

The Combat Readiness Riddle

It did not take long for me, once I was installed as the 4th Mech Division G-3 at the Post Headquarters to learn just how combat UNREADY the outfit was to take on its new and most challenging mission - be ready to move to, and immediately fight a conventional war - in Europe.

In fact the Army plans and scheme was that, if the balloon went up, and troops from Fort Carson's 4th Division had to get to Europe fast, that the men of the lead brigade consisting of at least 3 Mech Infantry battalions would have to pack only their duffle bags, carry their individual weapon, dash to Peterson Field, climb aboard C-141's WITHOUT any of their mechanized equipment, be flown to Germany, get off the plane, go into large warehouses where ALL the mechanized equipment for a Mechanized Infantry Division was prepositioned and stored. Get into those trackend vehicles, turn the key, and drive off immediately and into that war!

THAT is a tall order even for highly trained troops.

And it was not just from the lack of mechanized tactical training that the 4th Division was not prepared, but the whole Division was seriously undermanned in many key jobs, and the entire Command was turning over at the rate of 25% or higher EVERY QUARTER! Turnover was the killer factor. And that came about because the bulk of the division consisted of 2 year enlisted and drafted men, who had only gone through 6 months of Basic and Advanced training and travel, then spent exactly 1 year in Combat in Vietnam, and got to Fort Carson with only 6 months to do left in the Army after their war. Carson was a swinging door to civilian life! Any wonder trying to train them for new military equipment and mission was all but hopeless?

Gen Gleszar was almost apoplectic every month when I had to sit down with him and other staff officers and show him - to sign the 'Readiness' report.

The Army had a rating system, that went from 1 (not combat ready) to 4 (fully combat ready) in every category - Personnel, Equipment, Training, Supplies.

We had to report a 1 or 2 in almost every category for each major unit, and thus overall.

Moreover, as the months went by, even though the numbers of soldier bodies needed kept pouring in - and then leaving the Army within 6 months, and new equipment, from M113s, artillery pieces, radios, ammunition kept coming in to fill out the 4th Mech Divisions Requirement - it could never get ahead then of the sheer turbulence and turnover to settle down to become a combat ready Division.

Then, utterly apart from Combat Readiness, there were other, huge problems that reflected what had been building up and was going on in the rest of American Society in the late 60's that made for more difficulties.

The Cultural Clash at Carson

One has to understand that Fort Carson was inevitably caught up in the same anti-war, anti-government- racially tense, drug and generational 60's cultural wars that the rest of the Country was.

Those societal-wide problems were exaggerated greatly among the 18,000 soldiers and their families at Carson. And that exaggeration came from a number of unique military characteristics.

First of all, the soldiers coming back from a year fighting in Vietnam's savage insurgency war - which eventually cost 54,000 American lives - had become increasingly rebellious of all authority - military, police, local and national government. Even the egregious practice of 'fragging' had started in Vietnam - soldiers killing their own officers. Drugs had started permeating soldier ranks, first in Vietnam, then carried back to the US at Carson.

Returning soldiers spent all their off-duty time

outside dull Fort Carson, shacking up with whatever girls they could attract - they bought cars and motorcycles and drove recklessly, often drunk, getting ticketed, and - especially on the stretch of Interstate 25 between Colorado Springs and Pueblo, 40 miles south causing major accidents killing themselves and civilians.

And there were high racial tensions between whites and blacks, and especially between blacks and hispanic soldiers.

Charts maintained by the Fort Carson Staff showed the high arrest and incident rate by soldiers outside the gates.

And there were civilian organization outside the gates that were specifically designed to attract soldiers into civil as well a military disobedience

Change of Command

General Gleszer was flummoxed by all the trends that were contrary to his entire life and the men he had commanded in World War II.

He tried to deal with it 'statistically' by getting computer printouts of incidents and targetting units and places off Post with command efforts to cut them down.

But he simply was not the man for the youth of that culture of the 60s.

I am not sure whether he asked to be relieved or was fired for his poor record while as Commander of both Fort Carson as a post and the 5th Mechanized Infantry Division, but before we switched to being the 4th Mech Infantry Division, he was gone. (his next command was the Military District of Washington - where more order prevailed, and commanding the Old Guard which protects the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was hardly culturally challenging)

A very different new Commanding General was assigned to command Fort Carson and the 5th Mechanized Infantry Division.

I still had at least 3, or pehaps 4, more years at Fort Carson - which had all the problems

America had, in its Army. So, if I was to become more the solution than perpetuate the problems, I would have to use all my military education and experience AND my understanding of the changing American Culture to find, and help lead, an 18,000 man Combat Division which had its 'Readiness' mission for any war that came along.

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