff training deficiencies, but offers opportunities to focus on the difficult, complex, time-consuming tasks associated with maneuver.

The heavy Enhanced Brigade commanders were presented with various alternatives such as limiting firing to no more than Table VII (practice qualification), conducting the majority of training in the Unit Conduct of Fires Trainer (UCOFT) simulator, or combining and compressing firing tables. Any of the proposed options would conserve time for maneuver. The commanders unanimously rejected any proposal that pushed qualification to post mobilization.⁷ They appeared more comfortable with the current gunnery qualification table standards and their ability

to compare results with their Regular Army counterparts regardless how much time it took.⁸

In attempting to reach the goal of qualifying at least seventy five percent of their crews, some units devote the majority of their two week annual training period to this one task, refiring unqualified crews several times handicapping their ability to concentrate on the more demanding maneuver tasks. When an emphasis is placed on gunnery, there is also a tendency to neglect multi-echelon command post training and for the leadership to be present on the ranges where the most visible training occurs. This attitude of having to "prove" themselves to the detriment of smart training precludes an opportunity to spend more time on maneuver and staff training.

How can the Enhanced Brigades modify their training strategies and husband more time for maneuver and staff training in preparation for the rigors of combat? Clearly, the method used during Desert Shield/Desert Storm was inadequate. "Even though the entire officer staffs of the three roundout brigades attended the Tactical Commanders Development Course (TCDC) shortly after mobilization, the staffs continued to display tactical and technical weakness when they returned to their units."⁹ Additionally, lack of leadership lead to a "standard work day mentality and lacked the discipline and leadership skills required to work the extra hours necessary to keep up with the work load..."¹⁰

In today's Army, the best way for any American battalion and

brigade commander to prove readiness as combat leaders short of actual war is to deploy to a Combat Training Center (CTC). All active component combat commanders, at least once during their command tour, pit their skills against the world-class opposing force (OPFOR) in residence at a CTC. Some fare better against the OPFOR than others, but the training experience they gain is immeasurable. The CTCs were developed as culminating training events, not measures of qualification. Because of its intensity, the shared experience among those who have challenged the OPFOR, and the Observer-Controllers (OCs) who cannot help but compare units, the CTCs have progressed beyond mere training to a competitive rite of passage.

Unfortunately, most National Guard commanders are not afforded the CTC opportunity. Just scheduling all of the active component brigades is a challenge to Forces Command and the National Guard gets only an occasional assignment because of the established priorities. Units that are expected to respond to crises on a no-notice timeline followed by early reinforcing commands should be the highest priority for the Army's premier training facilities. Once active component forces are deployed, the facilities and all their capabilities become the training ground for mobilized forces just as what happened during Desert Shield/Desert Storm. Until then, most Enhanced Brigades must rely on a "CTC-like experience" at one of the larger posts' maneuver areas with a pick-up crew of OPFOR and OCs.

If the priority is not changed to include the potentially

early deploying Enhanced Brigades, how can the National Guard replicate this important facet of their training? The answer may lie in computer simulations. A simulation networking exercise, SIMNET, has been developed at Fort Knox where a CTC-like experience can be achieved for battalion-level unit leaders and their staffs without the need for travelling to a CTC or interrupting ongoing training below company commander level. Observer-controllers, computer-assisted after-action reviews, and stressful time-sensitive missions just like those encountered at the National Training Center (NTC) are carried out by units that train over a long weekend. It is not NTC and can not attempt to replicate the fatigue factor, land navigation challenge, or the logistical challenges incurred by units at Fort Irwin, but it does cause commanders and staffs to go through the planning process and command and control their unit against a first-class enemy in a simulation similar to a Battle Command Training Program (BCTP) warfighter exercise.

The only problems with SIMNET are its limitations in number and scope. There is currently only one facility at Fort Knox. It is designed for a heavy battalion task force, not a brigade and not for light or heavy-light mixes of forces. If it were scheduled exclusively for the heavy Enhanced Brigades, it would be used twenty four weekends per year for their battalion exercises alone not including any consideration of requirements for pre-training. If the program could be modified to include brigade-level scenarios, the required number of scheduled

weekends jumps to thirty-two. The short duration of the exercise does not tax units in the same manner as a CTC, but it is still worthwhile and this program should be adopted and expanded to include brigade, light, and heavy-light scenarios.

In order to "concentrate on core skills from individual through brigade," the missions for which the Enhanced Brigades must train has been reduced to only three: Movement to Contact, Attack, and Defend.¹¹ Focussing the training effort to three missions makes sense and refinement of missions to Mission Essential Task Lists (METL) is something every military unit is forced to do because of limited resources. The 82d Airborne Division, for example, has ten missions on its METL including the three chosen for the Enhanced Brigades.¹² The Second Brigade of the 82d Airborne Division has further refined its METL to seven missions including Attack, Defend, and Movement to Contact. Of the remaining missions, one is specialized, Conduct Airborne Assault to Seize an Airfield and/or Establish a Lodgment. The remaining two missions, Command and Control the Brigade and Perform Combat Service Support Operations¹³, are certainly "essential" for any combat brigade and can not be pushed to the post-mobilization training period. Inclusion of these missions on the METL ensures commitment of training resources to them as commanders are accountable for the quarterly assessment of trained (T), needs practice (P), or untrained (U) for each METL task to their higher headquarters.¹⁴ It could be argued that Command and Control and Performing Combat Service Support are

implicit requirements in the training of the other three missions. However, the recognition of their importance by the active component reveals the need to devote special training time and accountability for them. Recognition of this requirement and the need to dedicate significant time and effort to it is imperative for every combat unit including the Enhanced Brigades.

Congress has given the Enhanced Brigades another tool to improve their training capabilities and their leaders' abilities to be prepared for combat with the assignment of significant numbers of Regular Army advisors provided for by Title XI, U.S Code.¹⁵ The Regular Army advisors, while a decided advantage to the Enhanced Brigades in particular and the National Guard in general, are a significant burden to the Regular Army. During Desert Storm, the Active Component committed between 4000 and 8000 active soldiers to support the training required to bring one brigade to validation of combat ready.¹⁶ The National Training Center's 4000+ trainers account for the large difference between the 4000 and 8000 numbers. The Department of Defense contends that the NTC soldiers should not be counted as they would have been wasted if not used to train the National Guard or some other later deploying units.¹⁷ "Because of the large number of active Army soldiers and leaders committed to training the roundout brigades, the readiness and operations of the two active divisions were significantly affected." Training in those divisions was reduced to the individual soldier level because much of the leadership was gone, M1 tank and M2 infantry fighting

vehicle transition was postponed, and tens of millions of dollars were spent.¹⁸ Taking the cost of the proposed 5000 advisors and amortizing over a considerable period may soften the blow in the long run, but the cost in terms of readiness to active component TOE units and daily shortages of personnel in TDA units is significant.

There are already many competing demands for a shrinking manpower pool including the manning of certain high priority units like the Rangers and 82d Airborne Division at higher than their authorized level of organization (ALO), unresourced organizations like JTF Bravo in Honduras and the JTF in Haiti, and the always present recruiting and Reserve Officer Training Corps requirements. The training associations between the Enhanced Brigades and their active component regiment, divisions, and corps, also taps already stretched units with another requirement that is burdensome but understandable and acceptable given the important mission of the brigades. The Title XI advisors are kept sharp by their close relationship and rating scheme within the associated active units also.

Augmenting the training capability of the Enhanced Brigades with active component advisors and including a single annual high-tech rotation through Fort Knox may shorten the post-mobilization training time required by the units, but it does not solve the fundamental problem of inadequately seasoned commanders. The issue is further aggravated by the selection process for the commanders. In the active component, the

centralized selection board process is a ruthless, heartless procedure designed to select the very best qualified officer to command at battalion and brigade level. Of the many capable and competent combat arms lieutenant colonels and colonels throughout the entire Regular Army, a very small percentage are chosen.

The numbers and percentages in the National Guard are similar, but the process and pool of potential selectees are radically different. The final decision on command of National Guard units rests with the Governor of the State based on the recommendation of his Adjutant General. Merit and an understanding of the critical combat leadership skills required may or may not weight his decision. An outstanding manager or someone perfect for the State missions of the National Guard may be unsuited for command of an early deploying combat unit. Additionally, the Enhanced Brigades, enhanced at the expense of other National Guard units, represent only eighteen states or roughly thirty-three percent of the available states and territories. While the Regular Army draws from across its entire spectrum to glean the very best commanders, the Enhanced Brigades by the nature of their organization limit their collection base to significantly less than half their potential pool of officers. The best National Guard combat arms officers may come from those states, but it is probably a difficult concept to sell in Texas, Virginia, or California which have National Guard divisions but not Enhanced Brigades.

At least one of the initial Enhanced Brigade commanders

changed branches from Ordinance Corps to Infantry in order to qualify for the position. The process required taking a correspondence course from Fort Benning and passing a proctored examination. Upon passing the test, he was declared branch qualified and given command of one of only fifteen elite National Guard combat units even though his entire career had been spent in combat service support units. It is doubtful that many Regular Army combat service support colonels could step into command of combat brigades and be prepared to deploy and fight the unit in 90 days. It could be argued that the illustration just depicted is atypical and one would certainly hope so, but as long as situations like that described exist the quality of all the Enhanced Brigade commanders will be suspect. Some sort of centralized selection process is required to remove any possible doubts about the capabilities and qualifications of the battalion and brigade commanders. The active component selection process is certainly not perfect and many qualified officers are not selected for command, but there is little doubt that everyone selected is qualified and among the best for the position.

Given additional resources, innovative training strategies, cutting edge simulations, leadership augmentation from the Regular Army, and refined missions; tempered with the realities of the complexity of battlefield operating system integration, time constraints, and a non-centralized command selection process, what are some alternatives to the current plan for using Enhanced Brigades as early reinforcing units thus earning them

more time to overcome deficiencies of which they are victims? One way is to target missions for the Enhanced Brigade that require fewer of the rapid synchronization and battle command skills expected of the senior leadership. This type of missions is defined as those requiring less combat ready capability than that required for peace enforcement missions. Current policy calls for the active combat forces to conduct peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance missions augmented by reserve combat support and combat service support units. In case the combat forces are needed for a Lesser Regional Contingency (LRC) or Major Regional Contingency (MRC), they would be back-filled by Enhanced Brigades.

The Achilles heel of this policy is the deterioration of readiness and combat skills suffered by active component forces assigned other than combat missions. "Combat skills diminish with time in PO (Peacekeeping Operations) particularly with high tempo maneuver and synchronization of forces at BN and BDE levels."¹⁹ The time to recover from the deterioration depends on the length of the PO and the type of mission, but estimates are that heavy forces require 120 to 180 days and light forces from 90 to 120 days.²⁰ Given that it takes any combat unit, either active or reserve component from 90 to 180 days to be combat ready after a PO, then it makes sense to assign the mission to the Enhanced Brigades that require that much time to be combat ready anyway. By assigning them these viable and important missions, the Enhanced Brigades gain credibility, can continue to

focus on company and below combat skills during preparation for and conduct of the missions, and still retain the target of being totally combat ready within 90-180 days of PO mission termination. The deterioration from lack of use of "high tempo maneuver and synchronization skills" is not as critical since those are the very skills that are the most difficult for reserve component officers to achieve in the first place. Assigning some peacekeeping missions to the Enhanced Brigades also frees the active component to concentrate on mid-intensity warfighting skills and readiness for immediate deployment.

In illustration, take the PO mission in Haiti. In September of 1995, the Second Armored Cavalry Regiment (Light) (2ACR) was charged with the mission. The Regimental headquarters served as the Joint Task Force (JTF) headquarters and one of the regimental squadrons, reinforced with two infantry companies provided the combat force of the Army component.²¹ This active component force had the mission for 179 days in a TDY status. Upon completion of their mission, they deployed to home station, and if Concepts Analysis Agency conclusions are correct, took from 90 to 120 days to regain combat readiness and deployability. If an emergency had arisen requiring their high-level combat skills either during or shortly after their redeployment from Haiti, they would still require the extra training time. If, on the other hand, the mission in Haiti were conducted by an Enhanced Brigade that had to be pulled out for an emergency, they would require no more training time than is currently mandated, 90 days

and the active component force would have been ready for immediate deployment.

Assigning PO missions to the Enhanced Brigades requires some changes to law or policy, and it would need careful management by Forces Command and the National Guard Bureau. It is feasible as long as the lead times are sufficient. For example, if an Enhanced Brigade commander knows three to four years in advance that his unit will conduct any PO that occurs during a predetermined six month window, then he can recruit, retain, and train for the mission as well as prepare the community for the six month deployment. The Annual Training (AT) period in the year preceding the deployment could be spent at a CTC focussing on the mission. Putting a CTC rotation and potential peacekeeping operation on the long-range calendar of the Enhanced Brigades also structures their preparation parallel to their active component counterparts that use significant events like CTC rotations as centerpiece or culminating training events for the unit rather than surprise exercises.

In the unlikely event that a PO is not required during their window of opportunity, then the funds ear-marked for the mission could be used to focus the Enhanced Brigade on a 90-day combat training period or an Emergency Deployment Readiness Exercise to further prepare them for participation in a future LRC or MRC. Another option is to use the money budgeted for the operation on priorities established by the brigade, National Guard Bureau, State Adjutant General, or their active component training

association unit.

A change to current laws or Presidential Selective Reserve Call-up authority would also be required in order for the units to be brought on active duty for the extended period of time required for mobilization, deployment, conduct of the mission, redeployment, and demobilization. Today, a state of emergency must be declared in order to activate National Guard units. The authority to call out the Enhanced Brigades for a minimum of 90 days is necessary anyway to test the training strategy's ability to meet the post-mobilization standards or the ability of the units to prove combat readiness in that short amount of time will always be an unprovable theory. The only recent historical examples are those of Desert Shield/Desert Storm and, as previously documented, the units activated for that conflict point to the need for testing the training strategy and readiness.

Another alternative besides assigning peacekeeping missions to the Enhanced Brigades for solving the leadership challenge of their senior commanders and staff is to replace them with specially trained Regular Army or full-time National Guardsmen upon mobilization for an LRC or MRC. The current command structure would be charged with the same mission they now have: train their units on company and below essential missions. During peacetime, the units would still be available to their respective Governors for State missions as required. The battle-rostered Active Component cadre would spend their training time

concentrating on higher level maneuver and synchronization skills through the media of situational training exercises (STXs), command post exercises (CPXs), command field exercises (CFXs), communications exercises (COMEXs), tactical exercises without troops (TEWTs), and staff rides. All of these are relatively inexpensive as they require few troops below the battalion staff level and, if properly structured, are intense training opportunities in garrison and field environments.

Upon activation for an LRC or MRC, the battle-rostered battalion and brigade commanders and staffs, augmented with selected personnel from the Enhanced Brigade, would take charge of the companies and conduct the final collective training necessary to integrate into deploying divisions and corps. Since the "new" battalion and brigade leadership had spent most of their time preparing for the complexities of combat command, they should have no trouble meeting the ninety-day readiness requirement. The displaced Enhanced Brigade cadre, federalized for the national emergency, are now free to focus on the required complex integration and maneuver skills and form an ideal headquarters around which follow on forces could be built either from the training base or the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR). The valuable leaders could also be used to fill critical positions within Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), the Army Staff, and echelons above division vacated by their Regular Army colleagues. Either of these options dispel the notion that the displaced leaders are incompetent or that upward mobility in the

National Guard would be affected.

The current concept of "seeking innovative training strategies and greater efficiencies" with no evaluation of its viability until the units are mobilized, assumes considerable risk. Glowing readiness reports and feigned confidence by the units scheduled to receive roundout units quickly faded when subjected to the realization that American lives might hang in the balance. The initial performance of the mobilized combat brigades and their disadvantaged leadership coupled with the cost to the Regular Army in preparing them for combat confirmed the inviability of that program. Today's concept is only a warmed-over version of that broken program with no tangible improvements in the two weakest areas, time for training and unprepared leaders. Gaining training time by lowering expectations and standards is not a good solution. Neither is providing a few simulation synchronization virtual exercises going to allow the leadership to overcome years of experience especially if the leadership selection process is not necessarily merit-based.

Standards must not be lowered, but expectations as to the best use of the Enhanced Brigades and their leadership can be changed. Giving them the low-end of the warfare spectrum operations such as peacekeeping provides a viable, focussed mission that does not substantially add to their post mobilization training time while freeing active component units to concentrate on warfighting. Replacing the Enhanced Brigade leadership with Regular Army or full-time National Guardsmen in

case of a short or no-notice MRC that requires their participation answers the training time shortfall and the leadership challenge. The costs of these two policies and the political ramifications are beyond the scope of this study, but the expectation is that both would be considerable.

When balanced against the security of the Nation and the lives of its service men and women, it deserves careful consideration. As long as the combat units of the National Guard are expected to take their soldiers to war alongside their Regular Army counterparts on short notice with minimum time to prepare, then they deserve the best and most competent leadership the Total Army can provide. That leadership can be provided by the brigades themselves after tempering during peacekeeping operations or it can be provided specially trained cadres provided by either the Regular Army or full-time National Guardsmen. America and her soldiers deserve nothing less.

End Notes

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