

“Roundout Brigades, a Historical approach”

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In the 1970's there were a series of Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) tests to explore ways to improve RC readiness. The California National Guard participated in OSD Test #3 1971-2. As a result of those and other national studies there were a series of initiatives in the 1980's to improve readiness. One of the key results was the CAPSTONE program, partnering National Guard units with comparable Active Army units. This made it clear where the RC unit fit in war plans and the chain of command, focused training and greatly enhanced readiness. The 40th Mechanized Division's partner was the 4th Mechanized Division of Fort Carson. They often provided mobile training teams that assisted in training our Guardsmen to standard.

At that time, the Roundout brigades were introduced, but for a different reason. The Army wanted more divisions, but were constrained by manpower caps. The solution introduced by GEN Creighton Abrams was “rounding out” some Army Divisions by having their third maneuver brigade be a geographically close National Guard brigade. It was to the Army division commander's advantage to maximize readiness of his assigned Roundout brigade.

In every case, the increased readiness of the National Guard units was to a degree dependent on the attitude of the affiliated active component commanders. While this varied, it was generally good. In our case, we considered the 4th Division's support, at that time commanded by Major General (later General and Chief of Staff of the Army) Dennis Reimer, as outstanding.

I don't think any of us was aware if a serious problem with the system until the Gulf War. The three divisions assigned Roundout brigades that were deployed for the Gulf War, did so without their assigned National Guard brigades. After strong urging by the Congress, the three brigades were finally mobilized, and the Department of the Army Inspector General (DAIG) was directed to assess the efficiency of the process to mobilize and train those three Roundout brigades. To enhance fairness, I was assigned as deputy to the DAIG for the study, and was assured by the Army's Chief of Staff that I was “...authorized unlimited access to Army activities...and all information sources necessary to complete this assessment.” That turned out to be a hollow promise.

Most attention was directed at the 48th Brigade of Georgia, the first to be mobilized and process through the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin. The AC observer-controllers (OC) were surprised at how well the 48th did. Their gunnery was exceptional, and they did well with their tactics. In one telling example, the OC was praising the artillery battalion commander and his battalion. The brigadier general commanding the NTC quickly squelched the accolades. That and concealing other favorable comparisons and the exceptional gunnery scores made it clear the results that were desired. All this resulted in spite of the fact counterpart AC brigades had the advantage of an average eight months “train up” prior to the NTC experience.

In replacing the 48th for overseas deployment, the 197th Armored Brigade at Fort Knox had been chosen. They turned out to be grossly understrength, and in an account published in Army magazine, less ready than the 48th. It also turned out that the 48th's readiness reports were retroactively downgraded.

Prior to the Gulf War, it was generally agreed that the partnership and Roundout brigade programs were working. There understandably has always been a tension between the active and reserve components as involves force structure, resourcing and budgeting. To mention just one factor, the larger one component is sized and resourced, the better the promotion opportunities that result. The National Guard can rarely attain the same readiness as comparable AC units (though there are exceptions such as the National Guard Air Defense Nike-Hercules Battalions of the cold war era that outscored their AC counterparts during competitions at Fort Bliss). On the other hand, when adequately resourced, RC units do surprisingly well as demonstrated in the Army Research Institute's study in 1992. The ARI comparison of nine AC battalions with nine National Guard units that went through a NTC rotation in the late 1980's generally showed the Guard units ended up at a higher level than the level where AC units started for a typical rotation of only 21-days.

