

Running head: PREPARING THE ARMY NATIONAL GUARD FOR WAR

Army National Guard forces not prepared for Operation Desert Storm

MSG Mark Humphrey

United States Sergeants Major Academy

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CMD CM Cain, James M.

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to describe how military planners failed to account for the proper amount of funding, training, and mobilization time necessary for the deployment of Army National Guard brigades to Operation Desert Storm. When three Army National Guard roundout brigades mobilized for the Persian Gulf War, the active duty Army leadership identified multiple problems. After the 48th, 155th, and 256th National Guard combat brigades received their active duty notification for Operation Desert Storm, it took them much longer to get ready than expected. Many active duty Army officers had perceptions about these three units, and they did not want to deploy with them. To further complicate the Army National Guard's deployment, the active component placed additional training requirements on them in order to meet deployment certification which only one of the three brigades managed to reach.

### Army National Guard forces not prepared for Operation Desert Storm

Even though the Army National Guard had equipment shortages, lacked training, and took too long to meet deployment standards, three Army National Guard Brigades, which cost far less to maintain than their active duty counterparts, were activated for possible service in Operation Desert Storm. Our Military Strategy called for Army National Guard combat brigades to always be ready to deploy with their active Army divisions to any number of worldwide conflicts. However, before Operation Desert Storm, the Army encountered shrinking military funds due to the end of the Cold War. This enhanced the active components dependency on the National Guard component. The Army Total Force structure depends on the readiness of three Army components: the Active Army, National Guard, and Reserves. When three Army National Guard units mobilized for Operation Desert Storm, they encountered many problems that stopped them from deploying to the Persian Gulf in support of Operation Desert Storm.

As we know, America's National Defense Strategy should be in line with any military threats that face our country. To protect America's vital interests, it takes a total military force that includes the Active component, National Guard, and Reserves that are properly equipped, manned, and trained. Any military cuts, or force reallocations should be in agreement with a policy that provides enough Armed Forces to defend and preserve America's vital interests. Prior to Operation Desert Storm, our Nation made some poor decisions on National Security matters. Because the Congress and the Department of Defense continually compromise over the amount of the defense budget, a component of the total military force did not perform their mission when war broke out in the Persian Gulf. Our country's future will depend upon the military's readiness to include the Army National Guard, and a sound National Security strategy.

Due to the great economic cost of maintaining a large active duty military, Congress approved

a military strategy prior to Operation Desert Storm that relied more on the National Guard, and less on the Active Army. With the greater reliance on the Army National Guard, their readiness for war was in question when deployment problems occurred during the mobilization process for Operation Desert Storm. These troubles occurred during the mobilization of the three National Guard roundout brigades: the 48th Infantry, 155<sup>th</sup> Armor, and 256<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade for Operation Desert Storm. The problems were so bad that the active Army 197<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade deployed in place of one of the three National Guard roundout brigades that were in the process of mobilizing. The Persian Gulf War was the first time in history that America fought a war without a single combat unit from the Army National Guard, considering our state of readiness for that conflict. (Melnyk, 2001)

The National Guard roundout concept saved our Government money, and gives responsibility to the active Army division commanders for the National Guards wartime readiness. National Guard units, on average, cost the taxpayer one quarter of what the equivalent active duty unit would cost, and it gave Guard members a wartime mission on which to focus their peacetime training. (Melnyk, 2001) After the Vietnam War, nine active Army divisions had National Guard roundout brigades. There were also seven Army National Guard battalions that complimented the Active duty forces, if called upon. According to the Army Staff, this concept ensured if war ever broke out again, it would take the support of our entire Nation to activate the National Guard to active duty status.

The Army National Guard was a very important part of the Total Army Force, and the National Security Strategy of the U.S. when Operation Desert Storm occurred. The Army's National Guard roundout brigade's original design had their units deploying upon Federal notification within three weeks, and with their active Army duty division. On August 22,

President Bush issued Executive Order 12727, ordering the selected units of the Armed Forces to Active Duty. President Bush determined that it was necessary to augment the active Armed Forces of the United States for the effective conduct of operational missions in and around the Arabian Peninsula. It would become the largest mobilization of the Army National Guard since the Korean War, and the first combat mobilization since 1968, when some 7,000 Guard soldiers went to Vietnam. However, when activated for Operation Desert Storm, the National Guard encountered major issues: including the readiness of combat formations, leader qualification/certification, equipment shortfalls/incompatibility and post-mobilization training, which are all historic militia shortcomings. (Thompson, 2005) It was because of these problems the Army National Guard did not execute its primary mission at the outbreak of this war.

At the outset of the National Guard mobilization, active Army leaders noticed that the three-roundout brigades had deficiencies when it came to their validation for deployment to Operation Desert Storm. Because of this, Secretary of Defense Cheney made the following decision, “I want to be absolutely certain that the units drawn from the Guard and Reserve have the opportunity for the additional workup training our people think they require. I’m not eager to send units that are not fully ready. Before they go, they need to go to the National Training Center (NTC) to get into shape, as if they were an active duty division.” (Melnyk, 2001) In essence the Secretary of Defense changed the deployment standards, which were already set for the National Guard, because they were not ready to deploy and conduct combat operations. Because of this decision, all three National Guard roundout brigades would require fundamental training, that is referred to as the “crawl, walk, run” phases of military training. To accomplish this task active duty soldiers would be in charge of their training and deployment certification. The active Army would review each of the National roundout brigade’s personnel manning,

percentage of equipment on hand, operational readiness, rate of equipment, and leader certification.

I was serving at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California when the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade underwent their additional training for their certification for deployment. For two years, I observed over 20 active duty brigades train for combat, and even though I was a specialist at the time, I knew what a trained unit looked like. My first observation was the difference in leadership between the active duty and National Guard. The NCOs that I worked for were Observer/Controllers, and they attributed this to a lack of NCOES training, and other factors such as existing relationships from back home. Many of the soldiers were in fact, bosses of their military leaders in their hometowns. Lack of experience was also evident, which created a lot of stress both in the soldiers and leaders of this National Guard unit. I personally witnessed the firing of the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade's, "Brigade Commander" due to his leadership in-competency during this train up for war. It was also evident to me, that their leaders lacked the basic skills to maneuver any element larger than a platoon. Nighttime operations were out of the question until they received additional night driver's training, along with night driver optics, in which they were short. It took the longest rotation in history at the NTC, before the Observer Controllers certified the 48<sup>th</sup> roundout Brigade as combat deployable for Operation Desert Storm.

On 15 November, 1990, the Army National Guard's 155<sup>th</sup> Armor roundout Brigade from Mississippi, received their alert warning, and then entered Federal active duty on 7 December, 1990. Initially, this unit conducted gunnery training at Fort Hood, TX, and then completed a rotation at the NTC, following the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade. While waiting for the 48<sup>th</sup> to finish at Fort Irwin, the 155<sup>th</sup> Armored Brigade continued to train at Fort Hood, TX. The tank crews of the 155<sup>th</sup> had serious difficulties on the gunnery ranges. Col. Fletcher C. Coker, Commander of the

155<sup>th</sup>, claimed the training at Fort Hood “was an eye opener.” (Galvin, 1990) As an active duty Scout, I have conducted and evaluated gunnery ranges for both Bradley and Tanks units. In my experience, even for active duty soldiers, these types of training events are very difficult to master. With the National Guard’s limited time for annual training, it is no wonder this unit had such a difficult time with meeting gunnery standards for crew and unit qualification.

The Army National Guard’s 256<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Infantry roundout Brigade from Louisiana, also encountered problems in their mobilization and training. Eight Company Commanders from the 256<sup>th</sup> were replaced, because they couldn’t handle the stress. Perhaps, the most damaging roundout brigade mobilization story for the Guard, came in early February, 1991, when 53 soldiers from Louisiana’s 256<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, at that time training at Fort Hood, went absent without leave or overstayed their passes, and while doing so complained to the local news media about the poor conditions they were experiencing in Texas. (Melnyk, 2001) This National Guard roundout brigade trained at the NTC, and never achieved their combat certification.

The National Guard roundout brigades lacked strong leadership, their leaders lacked the experience, and military schooling necessary for combating the stress they would encounter during their train up for war and deployment to Operation Desert Storm. National Guard Officers and NCOs lacked certification for their current rank, in both officer and Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) education courses. Because of the leadership problems in these National Guard brigades, soldiers suffered very low morale. All three National Guard roundout brigades experienced increases in discipline problems; especially after it became clear that there was no way the units could deploy to Saudi Arabia in time for the impending ground war. (Melnyk, 2001)

In the opinion of many Guard members, the prolonged certification process for the 48<sup>th</sup>, and the passing over of many other Guard combat units for deployment, was done with the specific intent of keeping National Guard units out of the fight. Major General Robert Ensslin, President of the National Guard Association, was one of the most vocal critics of the Army's policy when he said "Many of us in the Guard have gained the perception that our combat arms units were put in a position where it was almost impossible to succeed. Because the Army did not need them in Saudi Arabia, and because many active Army officers instinctively disbelieve that a Guard maneuver unit (infantry and armor) can be combat ready, they set up a self-fulfilling prophecy." One Adjutant General saw a deeper motive for the exclusion of Guard maneuver units, the regular Army's fear of post-war force reductions. "It adds up to us the way two plus two adds up: If the Guard was mobilized, and did well in the theater, the Army would be in worse shape in sustaining the force structure of the active components." (Melnyk, 2001)

### Conclusion

The Army National Guard had equipment shortages, lacked training, and took too long to meet deployment standards and therefore never deployed for service in Operation Desert Storm. Our Military Strategy failed the Army National Guard combat brigade's ability for readiness. This was because the Army encountered shrinking military funds due to the end of the Cold War. I will continue to argue the Army Total Force structure depends on the readiness of three Army components: the Active Army, National Guard, and Reserves.



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