By First Lieutenant Robyn H. Franklin

The original concept of the combat training center (CTC) was designed to change how the U.S. Army trains and develops leaders and units for the next fight. In 1980, the establishment of the National Training Center (NTC), Fort Irwin, California, allowed the U.S. Army to build upon lessons learned from previous conflicts. Since then, CTCs have overseen the integration of the brigade combat team model for deployment of units and the adaptation of scenarios in order to replicate the dynamic and ever-changing threats that were faced during Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom to counterinsurgency operations following 11 September 2001 (9/11). As Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations*,[1] overhauls Army operations, NTC looks to challenge rotational training unit leaders at all echelons to coordinate efforts across domains. As CTCs continue modernization efforts to keep pace with current threats, they now rely on new technology and revive previously inactivated capabilities across the Army to replicate enemy effects rather than enemy assets.

In his article entitled "Recommendations for Intelligence Staffs Concerning Russian New Generation Warfare," Lieutenant Colonel Charles K. Bartles outlines three significant differences between Russia and the element acting as the Russian adversary, or the opposing force (OPFOR), in the areas of the military decision-making process, the concept of warfighting functions, and the use of doctrinal templates.[2]

In the Russian system, the commander decides the courses of action by thinking not about performing the warfighting function but, rather, about implementing capabilities. Additionally, tactics are standardized at the battalion level and below (such as in a battle drill), thus streamlining the decision-making process and reducing staff requirements. While OPFOR tactics draw heavily on influences from peer and near-peer adversaries, the OPFOR is confined to the same military decision-making and staff-centric planning processes as the brigades with which they fight.

The 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, Fort Irwin, known as the "Blackhorse" Regiment, has a unique mission set and modified table of organization and equipment. Blackhorse leaders master U.S. Army doctrine along with Training Circular (TC) 7-100.2, *Opposing Force Tactics*,[3] representing the OPFOR; fighting (with regular and irregular forces) as Donovians; and annexing their geographical neighbor, Atropia, to focus Army brigade combat teams on the post-9/11 counterinsurgency fight. As the Army transitions to multidomain operations in large-scale combat operations, Blackhorse continues to pace modern adversaries by imitating unconventional threats such as electronic warfare and drone swarms.

While Donovia fights similarly to Russia and with Russian-replicated equipment, the main difference between OPFOR and Russian doctrine lies in the purpose. The OPFOR is a training aid designed to test the training units on their mission- essential tasks (METs) in structured scenarios. At NTC, reception, staging, and onward integration take place over 5 days. At the beginning of the decisive action rotation, the Blackhorse Regiment mobilizes to fight as a division tactical group. Regimental task organizations dissolve as units realign to replicate two functional brigade tactical groups with squadron organic assets and regimentally supported enablers. At the start of a rotation, echelons fight one level above their garrison designation. For example, garrison troop command teams fight as mechanized infantry battalions and squadron command teams lead brigade tactical groups.

Competently integrating enablers and assets in the close and deep fight is critical to battlefield preparation prior to any direct contact. Donovian doctrine, like its real-life counterpart, is heavily reliant on artillery to displace and attrit enemy forces before the first force-on-force engagement. Clandestine NTC laboratory training sites, o-chlorobenzylidene malononitrile (CS) gas, and smoke are used to replicate chemical, biological, radiological,

and nuclear (CBRN) threats to deployable units. NTC has established several locations across the desert for conducting site exploitation and site assessments, ranging from bunkers built into hillsides to compounds constructed in the centers of cities. The operations group creates scenarios tailored to the assessed unit. To evaluate units on CBRN METs, the OPFOR simulates CBRN warfare by employing CS gas for terrain exploitation or denial, targeting critical defense assets and equipment and creating psychological effects.

The Smoke Platoon, initially formed under the now-deactivated 54th Chemical Detachment, is a unique enabler for the Blackhorse Regiment. This is the only smoke platoon in existence in the Regular Army; however, there are M56 smoke generators aligned to engineer units and smoke companies within the U.S. Army National Guard. Although the Blackhorse Smoke Platoon has had many homes within the Regiment, this specialty platoon is currently aligned under the Regimental Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, NTC. During rotation, the Smoke Platoon becomes a division asset attached to the lead brigade tactical group (O-5 level commander) and provides direct maneuver support to the mechanized infantry battalion (O-3 level commander). The Smoke Platoon provides two separate capabilities—special munitions (coordinated through the brigade tactical group fire support officer) and "live" smoke (to provide battlefield obscuration). The platoon utilizes M56 smoke generators, or "coyotes," mounted on the M1113 high-mobility, multipurpose, wheeled vehicle (HMMWV), manned and led by Military Occupational Specialty 74D–series CBRN Specialists. Additionally, Blackhorse has smoke pot capabilities; however, smoke pots are resourced and allocated separately from a smoke platoon.

Doctrinally, the Smoke Platoon supports light and airborne units at breaches and wet-gap crossings, obscuring friendly forces and targets or conducting deception operations. The unit replicates enemy capabilities, including the Russian TDA-3, a truck much like the U.S. medium tactical vehicle; the Russian TMS-65U decontamination vehicle, which has smoke and decontamination capabilities such that operators can direct the decontamination solution into the engine exhaust and direct the hot gas stream; and the Russian MRO-D, a white phosphorous smoke warhead. Russian doctrine calls for the use of smoke to obscure tactical movements and positions and infrared pellets to degrade targeting and observation. Although Donovian tactics mainly follow Russian doctrine, Chinese doctrine also accounts for the use of battlefield obscuration. The Chinese Type 87 mortar allows for special munitions, including smoke. And the Chinese PHL-81 is a 122-millimeter multiple-rocket launcher with similar effects that can be replicated by a smoke pot or smoke truck. Chinese doctrine calls for the use of smoke for obscuration and—combined with other assets such as loudspeakers, decoys, fire, and unmanned equipment—for psychological attacks.

To meet the training needs of deploying units under rapidly changing conditions, CTCs continue to turn to legacy equipment to imitate the effects of enemy capabilities. This allows CTCs to effectively train MET requirements with legacy equipment or replicated capabilities.

Endnotes:

[1]FM-3-0, *Operations*, 1 October 2022.

[2]Charles K. Bartles, "Recommendations for Intelligence Staffs Concerning Russian New Generation Warfare," *Military Intelligence*, Foreign Military Studies Office, 2017, pp. 10–17, <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/Hot%20Spots/Documents/Russia/Bartles-russian.pdf>, accessed on 14 March 2023.

[3]TC 7-100.2, *Opposing Force Tactics*, 9 December 2011.

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