



Company Command in Korea

by Captain Bradley T. Gericke

It is in the minds of the commanders that the issue of battle is decided.

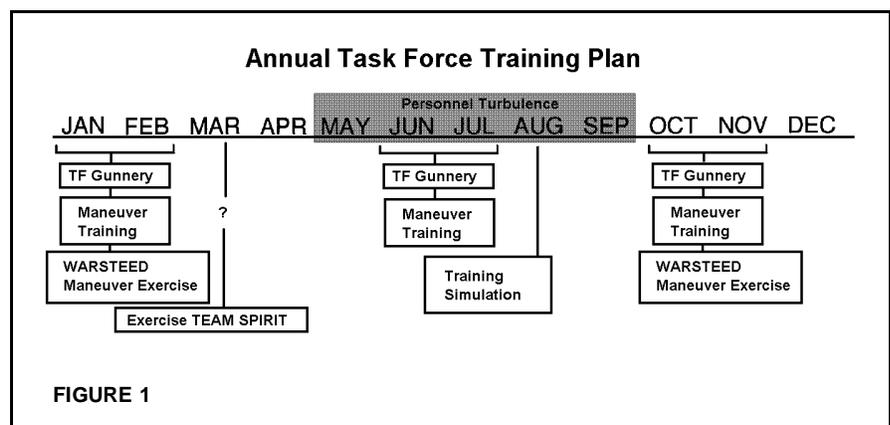
—B.H. Liddell Hart

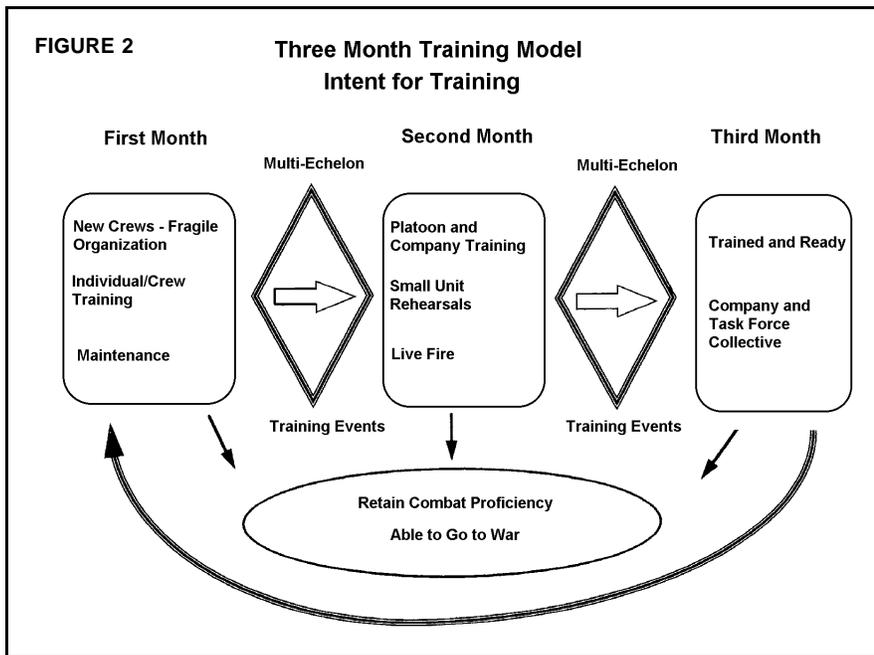
Nothing in the Army today compares with the challenges of tank company command in Korea. The threat posed by the massive conventional forces of the North Korean People's Army is increasingly menacing, especially as they are poised only 20 kilometers from the garrisons of the 2d Infantry Division's tank battalions.

Thus a renewed sense of urgency and purpose inspires today's armor leaders who live and work minutes south of the Demilitarized Zone. The mounted warriors of the 2d Infantry Division have become the weighted main effort for the Army's armor force, and in re-

sponse, company commanders have developed a number of techniques to successfully prepare their units for combat in this professionally rewarding but difficult theater of operations.

Service in Korea is unique. The peculiarities imposed by rugged terrain, an uncertain foe, harsh climate, and high personnel turbulence means that armor leaders at the company level face wide-





ranging challenges that must be overcome in the midst of a dynamic mission. Building a cohesive, trained company team can prove a sometimes elusive goal if one is not prepared. A tank company that can deploy to successfully defeat the enemy on the day of battle must overcome these obstacles now, in peacetime, and do so within the context of training, maintenance, and soldier programs that specifically address the ground truth reality of Korea-specific imperatives.

It is by now a familiar cliché that, as leaders, we must be ruthless trainers. Ruthless to prepare by allocating time, resources, and intent. Ruthless to execute to standards outlined in MTPs, manuals, and war directives. And ruthless to review, retrain, and capture lessons learned. So it is in Korea, except that training must also follow a strict cycle that maximizes home-station opportunities while emphasizing fundamental soldier skills and SOPs.

The current training paradigm within the 2d Infantry Division (Figure 1), allows a task force to fire a gunnery three times a year, usually in Jan-Feb, Jun-Jul and Oct-Nov. Gunnery is tactical, meaning soldiers live out of assembly areas, thereby providing the commander opportunities to practice crew and platoon maneuver skills concurrently when not live-firing. In addition, a major maneuver exercise, named Warsteed, in which the entire task force participates, occurs during the winter campaign season between Nov-Feb. Warsteed is designed to replicate the

CTC experience in its entirety, complete with OCs and full-up MILES. Two other exercises are scheduled to happen annually, but their precise timing is always a question. March is the month commonly designated for the annual Team Spirit Exercise, while in August, a peninsula-wide training simulation usually occurs.

If and when these events are held, they require significant leader involvement and often, soldier participation as well. Good intentions aside, expect the company and task force to cease any collective training — the NCOs can use this time to reinforce individual skills. And although soldiers come and go all year, the summer months see the greatest changeover. At least one-half of the company will change duty stations between May and September.

Before adopting any training program, the company commander must recognize and understand this single, overwhelming reality that influences everything that occurs in the life of the company: personnel turbulence. A 12-month tour of service means that in the course of one year, every soldier in the unit will arrive, serve his tour, and depart. This sounds obvious, but the implications are profound and not so apparent. In fact, and especially in the case of key leaders, turnover is greater than 100% — replacements arrive early and assume their duties, the battalion must often fill requirements, the normal drain of details and “SDs” occurs, emergency leaves are common, and occasionally soldiers depart for reasons of personal hardship. Not to mention that every soldier takes time to inprocess and outprocess and is normally granted a 30-day mid-tour leave.

The commander is thus confronted with an extraordinarily short time to meet numerous demands: major collective training to execute, a General Defense Plan mission that must be taught, maintenance both scheduled and routine to be accomplished to Army standards, and the usual complement of missions, assignments, simulations, taskings, and distracters that always seem to arrive at the most inopportune moment. And all of this must be done with crews and platoons who have usually been together only a short period. It is truly a situation of packing three years into one.

But the means to achieving excellence — as defined by a proud unit that accomplishes both training and GDP missions, maintains its equipment, and takes care of soldiers — is very possible. Unfortunately, most commanders

Example: Scheduled Service Plan

	1st Week				2d Week											
	FR	SA	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FR	SA	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SA
1st Platoon	R	M	M	H	H	H	T	T	M	M	T	C	C	C	R	M
2nd Platoon	R	M	M	T	T	T	C	C	M	M	C	H	H	H	R	M
3rd Platoon	R	M	M	C	C	C	H	H	M	M	H	T	T	T	R	M

R = Road March
H = Hull Phase
T = Turret Phase
C = Commo, Weapons, NBC, Personnel
M = Makeup

FIGURE 3

only figure out how to do it about the time they change command. I offer here a few suggestions to give the new company commander a head start.

In terms of scheduled training, a three-month training cycle (Figure 2), reinforced by clearly enunciated and rehearsed SOPs, is a model that enhances the company's collective readiness by shadowing the standard schedule found at the task force. Repetitive training, focused on unit fundamentals, is a must. In this three-month cycle, the first month is committed to basic soldier skills and leader training. (Ideally, vehicle services as well, discussed below.) The second month focuses on crew and platoon collective skills. These two months aggressively maximize home station training opportunities. The third month highlights platoon and company training conducted in conjunction with the task force deployment.

These are areas of emphasis only. Never does the commander state, "This month we'll train individual skills. ISG take charge." Because of the company's real-world readiness requirement, the necessity to maintain proficiency across the training spectrum is an imperative. But by declaring a focus, the commander and his leaders strive to build upon weaknesses and enhance strengths. It is pointless to schedule training that does not reflect the activities of the battalion, because the battalion's training will dictate the availability of resources for the company. For example, while the battalion is in garrison, individual and crew training must take priority so that when the battalion and company deploys, the company may maximize the scarce resources of bullets and maneuver land. Waiting until the unit is deployed to train crew drills is a waste of everyone's time.

While in garrison, aggressive imagination is called for. So is intensity. Take a look at how much the UCFT is used. It's a great training tool that frequently goes vacant while crew proficiencies wither from lack of practice. Time is frequently available during the evening or on weekends for leaders intent upon improvement. Other ideas: conduct tactical roadmarches enroute to TCPC, wear MOPP during maintenance periods, train at night in the motor pool, execute notification and load-up drills at company level, etc. The possibilities are endless. The point is that, with a little determination and en-

couragement from the commander, your junior leaders can be excited about training all of the time, not just "in the field."

At all times, the NCOs must own the company's individual and crew training. They will have to be innovative to find the time to train those tasks. The commander will not have the luxury of scheduling individual training as an implicit event. Rather, training is always multi-echelon. If a tank commander knows his crew needs work on donning their protective masks, perhaps bringing the mask to morning formation and practicing after the ISG finishes his business is the time to do it. Or maybe the crew can accomplish TCGST training while conducting command maintenance or weapons maintenance. In other words, no training event can ever be just one task. The unit focus will of necessity weigh heavily on the collective training side, so NCOs must meet the individual training challenge by being creative and aggressive.

Officer training needs to be frequent and intense. At any given time, two of the platoon leaders will most likely have no experience whatsoever. And the XO will be junior himself, with maybe two gunneries and one or two opportunities to deploy to the field with his former platoon. So the commander must remain hands-on, training the lieutenants on the fundamentals through a variety of means: sandtables, terrain walks, discussions of FMs, or map exercises. Investing three or four hours a week here pays big dividends for the commander, the unit, and the lieutenants.

It is an Army tradition that maintenance is training, and for that matter, that maintenance is everything. In Korea, the challenge is no different. However, once again, personnel turbulence plays a role. Soldiers assigned to various pieces of equipment such as NBC, mine detection, or SINCGARS, may be new to those items and require training, not only on operation but maintenance and upkeep as well. And as long as the MIIP is deployed to Korea's tank battalions, refresher training is necessary on its differences, such as weapon systems, suspension, and collimator.

The extreme cold of winter and the harsh humidity of summer take a toll on equipment. Seasonal preventive maintenance measures are critical (Don't forget to rigorously prepare soldiers too — another great training topic, and absolutely important). Maintenance must

be a command priority, reflected on the training schedule, and reinforced by the presence and participation of leaders.

A technique to complete the company's semi-annual service within the first or second month of a three-month cycle is to execute a company service (Figure 3). This ensures command emphasis and allows the commander to service all of his equipment and soldiers concurrently. The commander coordinates with the battalion for resources, and emerges in a higher state of maintenance readiness because the unit has conducted one mission with the entire chain of command's involvement. That level of experience and leadership is critical for solid maintenance in Korea's tumultuous atmosphere.

None of this is profound in any sense. I don't claim originality for any of these techniques. But I have tried a few myself, watched other commanders successfully execute some, and was taught a number by my own leaders. Each has been published, proven, and practiced by commanders and units throughout the Army. To succeed in the dynamic, demanding conditions which are the routine for the Army in Korea, these fundamentals are essential, underwritten by rehearsed SOPs. Nowhere else is the margin between unit excellence on the one hand, and collective fragility on the other, so razor thin.

Command in Korea is invigorating because of the urgency of the mission and the ever-present commitment of our soldiers. They deserve the very best training we can offer. Our nation demands nothing less.

Captain Bradley T. Gericke received his Armor commission from the U.S. Military Academy in 1988. A graduate of Armor Officer Basic Course, Armor Officer Advanced Course, and the Joint Firepower Control Course, he is currently attending graduate school at Vanderbilt University. He has previously served as a tank platoon leader, tank company XO, and battalion adjutant with 2-67 Armor in Germany; as BMO, HHC 2-72 Armor, and company commander, D Company, 2-72 Armor, Korea.