

Achieving Effective AC/RC Relations: An NTC Model for Success



by Lieutenant Colonel Aaron R. Kenneston

One hundred years ago, the Spanish-American War brought to light the need to reform active and reserve component relations in America's Army. Although our Army decisively defeated the Spanish defenders in Cuba, there was a great disparity in the ability of units to accomplish their missions. This was especially evident in active and reserve component performance.¹ Prior to this war, National Guard training consisted mainly of close order drill and marching. Each state had its own training standards and, based upon available funds, provided its own equipment.² To compound this problem, Active and National Guard units seldom trained together.

In sharp contrast is today's highly successful training relationship between the 11th Armored Cavalry (Blackhorse) Regiment and Nevada's 1/221st Cavalry (Wildhorse) Squadron. The validity of this partnership was demonstrated during two active duty NTC rotations this year, when the Wildhorse fought alongside the Blackhorse in January during Rotation 98-04 (see *ARMOR*, May-June 1998) and again in August during Rotation 98-10. In both rotations, the 1st Squadron, 221st Cavalry assumed its OPFOR identity as the 60th Guards Independent Tank Battalion, and fought under the control of the 125th Guards Tank Regiment (the 11th ACR) to defend the fictitious nation of Krasnovia against a visiting active Army brigade combat team.

An effective AC/RC relationship, like that of the 11th ACR and the 1/221st Cavalry, is built on mutual trust and support. Developing mutual trust requires both time and patience. It is created through frequent training exercises, com-

patible equipment, and a common training strategy. Of course, in an AC/RC relationship the support must also be mutual. To be highly successful, the partnership must increase the proficiency of the reservists, while materially enhancing the active unit's warfighting ability.

Units participating in the Spanish-American War clearly did not have the mutual trust and support necessary for effective relations. Upon outbreak of the hostilities, the Army Ordnance Department limited the issue of modern rifles to the Regular Army. The Reserve units participating in this conflict, with the exception of the Rough Riders, were armed with obsolete Springfield .45-70 single-shot black powder rifles. When the expeditionary force commander made the unfortunate decision to place a National Guard unit in the lead as our Army approached the open meadow below San Juan Hill, the unit's weapons were not only ineffectual, but their smoke revealed the exact location of the riflemen. This brought the concentrated fire of the enemy directly to bear upon the approaching column. The Spanish were armed with the then-state-of-the-art bolt action Mauser Model 1893, firing a smokeless, modern 7mm cartridge. Their withering fire caused the green Guard soldiers to go to ground and obstructed the attack's forward movement.³

Of course, there were other factors besides the reserve component's poor training, inferior equipment, and improper employment that affected our Army's performance. But, the war certainly highlighted the inadequacy of AC/RC relations. Our country discovered that the Revolutionary-era ideal of a very small

standing army, supplemented with independent state-trained reserves, was not realistic in the 20th century. The Army's overall performance caused the Secretary of War to create a General Staff, reorganize the War Department, and reform the National Guard. Active and National Guard units began routinely to conduct joint maneuvers, be issued the same type of equipment, as well as use common training standards and methods. Thus, the war marked the very beginnings of effective integration of the RC into America's Army.⁴

In the hundred years since this watershed event, our Army has experienced both successes and failures while pursuing the ideal of seamless AC/RC integration. As we near the end of this century, one unit stands out as a model of the Army Chief of Staff's "one team, one fight, one future." This unit is the storied 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. Tasked with providing a world class Opposing Force at the National Training Center, the 11th ACR has aggressively pursued the full integration of its three FORSCOM-authorized round-out units. Nevada's 1st Squadron, 221st Cavalry, has recently been joined by Arizona's 1st Battalion, 180th Field Artillery (Thunderhorse), and will soon be joined by a recently restationed cavalry troop in Montana.

The success of the unique Blackhorse/Wildhorse relationship is strengthened by three lessons that our Army learned from its experiences in the Spanish-American War. First, the Wildhorse conducts regular joint maneuvers with the Blackhorse. There is no peacetime equivalent to the realistic experience of the MILES battlefield at the NTC. Second,

the 1/221st Cavalry has equipment on a par with its active duty counterpart. The visually modified M113A3, HMMWV, and M1A1 (BMP, BRDM, and Krasnovian Variant Tank) are reliable, modern combat vehicles. Third, the training in the 11th ACR and its round-out units uses a standardized training strategy. All training follows the proven "8-step training model"⁵ as directed by the commander of the National Training Center. Here is how the 8-step model was used to attain success in the six months between Rotation 98-04 and Rotation 98-10:

Step One. Immediately following the after-action review (AAR) of January's Rotation 98-04, the staff began to develop the plan for Rotation 98-10. While the squadron did not know the exact details of the missions that it would perform during its next NTC rotation, it could make certain assumptions, based upon the doctrinal employment of an independent tank battalion. After assessing the squadron's past performance, the plan was to focus on three major areas: the lethality of individual tank crews, the survivability of reconnaissance assets, and the synchronization of squadron combat power. The squadron scheduled and conducted planning sessions with the regiment and fellow active duty squadrons. Wildhorse staff officers also participated in a series of wargaming sessions. Several potential scenarios were discussed based on probable enemy courses of action. Then, general concepts for employment of the 1/221st Cavalry were developed.

Step Two. After initial planning, the squadron began to train and certify leaders. The centerpiece of this training is OPFOR tank commander certification. This process is similar to BLUEFOR tank tactical tables. Conducted over a drill weekend, this training is designed to validate a tank crew's ability to meet OPFOR standards on the battlefield. The certification process consists of 11 tasks modeled after the Blackhorse crew validation program.⁶ The process begins with structured PMCS, PCI, and MILES operational checks. Then, the tank commander maneuvers his tank along a prescribed route and encounters an anti-armor team, enemy tanks, FASCAM, and a wire/mine obstacle. The TC must navigate from operational graphics, employ all tank weapons systems, conduct hasty breaches, report to a higher headquarters, and call for fire. Limited visibility operations are also included to enhance the



1/221 Armor's "Krasnovian Variant" of the M1A1 tank on the move.

squadron's night fighting capabilities. A tank crew evaluator accompanies the tank and rates the TC based on the standards in the Motorized Rifle Company Handbook. This exercise ensures that leaders have the confidence and basic competencies necessary to lead their troops on the MILES battlefield. Additionally, Wildhorse leaders participated in the regiment's officer professional development classes, which focused on how to defeat BLUEFOR command, control, communications, computer, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) capabilities.

Step Three. Prior to NTC Rotation 98-10, a detailed reconnaissance of the training site was conducted. Officers and key NCOs spent a full drill weekend at the NTC participating in a tactical exercise without troops (TEWT) to gain a greater terrain appreciation and discuss OPFOR battle drills on the ground where they would be executed. The Wildhorse leaders maneuvered in HMMWVs throughout the training area with the regiment providing a motorized rifle battalion commander to facilitate this process. He discussed detailed tactics, techniques, and procedures, covering topics that ranged from potential enemy aerial battle positions to critical intervisibility lines. When the Wildhorse was not actually in the field, its soldiers were taking classes on navigation techniques and reporting procedures.

The regiment also provided a comprehensive intelligence summary of the BLUEFOR. The squadron leadership carefully studied the known capabilities of their opponents, the newly digitized 4th Brigade of the 4th Infantry Division, from Fort Hood, Texas.

Step Four. The next step was for the squadron to issue the training plan to subordinate troops at the monthly command and staff meeting. This meeting is conducted on a Tuesday night two weeks prior to drill, and looks out 180 days. The squadron commander gives his vision for the 180-day training plan. The S3 staff

provides courses of action to the SCO for 150-day training. The troop commanders then brief the SCO on their 120-day training plans. Once approved, the SCO signs their training schedules. The troop first sergeants then address issues by exception for the 90-day and 60-day training events, while the squadron executive officer records issues for the staff to resolve. They then conduct a final "sanity check" of the upcoming 30-day training. From January's 180-day guidance to July's 30-day review, the training plans for NTC Rotation 98-10 were refined and communicated to the Wildhorse troopers.

Step Five. Next came rehearsal of the training plan at squadron, troop, and individual vehicle-level. As has become tradition in the Wildhorse, every vehicle commander, each with a map containing full operational graphics, participates in a squadron-level rehearsal on a giant sandtable. These rehearsals culminate in a full-up squadron-level meeting battle at the NTC utilizing MILES equipment. Our unit, the 60th Guards ITB, sparred with the free-thinking, uncooperative 4th MRB of the 125th Guards Tank Regiment in the Central Corridor one day prior to the regiment's actual attack on a visiting BLUEFOR unit. This was a "win-win" event for both the Blackhorse and the Wildhorse. Every member of the squadron team, from supply sergeant to mechanic to scout, was totally focused and committed to performing tasks to standard. The 1/221st Cavalry gained invaluable experience, while elements of the regiment were able to practice critical tasks prior to Training Day 01 of NTC Rotation 98-08. The 11th ACR provided "Blackhorse Brothers" to critique performance and provide troop/squadron after-action reviews. Lessons learned from the rehearsal were folded into final preparations for the upcoming rotation.

Step Six. When the time arrived to deploy for NTC Rotation 98-10, each trooper and the squadron had the confidence which comes with solid training and thorough preparation.

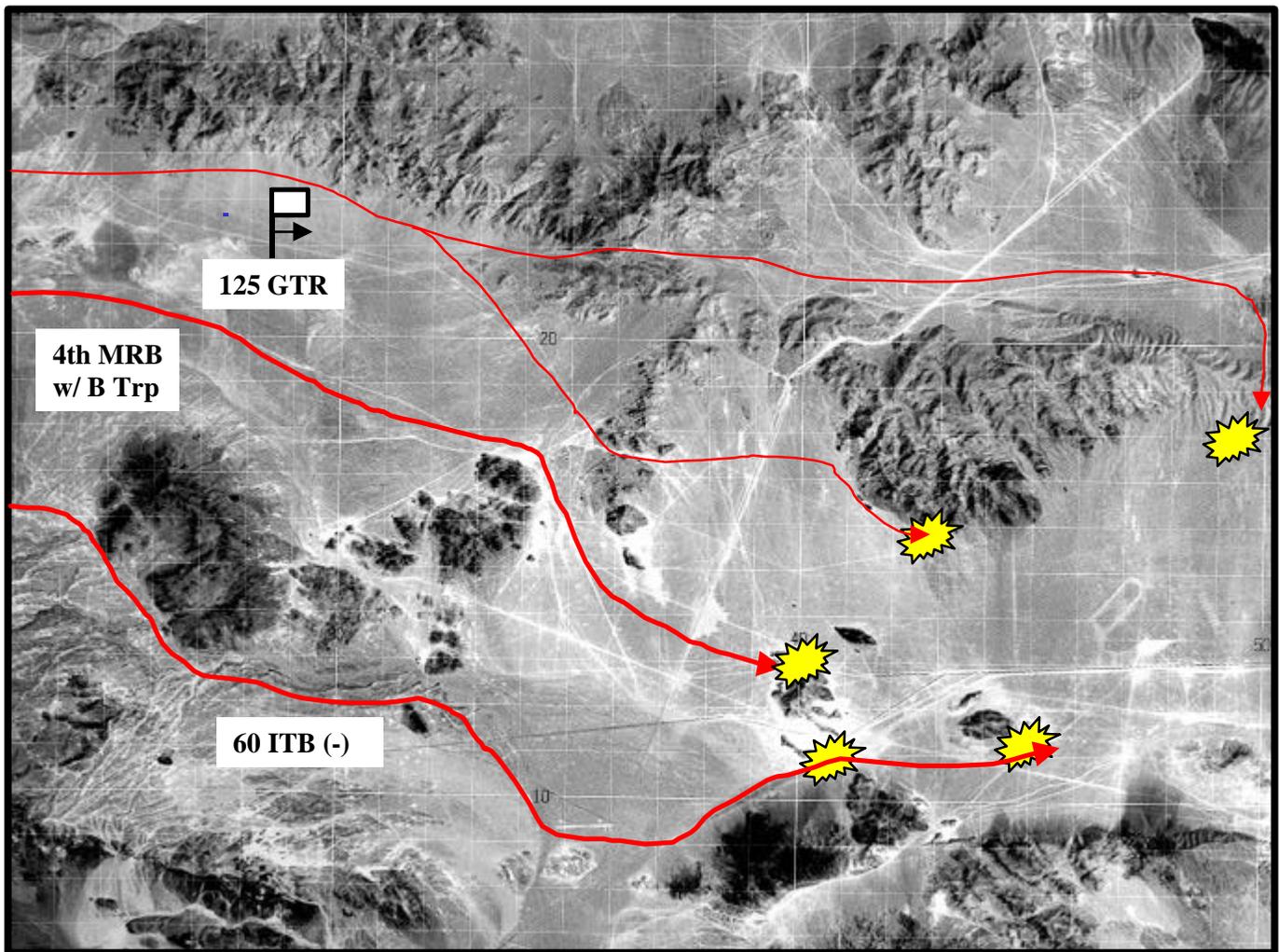


Fig. 1. MRR Meeting Battle (60th Guards ITB as Second Echelon)

The regiment provided a liaison officer to facilitate communications with higher headquarters. Nevada senior leadership provided technical support, such as environmentalists and DS-level mechanics, to ensure that Wildhorse troopers could focus entirely on the task at hand. Even Arizona's 1-180th FA (Thunderhorse) battalion contributed by providing about a dozen qualified forward observers to assist in the fight.

During the first battle of the rotation (see Figure 1), Bravo Troop was attached to the 4th MRB as part of the Forward Security Element in a regimental meeting battle. When the FSE made contact with the BLUEFOR, B Troop set a firing line and was able to fix and destroy numerous Bradleys and M1 tanks. The effect of concentrated volley fire was stunning. The only radio transmission received at the 60th Guards ITB command post during this engagement was "Send more ammunition!" Next, the 60th ITB (-) swung into action as the 125th GTR's second echelon, and was given a unique deception mission. Because of the exceptional ability of the 4th ID to see the battlefield with their UAV, digitized equip-

ment, and helicopters, the 60th ITB was tasked with helping to overload their sensors. Combat Reconnaissance Patrols (CRP) moved along a southern route creating smoke and dust, which created the illusion of a large southern force, while the 125th GTR attacked in the north. Once the regimental commander called for the commitment of the second echelon, the 60th ITB moved along the same southern route that the CRPs had cleared. By combining a known safe route with additional obscuration, the 60th ITB moved unimpeded into the fray. An Apache helicopter, as well as a few M1 tanks and Bradleys, were destroyed as the 60th Guards ITB exploited the regiment's success.

The second battle proved to be a graduate-level tactical exercise for the citizen-soldiers of the 60th Guards ITB (see Figure 2). This time the regiment conducted a penetration attack. Attacking with three battalions abreast, the 125th GTR again attempted to overload the BLUEFOR's formidable intelligence assets. The 60th ITB used speed and obscuration to move along the regiment's southern flank. The CRPs employed smoke and stealth, and

were able to overwhelm a sophisticated BLUEFOR observation and listening post. With this key terrain secured, the 60th ITB's Forward Security Element was able to bound to the southern wall of the central corridor. The main body then maneuvered into terrain known as Hidden Valley. The FSE was able to breach a tank ditch, two wire/mine obstacles, and rout a cavalry troop in the defense. Concurrently, the main body engaged and destroyed two Apaches and pushed three more out of the valley. With the helicopter threat neutralized, the main body was able to overwhelm the remaining M1/M2 opposition and secure the east mouth of Hidden Valley. The 60th ITB had now "set the L" on the remaining defenders of Hill 780.

While the main body provided suppressive fires on Hill 780, the FSE maneuvered and secured the hill. The 60th ITB then assumed a hasty defense on Hill 780 and along an IV line located near the east mouth of Hidden Valley. The Wildhorse had accomplished its mission! Several M1 tanks and Bradleys located on Hill 760 attempted to retake Hill 780, but their counterattack failed.

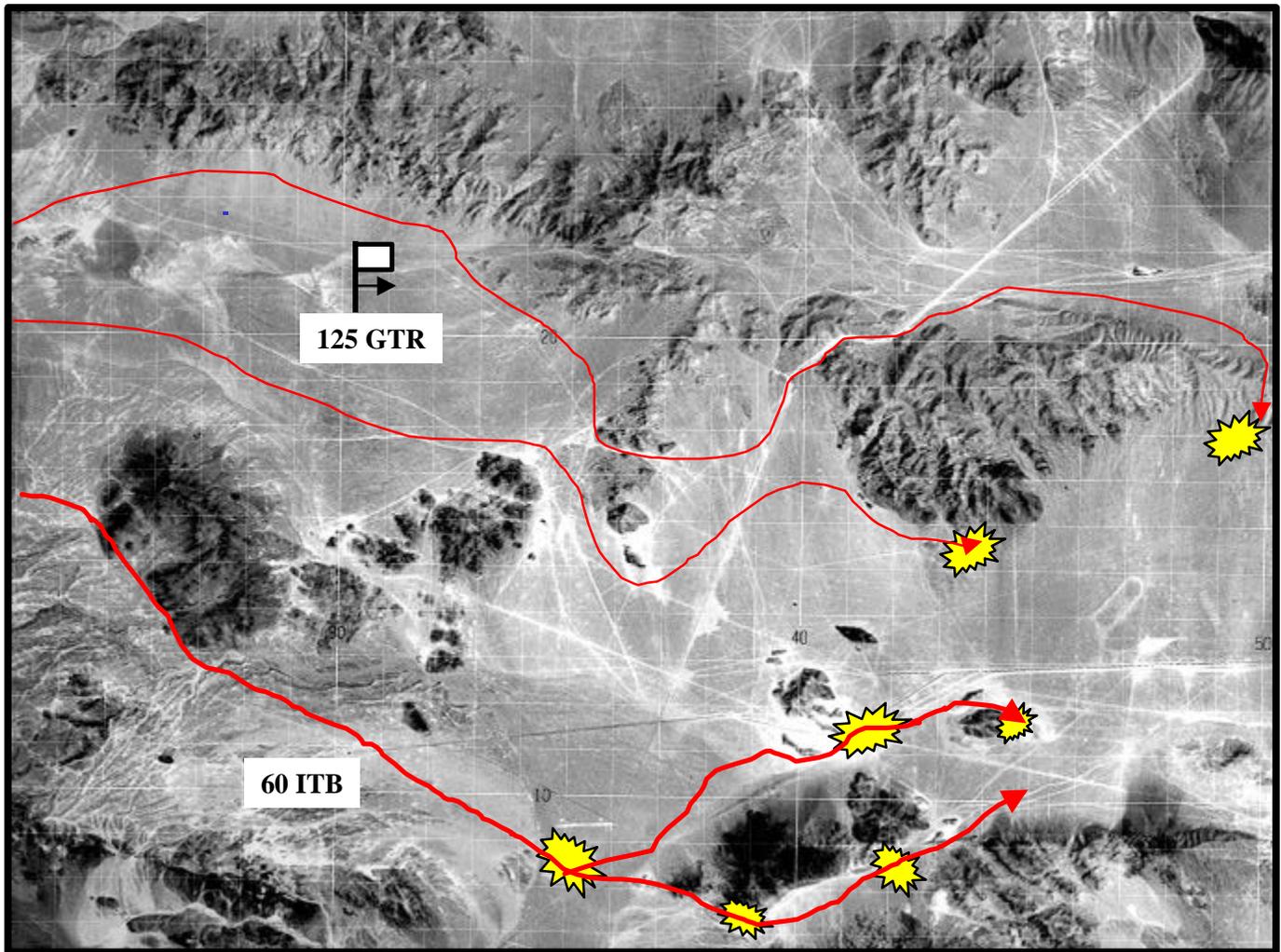


Fig. 2. MRR Penetration (60th Guards ITB as Enveloping Detachment)

The squadron morale was high after participating in these two battles. In a testimony to the determination and perseverance of Krasnovia's unsung heroes; the truck drivers, medics, cooks, supply personnel, and mechanics had worked at an amazing pace to ensure that all combat power crossed the line of departure for every battle. COL John D. Rosenberger, 58th Colonel of the Regiment, told the troopers of the 1/221st Cavalry: "I'm proud to serve with you and count you as members of this great fighting regiment, a team of teams. You should be proud of yourselves. You came ready to fight; you accomplished your missions with distinction; you took good care of each other. You upheld the heritage and traditional performance of the Blackhorse Regiment. There are no finer compliments, and you earned them all. Allons!"

Step Seven. The euphoria of the battles soon faded as the squadron began to conduct AARs. Under the critical eyes of the regimental S3 shop, the Wildhorse participated in brutally honest self-assess-

ment. Troopers at all echelons discussed lessons learned. Performance was examined at the individual, collective, and leader levels. They also updated troop and squadron METLs.

The squadron's hard work had indeed improved the lethality of its tank crews, the survivability of its reconnaissance assets, and the synchronization of its combat power. However, additional items were identified that needed to be improved at the squadron level, including timeliness of information, both to subordinates and higher headquarters, speed of the approach march, use of indirect fires, and crosstalk among attacking elements.

Step Eight. While the experiences of NTC Rotation 98-10 are still fresh in the Wildhorse Squadron's memory, future plans are already being formulated. The focus is now on positioning the squadron so that it can retrain to meet the standard, to win by even more decisive margins, in preparation for NTC Rotation 99-08 next June.

The citizens and soldiers of this great nation should be proud of our Army's progress since the Spanish-American War in 1898. Despite the challenges and setbacks of this last century, our Army of 1998 is committed to "one team, one fight, one future." As we study the lessons of history, more effective AC/RC relationships are beginning to emerge. The Blackhorse and its round-outs serve as an excellent example of highly effective AC/RC relations. Their mutual trust and support continues to be strengthened through almost daily interaction. Using standardized training strategies like the "8-step model," they are achieving new levels of training readiness. The Blackhorse provides training support to its round-outs, and in turn, receives additional combat power to train visiting BLUEFOR units. As a model of the synergy that our Army can achieve, the 11th ACR, the 1/221st Cavalry, and the NTC are committed to remaining full partners in providing world-class training to America's Army as we enter the 21st century. *Allons! Let's Go!*

Notes

¹Schwarz, Fredric D., *American Heritage*, July-August 1998, The Time Machine “The Out-of-Date Army,” p. 102.

²Lawson, Don, *The United States in the Spanish-American War*, Abelard-Schuman, New York, 1976, p. 13.

³Regan, Geoffrey, *Great Military Disasters, A Historical Survey of Military Incompetence*, M. Evans & Company, Inc., New York, 1987, p. 221

⁴Cosmas, Graham A., *America's First Battles, 1776-1965*, San Juan and El Caney 1-2 July 1898, University Press of Kansas, Lawrence Kan., 1986, p.147

⁵The “8-step training model” is a synthesis of key steps contained in *FM 25-101, Battle Focused Training*, and *TC 25-10, Lane Training*. BG (P) Cash brought this training method to the NTC from his assignment at the CMTC in Europe. Admittedly, it is simply “a way” to manage and conduct training, however, it is an effective and successful technique.

⁶11th Armored Cavalry Regiment TACSOP, 20 January 1995, Annex Q (Crew Validation).

LTC Aaron Kenneston commands the Nevada Army National Guard's 1st Squadron, 221st Cavalry. He has previously served as a brigade assistant S3, battalion XO, cavalry troop commander, and tank platoon leader. He holds a masters degree from California State University, Dominguez Hills. He is a graduate of both the Army and Air Force CGSC, and the Army War College Defense Strategy Course.



Under its VISMOD skin, this BMP is a converted M113.



A HMMWV, with a few additions, becomes a Krasnovian BRDM wheeled APC.



At left, a crew rests and refits after the battle. Above, the XO briefs the command group.