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OPERATION DESERT
STORM

Army Guard Combat Brigade
War Lessons Reflect
Long-Standing Problems

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Panel:

We are pleased to be here today to discuss our findings regarding the mobilization of Army National Guard combat forces for the Persian Gulf war. Since adoption of the Total Force Policy in 1973, Congress' strong support for improving the reserves has led to a reserve force that the Army believes is better trained and equipped than ever before. Nevertheless, despite these improvements, the Army found significant deficiencies in National Guard roundout brigades' capability during their post-mobilization training, and the brigades remained in a training status until the war was over.

While it is true that the Army experienced problems in readying the combat brigades for the war, many of these problems are long-standing and have hampered combat reserves' ability to achieve proficiency at even the individual soldier and small unit levels. However, one should not conclude that individual reservists are at fault; these problems are a reflection of the complexity of the skills required of large, ground combat maneuver units and a peacetime training system that simply has not worked. Moreover, there may have been unreasonable expectations about the level of proficiency that combat reserves can achieve on a part-time basis.

Although the Army has replaced its National Guard roundout brigades with active forces in its early deploying divisions and now plans to deploy these brigades later, if needed, as fourth brigades to the divisions already deployed, reserve combat brigades can still be expected to have a significant role in the Army's Base Force. Even as later deploying forces, they may have missions requiring their commitment to a war effort after completing only a few months of post-mobilization training. Accordingly, we believe that if the Army is to confidently rely on its combat reserves in future conflicts, it must work to correct the fundamental problems that have long hampered these forces.

Today, I will first highlight the complexity of combat brigade operations as a means of establishing realistic expectations about the degree of proficiency that reserve brigades can achieve on a part-time basis. Then, I will discuss our key observations about three National Guard roundout brigades as they stood when mobilized for Desert Storm and during their post-mobilization training. In brief, we found that (1) peacetime training did not adequately prepare the brigades for their wartime roles, (2) the Army's readiness information greatly underestimated the amount of post-mobilization training that would be needed to ready the brigades to deploy, and (3) adverse impacts resulted from the incompatibility of the National Guard's peacetime systems with those of the active Army.

EXPECTATIONS ABOUT THE ROLE OF
COMBAT RESERVES MUST BE REALISTIC

Expectations about the role that reserve combat forces can play, given peacetime training constraints and the complexity of the skills required for them to succeed on the battlefield, must be realistic. According to the Department of Defense, roundout brigades were never intended to be part of a "rapid deployment" force, since it had always been envisioned that they would require post-mobilization training before they were committed to combat. Rather, they were expected to be a part of early reinforcing forces--those expected to depart for a crisis between 30 and 90 days after its commencement. Therefore, expectations on the part of reservists and some in the Congress that these brigades would be deployed soon after their active Army counterparts may have been unreasonable.

According to the Army, the synchronization of large combat maneuver units is the most difficult doctrinal and leadership task in the Army.¹ As the Army has concluded, it simply may be unrealistic to assign early deployment missions to reserve combat brigades when the required proficiency of such large maneuver forces cannot be achieved in just 39 days of training a year. The Army is now estimating that at least 90 days of post-mobilization training for combat brigades is needed. However, expanding the roundout concept at the battalion and company levels might make it possible for some combat reserves to deploy earlier. Other alternatives might be to (1) selectively increase the number of required training days for reserve units designated as early deployers and (2) rearrange the way that the 39 days are used so that more than one extended training period is available each year.

PEACETIME TRAINING INADEQUATELY PREPARED
NATIONAL GUARD COMBAT BRIGADES

Our examination of the National Guard roundout brigades revealed that they needed substantially more post-mobilization training than the Army had anticipated and that, in fact, their peacetime training did not adequately prepare them to do their wartime jobs. The following are some of the problems that we found during post-mobilization:

- About 1,500 soldiers in two brigades--over 15 percent of their total personnel--needed additional training in their assigned jobs. These soldiers were to fill such critical positions as

¹Synchronization includes integration of assets such as armor, infantry, mortar and artillery fire, aviation, air defense, engineers, and logistics. These tasks must be conducted in conjunction with other activities such as intelligence gathering and analysis and planning for future operations.

infantrymen, M-1 crew members, and vehicle maintenance personnel.

- Many commissioned officers displayed weaknesses in preparing for combat operations and synchronizing combat assets. In force-on-force engagements at the National Training Center, Army trainers noted serious systemic and recurring weaknesses in using intelligence information; integrating direct and indirect fire; and locating, fixing, and amassing assets to destroy the enemy.
- According to Army trainers, many noncommissioned officers lacked leadership skills and the tactical and technical competencies needed to effectively train their respective squads and crews. Because some in the maintenance area could not accurately diagnose mechanical problems or effectively supervise their subordinate soldiers, as many as 50 percent of one brigade's vehicles were frequently out of service during its training at the National Training Center.
- Widespread deficiencies in crew and individual skills were noted in tank and Bradley Fighting Vehicle gunnery; nuclear, biological, and chemical training; and basic survivability.
- Upon mobilization, over 4,000 soldiers--about a third of the personnel in the three brigades--had either dental conditions or incomplete dental records that initially rendered them ineligible to deploy. Others--most over age 40--had medical conditions, such as ulcers or chronic asthma, that made them nondeployable.

The proficiency of these brigades improved during post-mobilization training, and after 90 days of training, one brigade was certified as ready to deploy. However, even after this extensive training, only about half of that brigade's tank and fighting vehicle crews met gunnery qualification standards.

The underlying reasons for the conditions we saw are complex and relate to long-standing systemic problems. The most basic is the limited peacetime training that reservists receive compared to their active duty counterparts--39 days total spread out over 11 weekends and 2 weeks of annual training. However, fewer than this number of days are actually available for training because of the administrative demands placed on the units. According to an Army study, administrative requirements can consume up to one-half of available training time. The Army's position is that with this level of peacetime training, a large ground combat maneuver unit cannot become proficient in the complex skills needed to synchronize its assets. Its estimate that 90 days of post-mobilization training will be required for National Guard combat

brigades to deploy assumes that peacetime training can be focused to achieve proficiency at the platoon² level.

The need to constantly retrain many reservists in other specialties is also a contributing factor to the problems we saw. Many of the Guard members who needed formal schooling upon mobilization had previous military experience, but in a different skill than their present assignment. Each year, about one quarter of Guard enlistees are prior-service personnel who require retraining. Most reservists are unable to attend further training on active duty because of civilian job commitments. Schools for reserve forces generally require one or more annual training periods and several weekends to complete specialty skill training. Many soldiers and commanders are reluctant to make such lengthy commitments, and needed training is often deferred.

Mission changes and the introduction of new equipment can also create retraining problems for units. For example, when one of the roundout brigades received the Bradley Fighting Vehicle in early 1990, 824 soldiers had to be retrained as Bradley infantrymen, and unit mechanics had to be retrained to work on the Bradley.

The impact of unrealistic peacetime training practices showed up in the difficulty that the brigades encountered in achieving tank and Bradley Fighting Vehicle gunnery skills that would allow them to meet Army standards. The problems experienced by the brigades resulted from training practices that (1) provide only one opportunity every two years for crews to demonstrate live-fire qualifications; (2) do not hold crews accountable for meeting Army firing time standards; and (3) allowed master gunners to boresight³ all tanks, rather than requiring tank crews to learn these procedures.

A primary reason for the weaknesses in noncommissioned officer leadership is that leadership courses tailored for the reserves' 39-day training year have only existed since 1988. Moreover, these soldiers are not required to complete leadership training before promotion to sergeant. Many roundout brigade soldiers were given immediate promotions when they were mobilized for the war if their rank was lower than the position they held. Several hundred soldiers in one brigade were promoted and had their leadership training deferred.

Insufficient attention to basic soldiering skills, lack of opportunities for realistic training, constraints on the extent of

²Platoons, companies, battalions, brigades, and divisions are successively higher echelons of command.

³"Boresighting" is the alignment of a weapon's barrel with its sights.

collective training, inadequate peacetime medical screening, and shortages of equipment, such as chemical gear, that hampered peacetime training are further explanations for the problems we saw in the combat brigades.

Under the Army's Bold Shift initiative, which began on a pilot basis in September 1991, peacetime training is to be focused on individual soldier skills, leadership training, and collective training at the platoon level. Post-mobilization training will then focus at the company, battalion, and brigade levels. We believe that this is a significant step in the right direction; however, some Army officials remain skeptical that even platoon-level proficiency can be achieved in just 39 days.

ARMY READINESS INFORMATION
WAS GENERALLY UNRELIABLE

The Army's information on the proficiency that its roundout brigades had achieved prior to their mobilization overstated the capabilities of these units. We noted weaknesses in the Army's collective training evaluation reports, its unit status reports, and the units' post-mobilization training plans.

With respect to unit status reports, we identified several long-standing weaknesses that contributed to an inaccurate picture of units' readiness:

- Under the regulations, commanders were not required to report shortages of certain items of equipment. For example, the National Guard Bureau listed over 300 types of equipment, including a wide range of trucks, night vision equipment, communications gear, and other major items of equipment that in some cases did not have to be reported.
- Commanders were also permitted to report older items of equipment as substitutes for newer items not yet issued in some cases. These substitutions sometimes did not meet the needs of the unit. For example, the commercial utility cargo vehicle did not prove to be a true substitute for the high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicle needed for desert operations.
- Commanders could also report personnel requirements as being filled, even though the assigned personnel did not have the required specialties or skills. For example, one brigade reported that 86 percent of its positions were filled, yet only 79 percent of these soldiers were qualified in the skills required of their positions.
- The brigades' unit status reports did not reflect their current status due to the different frequencies with which unit status was being reported. National Guard units were reporting their status quarterly while active units were reporting their status

monthly. As a result, the Guard reports did not reflect the annual training that they had received in the summer preceding the war.

Evaluation reports covering annual training and rotations to the National Training Center fell short of capturing the true status of units' proficiency. In February 1991 we reported that National Guard units' annual training evaluations did not provide reliable or useful information to higher commands. These evaluations were based on training that was often conducted under unrealistic conditions and were not focused on mission-essential tasks. Moreover, the evaluations were based on limited observations and often provided conflicting information.

Active Army trainers had difficulty defining what additional training the brigades needed because their post-mobilization training plans were based heavily on the unit status reports and the annual training evaluations. Training officials made little use of the plans because they were skeptical of their accuracy. For example, while brigade commanders had reported training readiness ratings indicating that from 28 to 40 days of additional training would be required to make them combat ready, after further evaluation, Army trainers increased this estimate to 91 and 135 days, respectively.

If the Army is to effectively respond to rapidly evolving contingencies, it must have better readiness information to support its mobilization process.

INCOMPATIBLE ACTIVE AND RESERVE SYSTEMS POSED DIFFICULTIES

The National Guard's peacetime personnel and supply systems were incompatible with those of the active Army. Because Guardsmen had not trained on active Army systems in peacetime, they were unfamiliar with their use and had difficulty making the transition to the active Army's system while in training at the National Training Center. After mobilization, Guard units also encountered difficulties maintaining equipment that had been maintained by civilians in peacetime.

The Guard's peacetime personnel system did not interface with the active Army's automated system. The Guard's system is primarily a manual system in which personnel data maintained for mobilization can often be 60 to 120 days old. In addition to the data being outdated, Guard personnel had difficulty making the transition to the active Army's automated system because they had not been trained in its data-entry system. These problems hampered the mobilization process, including decisions on personnel transfers among units.

In the area of supply, the National Guard did not possess the automated data systems that the active Army used to acquire supplies and repair parts. As a result, the Guard had obtained personal computers for many of its units and had developed Guard-unique software to facilitate unit level supply activity. Once mobilized, these personnel were unfamiliar with the active Army system and had difficulty ordering supplies and repair parts. For example, one roundout brigade training at the National Training Center mistakenly ordered parts for the M-60 tank instead of the M-1 tank with which it was equipped.

In the area of maintenance, the two combat brigades that trained at the National Training Center had difficulty maintaining their tanks and Bradleys because, during peacetime, most tracked vehicles belonging to the Guard had been maintained by state civilian employees. As a result, many mechanics did not know how to diagnose equipment problems or repair the vehicles in a timely manner. For example, during one force-on-force exercise that we observed at the National Training Center, brigade mechanics could not accurately diagnose problems or repair their vehicles and, as a result, had more vehicles disabled in its support area than it had to use against the opposing force.

If reserve forces are to be effectively integrated with active forces in future contingencies, Guard units need to gain experience during peacetime on the systems and procedures they will use when mobilized.

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In conclusion, we believe that if the Army is to effectively use its Guard combat forces, it needs to (1) determine what changes are needed in its peacetime training to improve the readiness of these forces, (2) explore the feasibility of expanding its roundout concept at lower levels of organization as a means of retaining combat reserves, (3) make active and reserve systems compatible to ease the integration of reserves upon mobilization, and (4) improve its readiness information so that Army leaders have reliable information on the units' proficiency. The Army has ongoing efforts on many of these fronts, including the Bold Shift initiative and actions to improve readiness information. We view these efforts as positive steps toward overcoming the problems that we have highlighted today.

I would like to add that, while much attention has been devoted to the National Guard combat brigades, some of the problems were not unique to the combat brigades. While the above problems prevented the National Guard combat brigades from participating in the Persian Gulf war, many of the National Guard and Army Reserve support troops that served in the Gulf experienced many of the same problems--nondeployable personnel, skill and position mismatches, inadequately trained leaders, incompatible systems, insufficient

competence in survival skills, and medical and dental problems. As the Army looks to address the problems that we have identified today, we believe that it should also examine the problems that these forces experienced.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my prepared remarks. I will be happy to address any questions you or other members of the panel may have.

SELECTED GAO REPORTS RELATED TO ARMY
NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE FORCES

Operation Desert Storm: Army Had Difficulty Providing Adequate Active and Reserve Support Forces (NSIAD-92-67, Mar. 1992)

Operation Desert Storm: Full Army Medical Capability Not Achieved (GAO/T-NSIAD-92-8, Feb. 1992)

National Guard: Peacetime Training Did Not Adequately Prepare Combat Brigades for Gulf War (NSIAD-91-263, Sept. 1991)

Army Reserve Forces: Applying Features of Other Countries' Reserves Could Provide Benefits (NSIAD-91-239, Aug. 1991)

Army Training: Evaluations of Units' Proficiency Are Not Always Reliable (NSIAD-91-72, Feb. 1991)

Army Force Structure: Lessons to Apply in Structuring Tomorrow's Army (NSIAD-91-3, Nov. 1990)

Reserve Force: DOD Guidance Needed on Assigning Roles to Reserves Under the Total Force Policy (NSIAD-90-26, Dec. 1989)

Army Training: Management Initiatives Needed to Enhance Reservists' Training (NSIAD-89-140, June 1989)

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