

# TAC NEWS

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## WARGAMING A WARGAME Modeling the 11th ACR as the Army of Krasnovia (NTC) 1993-2003

Did you know that one military unit has fought almost every US brigade combat team in the past 20 years? And generally beat them! Sounds like a unit that you might want to model and game with, doesn't it?

While browsing the internet, I stumbled upon the FT Leavenworth Combined Arms Center web page and found back issues of a publication called *Red Thrust Star* which is a quarterly pamphlet distributed by the Opposing Forces (OPFOR) to all CONUS units on tips, tricks and general info on the National Training Center (NTC). I was hooked because of the great photos of the VISMOD ("visual modification") and real vehicles used by the 11th ACR (Armored Cavalry Regiment). *Red Thrust Star* also had great details on the Order of Battle of the OPFOR and what a visiting unit would face in its training rotation at Fort Irwin, CA.

I remembered those unused M551 Sheridans in the bottom of my Micro Armour® box. In the 30 year lifespan of the Sheridans, they had never fired a shot in anger at another armored vehicle (despite deployments in Vietnam, Panama, and the Persian Gulf). But they've seen lots of active 'simulated' combat at the NTC. My Sheridans would now have a purpose! The point is to create an accurate representation of the 11th ACR OPFOR. I wanted the Sheridans to look like Sheridans that were trying to look like Soviet armour.

### THE NTC AND THE 11TH ACR -

Without going into a long drawn out thesis on the creation of the NTC and how Army warfighting doctrine evolved after the Vietnam War, let's just say that the National Training Center is one big reason that the US was so tactically successful in both Gulf Wars, the Balkans, and Iraq. It allows battalion task forces and brigade combat teams to engage and become "battle seasoned" before deploying and actually engaging a real enemy. Essential to that success was the creation of the OPFOR. Originally, the

OPFOR was two battalions (one mechanized infantry and one armour) from the 7th ID (before it became light) that was detached to Fort Irwin.

Taking the M-551 Sheridan, they created Soviet-style units by modifying turrets and hulls to resemble such vehicles as the T-72 main battle tank, BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicle, ZSU-23-4



A T-72?

AAA, 2S1 self-propelled artillery piece and others. To represent lighter vehicles, Dodge M-880 3/4 trucks were modified to more closely resemble various BRDMs. M-548 cargo carriers became AT-T tractors, and V-150 armoured cars were converted into apparent SA-9 ADA vehicles. As time wore on, a more formal OPFOR organization was created when the two separate battalions were grouped under the 177th Armored Brigade. This brigade would become the "60th Guards Motorized Rifle Division" and each battalion would play the role as a tank or motorized rifle regiment.

In the 80's and early 90's, nearly every heavy (and even some light and medium) brigades would meet the vaunted OPFOR. Most came away bloody and bowed, but confident in the ability to fight and win against even the most lopsided of odds. After the Gulf War and the fall of the Iron Curtain, the NTC went through a transformation of its own. The 177th stood down and in 1994, the famous 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment was transferred to OPFOR headquarters. The general tactical formation remained the same, but the OPFOR took on a new role as a fictitious army called the Krasnovians to reflect the New World Order.

Many changes affected the OPFOR as well. The Sheridans soldiered on to be VISMOD'ed as the T-80, the BMP and the other vehicles it could replicate. The BRDM was copied using a modified "turtleback" HUMVEE and many other

Soviet bloc vehicles were either substituted with similar type US vehicles, VISMODs or in some cases actual Soviet vehicles (like the MT-LB, BTR-50 and BTR-60 ). It is difficult to determine how a standard AOE ("Army of Excellence") mechanized infantry or armor battalion can be reorganized to replicate a fully ready tank or motorized rifle regiment. In the scenarios shown at the NTC, the 11th ACR actually served as a motorized division headquarters, and much of the division is simulated as part of the command post exercises that coincide with the live fire and force on force training. In most cases only one battalion is placed in the field at a time to play the role of the tank or motorized rifle regiment, with the battalion command and staff acting as the Regimental leadership. Each is rotated per visiting unit deployment cycle as the combat unit while the other battalion in the 11th ACR that is not fielded against the visiting brigade acts as support to the rotation by providing personnel augmentation, observer/controllers, and other "non combat" roles. The fielded OPFOR portrays the 32nd Guards Motorized Rifle Regiment of the 60th MRD. Also, the 11th ACR has a real "go to war" mission as well. It is therefore under the control of the US Forces Command and not TRADOC. The two active battalions (1/11CAV and 2/11CAV) would park the VISMODS and draw M-1A2s and Bradleys and be ready to deploy at a moments notice just like its fellow battalions in the 1st Cav, 3rd ID or 3rd ACR. The 11th would have to be augmented with reserve component units like 1-221 CAV from the Nevada ARNG, as well as a 155mm SP battalion, an armored cavalry troop, and additional CS/CSS (Combat Support / Combat Support Services) units from the National Guard to bring it up to full strength. In the end, the 11th would deploy as a standard armour brigade and not an armoured cavalry regiment should it be called to deploy as a combat unit.

This article will show how to create the NTC VISMOD effect on existing GHQ models and give a general TOE on a deployed tank regiment, substituting other US vehicles to replicate a similar Soviet one.

## CONVERSIONS -

**T-80/Sheridan** - This simple conversion is to take a Sheridan hull and replace its turret with the turret from the T-80 (W-45). The pivot on the turret and the hole in the hull are a perfect match.

It is a very realistic looking Sheridan VISMOD of the T-80.



*BMP-1 / Sheridan*

**BMP-1/Sheridan** - This requires some artistic license and a bit of imagination (much like the real thing). The Sheridan turret can be modified to look like a BMP by removing the 'crow's nest.' The resulting hole in the turret can be filled by using an old single figure from the GHQ company pack. The ones that were broken at the legs work great here. I also clip the stowage bin from the rear of the Sheridan turret to give it that rounded BMP look. The early NTC Sheridan BMP VISMODS had extensions on the front fenders to match the profile of the real BMP. However, these disappeared by the mid 90's. (That's the time period I am portraying the OPFOR so I don't try to reproduce them on my models.) The Sagger missile on top of the main gun can be reproduced by taking one of the laser guided bombs from the aircraft stores or the F-16, clipping the guidance head from the rest of the bomb and gluing directly on the top of the gun. Or drill a hole in the turret and mount a missile from the raketanpanzer (N45).

Another BMP VISMOD that is portrayed and I attempted to reproduce is the M-113 version. There I took a standard M-113 and I did glue some sheet styrene panels on the sides and in the front, trimmed to match the BMP profile. I also took the LGB head like the Sheridan conversion and mounted it on the coupola. In the real world NTC, these vehicles do not shoot back as the Sheridan conversion does. These vehicles carry the representative dismounts that the Sheridan BMP's can't in the motorized rifle battalion. Typically, only a company's worth of these is placed with a motor rifle battalion (3 per battalion). This reflects the typical Soviet doctrine of infantry staying buttoned up in a vehicle through most of a deliberate attack.



*ZSU-23-4 / Sheridan*



*T-80 / Sheridan*

**ZSU-23-4/Sheridan** - This is also one of the most convincing conversions (real and micro). The ZSU-23-4 turret (W-7) and associated Gun Dish radar can be glued to the Sheridan after the mounting hole in the hull is enlarged. This can be done with a drill, but if you insert the tip of a hobby knife into the hole and rotate it, it will make the hole larger..

**BRDM/HMMWV** - This is an odd conversion because the HMMWV is modified at the NTC by making the hood look like the front part of the BRDM. This can be done with sheet styrene plastic, a pair of nail clippers, and some patience. I didn't bother. The BRDM recon vehicle can be replicated with the HMMWV (N-63) with a .50 cal or M-60 MG mounted in the top cupola. The AT-5 antitank version can be replicated by taking the TOW HMMWV (N-79) and installing the TOW launcher from the M-151 jeep (N-149).

**BRDM/SA-9** - This strange conversion was done in the early 80's by the NTC OPFOR. It involved the M-706 Commando (VN8) with the SA-9 launcher boxes (W-24). This version only lasted a few years. Subsequently ADA missile launchers were simulated with electronic generators mounted in electronic shelter HMMWVs (N-80). These simulators are used to accompany the ZSU-23-4 VISMOD to replicate the electronic signature of the GUNDISH radar and the radar for the SA9/13 short range air defense systems.



*2S1 or 2S3 / Sheridan*

**ARTILLERY** - Soviet doctrine dictates that artillery is the decisive arm in modern warfare. It is somewhat difficult to simulate the realities of a rolling barrage of hundreds of divisional, army and front artillery batteries. At the NTC, artillery fire is simulated on computer and through the MILES gear every vehicle and soldier wears while "in the box." Soviet artillery is pre-planned, pre-timed and well rehearsed to meet the type of mission it is assigned, hence the computerized simulation. Regimental artillery is simulated by OPFOR by taking the Sheridan and creating a VISMOD to mimic the 2S1 or 2S3 self-propelled howitzers. In reality there are only 6 of these in the 32nd GMRR to reflect one battery. Of course most Soviet regiments have a battalion of 18. I created my VISMOD version by taking the Sheridan hull mated with the short

tube M-109 (N38) turret. It is grotesque to say the least, but so is the real 11TH ACR version. The point here is creating an accurate depiction of the VISMOD, not the real Soviet vehicle. The 11th ACR will not have organic or augmented towed 155mm howitzers or even M-109's out in the box to replicate the D-30 or the 2S3 in a typical rotation

**ENGINEER AND ASSAULT EQUIPMENT** - Soviet engineer equipment is exotic and VISMODS are hard to make. The 11th ACR uses the M-9 ACE (N-127), and the M-728 CEV (N-30) as surrogates for the IMR and AT-T entrenching vehicles. For mobile bridges, the M-60 AVLB (N-30) simulates the MTU-55 AVLB and the M-548 (N-50) simulates the AT-T (W-52) mine distribution vehicle and the PTSM amphibious ferry (W-51).



*NTC 2 1/2 ton Truck*

**LOGISTICAL AND SOFTSKINS** - The OPFOR uses the same vehicles as the line units with little or no modification. HMMWVs (N-105) replicated the UAZ 469 (W-78), although the M-151 (N-149) was used in the early days. Standard 2 1/2ton (N-65) and 5 ton trucks (N-86) were used as surrogates for the Zil 157 (W-73) and Ural 375 (W-47) Soviet trucks. HEMMT fuel (N-96) and cargo trucks (N-95) are also used. As a trick, I took the chassis of the GHQ 5 ton FMTV and mounted the cab and bed from the "other guys" M-35 deuce and a half model on it, That created a pretty good representation of the M-35A3.

**AVIATION** - The standard UH-1H Huey was converted to a MI-24 HIND at the NTC by giving it a Soviet paint scheme and some visual hard points to simulate weaponry. I found that taking the UH-1 model (AC-21) and adding the hard points from the MI-8 (AC29) gives the VISMOD Hind E a pretty realistic look.

**TROOPS** - The GHQ Brushfire Warriors (TW8 & TW9) make the most realistic looking OPFOR troops and "Parrumphs." One area of the NTC is at times referred to as either "The Kingdon of Parumphia, or alternatively, "Parumphistan." Parrumphs are noted for non-traditional warfare, and need to be closely watched!

# 60<sup>TH</sup> GUARDS MOTORIZED RIFLE DIVISION

## OPFOR - NATIONAL TRAINING CENTER - FT IRWIN CALIFORNIA

### HQ 60th GMRD (HQ 11TH ACR)

1 x GHQ, 1 x BTR-60PU (M-577), 1 x UAZ 469 (HMMWV)

### HQ, 32nd Guards Tank Regiment (or MRR)

(Portrayed by either HQ 1st or 2nd Squadron/ 11th ACR)

1 x HQ, 1 x BTR-60PU (M-577), 1 x UAZ 469 (HMMWV)

### 3 x Tank battalions each with

HQ 1 x HQ / T-80 (VISMOD)

1 x ARV (M-578 ARV)

1 x Med. Truck (M-35A3)

### 3 x Tank Companies each with

2 x T-80 (VISMOD)

### 1 x Motorized Rifle Battalion

HQ 1 x HQ / BMP (VISMOD)

1 x ARV (M-578 ARV)

1 x Med. Truck (M-35A3)

### 3 Motorized Rifle Companies each with

3 x Infantry / BMP (VISMOD)

*Note: M-113 BMP (VISMOD) may be mixed in the above to simulate infantry dismounts since the Sheridan BMP VISMOD cannot carry a squad of infantry*

### 1 x Field Artillery Battalion (Typically computer simulated)

*Note: Field batteries are portrayed with*

1 x 2S1/2S3 (VISMOD)

1 x M-577 (simulate the ACRV vehicle)

### 1 x Regimental Recon Company

3 x BRDM-2 (HMMWV VISMOD w/ MG)

### 1 x Regimental Antitank Company

3 x BRDM-2 AT-5 (HUMVEE VISMOD w/ TOW)

### 1 x Regimental Engineer Company

1 x BRDM -2 Recon (HMMWV w/ MG)

3 x Engineer / BMP (M-113/BMP VISMOS)

1 x Entrencher (M-9 ACE)

1 x IMR (M-728 CEV)

1 x MTU-55 (M-60 AVLB)

### 1 x Regimental ADA Battery

1 x ZSU-23-4 (VISMOD)

1 x ACET IV [Simulates acquisition radars for ZSU 23, SA-13/9. (S-250E HMMWV)]

*Note: SA-14 teams can be scattered throughout the regiment. They can be BMP dismounts or even ride in their own BMP/M-113 VISMOD in the motorized rifle battalion. Stinger MANPADS stands work fine here.*

### 1 x Regimental Support (notional)

3 x HEMTT Cargo

3 x HEMTT Tanker

1 x 5 ton Wrecker

1 x Med Shop Van (M-35A3)

1 x Medical Stand (M977 HMMWV Maxi-Ambulance)

2 x Med Trucks (M-35A3)

### OPFOR Aviation (portrayed by Co C 3-159 Aviation)

2 x UH-1H (VISMOD) to replicate Mi -24E

2 x UH-1H to replicate Mi-8 Hip

This represents the OPFOR as it typically appeared between 1993 through 2003. After 2003, the Sheridans could no longer be maintained, even with cannibalized parts. The Sheridan was replaced by the OSV (OPFOR Surrogate Vehicle). This vehicle was originally developed in the 1990s to fix the problem of the Sheridan BMP VISMOD not having a troop carrying capability. Basically the OSV is an M-113 with a Bradley powered turret and external VISMOD features to match that of the BMP-2. It can carry 8 dismounts. The OSV has worked so well, that further VISMOS were made to it to give us an unconvincing replica of the T-80. The OSV has not gotten as much of a workout as the Sheridan due to the fact that the NTC has geared up to train for the insurgency and OOTW ("Operations Other Than War") scenarios pertinent to Iraq and Afghanistan. Whenever a Brigade Combat Team goes into the box at the NTC, the only VISMOS it will encounter will be 11TH ACR troopers dressed in Arab or Afghan garb driving around in civilian cars. The vast open ranges and maneuver areas are now dotted with villages and towns to simulate such places as Khandahar, Ramadi or Fallujia. Today, the OSV's sit parked at the Ft. Irwin cantonment area, awaiting the day when armoured force-on-force maneuver becomes chic once again.

*by Roger Houston*



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