

Training in Korea's Unusual Terrain

by Captain Michael S. McCullough

"The commander of the lead tank, Lieutenant James Mace, set off, blazing away at the surrounding peaks with his turret-mounted machine gun; the riflemen riding his tank's upper deck emptied their M-1s as fast as they could reload. Incoming Chinese slugs splattered the hull...Three miles down the road Lt. Mace let out a yell. The column ground to an abrupt halt. An empty M-39 utility carrier blocked the crown of the road. Abandoned beside it stood a Sherman tank and a two-and-a-half-ton truck. The men of George Company, led by Lt. Knight, jumped off the tank as bursts of Chinese machine-gun fire poured in from both sides. The lieutenant realized with sudden shock that the Chinese must have been in position for at least the last day and a half, strung out in strength for miles along the Sunchon Road. The 2nd Infantry Division had raced into a trap. Five frightful miles from the departure line the column entered the gully on the highest point of the Sunchon Road. Americans called it "The Gauntlet." Those who entered it and lived to tell the tale never forgot what followed."

— Enter The Dragon by Russell Spurr

Soldiers of the 2nd Infantry Division train and will potentially fight on this hallowed ground, not far from where the battles in "The Gauntlet" took place. Nearby is a training area known as "Twin Bridges," site of the division's recent Warsteed 2000 exercise.

In order to conduct large-scale maneuver exercises in Korea, units must road march to Twin Bridges, which is used by both U.S. and Republic of Korea (ROK) Army units. Complicating the arrangement are the South Korean citizens who live nearby and commute through the training area, regardless of any exercises in progress. Twin Bridges is approximately 3 km wide and 9 km long, expanding north and south, and is composed of two primary training areas, "the southern bowl" and the "defile" that is located farther north. The terrain can be described as having high ridges, numerous draws and spurs, roads ranging from hardball to trails,

creek beds large enough for tank movement, and thick vegetation in the spring and summer which grows sparse in the winter. Twin Bridges is approximately 12 km south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ).

The 2nd Infantry Division is uniquely task-organized for its mission in the Korean theater, the only Army division that includes armor, mechanized infantry, and light infantry forces. During Twin Bridges training, units are commonly organized as a combination of light and heavy task forces. Mechanized infantry and armor battalions conduct maneuver training at Twin Bridges one to two times a year. Normally, one rotation focuses on platoon and company lanes for one week and a second rotation focuses on company- and battalion-level operations.

One of the most recent rotations, "Warsteed 2000," was conducted by TF 2-72 AR last winter from 20 February to 12 March. The OC team was trained internally by 1st Brigade and fielded by 1st Battalion, 72nd Armor. The training unit, TF 2-72 AR, was composed of A, B, and D Companies, 2-72 AR; C Co, 2-9 IN; A Co, 1-506th INF; and B CO, 2nd ENG. The engineers brought the ACE, MICLIC, volcano, and bridging assets to the training.

The maneuver event can be broken down into three phases: Phase I: platoon lanes in the southern bowl; Phase II: company lanes in the southern bowl; Phase III: company lanes in the defile that resembles the terrain of "The Gauntlet."

Each mission was based on a two-day cycle. Day 1 Morning: execution, and AAR. Late afternoon: battalion OPORD issued. Day 2: Planning and rehearsals.

We called a training concept used during Warsteed 2000 "Linked Lane" training. Depending on the success of the platoon or the CO/TM, the lanes ran independently or the lanes cross-talked and fought together. This enabled the platoon leaders to exercise adjacent unit coordination and CO/TM commanders to develop techniques of pass-

ing the information or the battle to one another.

Phase I: The platoons executed one week of lane training focusing on the breach, support by fire, defend, and assault missions. The battalion commander, the company commander, and staff served as OCs. Each company had a lane and, depending on the success of each platoon, there was the potential for three platoons maneuvering simultaneously, or "re-cocking" and executing their task as many times as needed to train the platoon. The OPFOR for platoon lanes consisted of dug-in light infantry supported by a tank or a Bradley.

Phase II: TF training was executed in the second week. Missions for the CO/TM lanes in the southern bowl were SBF, assault, breach, and defend. The OPFOR, a large number of dismounted infantry, replicated the large numbers of North Korean infantry and Special Operation Forces (SOF) that we would encounter during a war. The defenders typically fought with one mechanized infantry platoon, two tank platoons, and a light infantry platoon.

Phase III: The TF conducted a brief road march north and occupied new assembly areas in order to prepare for the defile fight. In the defile, the missions changed to advanced guard, breach, assault, and defend. Mechanical smoke provided an additional asset for our training in the defile. Warsteed 2000 ended with a 30 km tactical road march back to Camp Casey.

Key Lessons Learned

Observation 1. "Don't Be Bound By the Book."

As commanders and leaders, we need to incorporate practical application of doctrine through TTPs based on METT-TC. However, we observed that soldiers and officers try too hard to apply the material in our doctrine verbatim to the situation on the ground. We must remind ourselves that publications are a reference and a starting point. Obviously, the way we fight in

Korea is different than the way we fight in the desert, which is different than the way we fight in Europe. No single FM applies to all theaters. During movement and maneuver techniques, we often observed examples of doctrine applied in the wrong place. In Korea, platoons are most likely to travel on a road in column or bound. There is very little space for the wedge, vee, or line formations. Unless it is winter and rice paddies are frozen, and the unit is moving through a large valley, platoons will not be able to conduct alternating or successive bounds by section. Many situations in a Korean terrain-based conflict require tanks to bound individually.

It was observed during Warsteed that both lieutenants and captains believe that a section of tanks must bound in unison. Unfortunately, in the defile this is a good way to be killed. The terrain is very restricted and draws provide an excellent place for enemy infantry to hide and wait until the vehicles pass so that they can engage targets from the rear. In order to move securely, there will be times when a crewmember must dismount the tank and conduct a recon around a choke point or terrain features such as spurs. "Death before dismount" means exactly that. If you don't dismount, you will die. Dismounting is an approved technique found in Chapter 2 of *FM 17-15*.

Observation 2: "The Third Dimension."

Warfighting in Korea can be best described as a three-dimensional fight. Korea has a plethora of ridges and draws that add to the equation. The draws become excellent "keyhole" locations where the enemy can hide and wait to ambush tanks as they pass by. To aid in command and control while fighting through the defile, an effective technique is to number the draws, valleys, and ridges, just as the infantry numbers windows during urban missions. In addition, we describe target locations in relation to elevation, "high, medium, and low." One way to use the described methods in a contact report is, "Contact VTT, draw two, medium, out." This quickly orients weapon systems and enhances target acquisition. During an AAR of the defile battle, the task force commander used the analogy of police officers clearing a room. We have all seen the technique where one cop puts his shoulder into one side of the doorway and scans. Once clear, his

partner repeats the steps in the opposite side of the doorway. That is a good method to use when clearing the defile. The same technique can be used within a tank section.

There are scenarios that require tanks to conduct individual movement techniques similar to those of a dismounted team. A perfect example of how to maneuver is in *STP 21-1-SMCT, Common Tasks*, "move under fire." If you replace the individual with a tank and double or triple the distances, a leader will have a great guide on how to maneuver the tank.

Another bad habit is the cavalry charge when the order to "assault, assault, and assault" comes over the net. The cavalry charge will either put you into a minefield or suck you into a kill sack. When an assault is initiated, it should be the last maneuver before you seize an objective. Platoons leaders still need to bound and continue to develop the situation.

Observation 3. "Belt Buckle Defilade."

No one likes to fight closed hatch or open protected when they first arrive in Korea, but Korea is the last place you would want to maneuver standing exposed in the hatch. Next to artillery, the next most likely form of contact in this situation will be a 7.62 round through a loader's or TC's head. Instead, fight in open protected or closed hatch. While it takes training to fight from this position, it protects a soldier from bullets and roll-over injuries as well. Over the years, the armor force has lost too many soldiers to roll-over accidents. If our crews are trained to fight open protected during operations in hazardous terrain, we will significantly improve our force protection and minimize crew fatalities.

Another mistake is to pop out of the hatch when you reach the objective. Numerous casualties occurred during Warsteed when crewmembers did this. The OPFOR waited until BLUFOR secured the objective. Crewmembers opened hatches and went "admin" instead of completing consolidation — then the OPFOR threw satchel charges into hatches and called air-burst mortars.

A tight load plan is an implied task for fighting open protected. The 2-72 AR has added bustle rack extensions made

of scrap metal and engineer pickets to provide room to store equipment and prevent the load from rising above the EAPU. At that height, the TC can see behind him. Additionally, many units like to bolt an extra road wheel in front of the loader's position for added protection. However, if a tank makes contact the loader will likely drop and close the hatch. Now the loader has a road wheel in front of his periscope that isn't moving anytime soon. The training objective is to get the loader to be able to scan from a low position (reducing his signature) and be able to operate his periscope effectively without a blocked view.

Observation 4. "Rehearse, Rehearse, Rehearse."

We have all heard this a million times, however, our junior leaders given time to conduct platoon rehearsals may need some strong guidance for the first few missions. A great reference is *FM 17-15*, page 3-8, under Maneuver. Another lesson learned is that every leader and slice element must attend all the OPORDs, FRAGOs, and rehearsals. It's the one person or element that you don't think needs to be there that will cost you the most. An example was when the mine plow and the MICLIC both died in the breach and the ACE was sent forward. The driver of the ACE, a one-man vehicle, was unfamiliar with the execution and not present at the rehearsal. He drove off the lane and was destroyed.

One method 2-72 AR developed to aid C² and rehearsals is incorporating a driver's sketch card into our TACSOP. Time permitting, all drivers, regardless of mission, should receive them. An old lesson re-learned is that prior to a rehearsal, a platoon leader must do a good map recon and designate sectors of fire before SP — this saves time and reinforces C² when in contact. Also, units should rehearse engagements in order to prevent TCs from getting tunnel vision when engaging personnel carriers. Where there is one personnel carrier, there is a squad of infantry out there and that dismount squad will cause the most damage.

Rehearse what you will do in the attack position, especially before the breach. Mounting rollers with or without the aid of an M88 can be an emotional experience for untrained crews. Rollers have been known to fall off if

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not properly fitted. It is very important that crews and leaders understand the realities of plow and roller operations. It is difficult to simulate real-world conditions, but if we don't try, we risk teaching bad habits that will get our equipment and crewmembers killed. An example: knowing (and the OCs enforcing) the speed, depth, and number of hits a plow or roller can take, along with knowledge of the type of enemy mines, will allow more realistic training.

While in the open protected hatch position, TC observation is very limited. Loaders and drivers need to be trained (and rehearse) identifying surface-laid mines and indicators of buried mines from their positions. Units should attempt live rehearsals, regardless of training space, even if there are only a few hundred meters or less. Tank crews will benefit from the training. Furthermore, if there is time, crawl, walk, and run your rehearsals and use terrain boards. The more times soldiers rehearse, the clearer the commander's intent will be.

Observation 5. “The Light Fighters.”

Light infantrymen are one of the most valuable assets a CO/TM commander can have in the defile, and they provided outstanding results during Warsteed. They often moved forward, getting eyes on or engaging dug-in targets that allowed tanks to move into an advantageous position.

A key player when working with light infantry is the driver of the 5-ton or LMTV. Normally, the truck will come from the HHC and you may not get it early enough to fit it into all your planning. A 5-ton will carry a platoon of light fighters. If that driver is unfamiliar with the plan, he may expose himself. With one enemy tank round or ATGM, a CO/TM commander will lose one-third to one-fourth of his combat power. Don't lose your dismounts because you didn't have the driver at the rehearsal. Rehearsing with light infantry was and is critical. Enemy and friendly dismounts look the same in a thermal sight, so it is paramount that

good visual signals be developed and rehearsed. Training tankers to verify troop targets with the GAS is an important fire control technique. At a minimum, have your tankers watch a trench-clearing rehearsal so that they know what it looks like through their sights. Time permitting, incorporate both tanks and dismounts into rehearsal.

Command and control is very different in the heavy and light worlds. Because of the speed and distances that armor can travel, our graphic control measures are normally spread out. When working with dismounts, leaders need to include more and closer graphic control measures, not only to track movement, but to enhance force protection. Commanders must talk to the infantry platoon leader and platoon sergeant to get a good estimate of how long it will take for them to patrol or move from point A to point B. It's a rude awakening when you discover that your execution will take 2-3 hours longer than you anticipated because you had them dismount too early.

To enhance training or to incorporate realism in a rehearsal, use MILES MITTs kits on bunkers. This provides feedback if a tank engages and hits a bunker and signals the occupants that they have been hit. It is paramount that forces training in or deploying to Korea understand that the northern part of South Korea is heavily fortified. The same can be assumed of North Korea. Tankers will encounter bunkers and trench lines that have been reinforced for several decades with vegetation and concrete.

Observation 6. “Move to Shoot and Shoot to Move.”

Tankers are pretty good at conducting berm drills during gunnery, but during maneuver training tanks often remain still when they pull into a position. There is a disconnect between our gunnery and maneuver skills. A question we must ask ourselves is, “Are we really training the way we will fight?” Again, each theater is different with specific training requirements, so why

don't we develop gunnery tables tailored to the theaters we will be training or fighting in? In Korea, most armor units are on their fourth iteration of the new TTVIII. Though the new table is fun and challenging, it does not necessarily represent the North Korean forces that we will face. The troop targets that the tank tables currently provide often have the troops positioned in the middle and in the open. We need more troop targets with their location high and on our flanks, where they would really be in a Korean scenario. This will enhance our maneuver training that focuses on those same types of engagements. Additionally, Tank Table XII must emphasize troop targets along with “hour-glass” shaped engagement areas. A Tank Table XII with these characteristics trains our forces for the most likely fight. We have the technology and terrain to create a theater-based gunnery — we simply need the tables to provide a qualification standard.

At Warsteed, platoons and companies initially fought the way we have trained at gunnery. As the crews scanned in the middle and open ground, the OPFOR crawled along the high ground, in bunkers, along trench lines, and on the flanks, and then we learned some lessons. All of our training should focus on how we fight. If we want crews to scan 360 degrees, looking high and to their flanks, then we need to develop tank tables that emphasize this.

Another issue to consider is the proper ammunition for the engagement. When tankers see troops — whether they are in bunkers, trenches, or in the open — tanks will typically open up with coax or .50 cal. The crew soon learns that they wasted a bunch of ammo. In the Korean environment, the first and last thing enemy troops should hear is the main gun, sending an HE-OR round in their direction. What few survivors are left will most likely run for a new position. At this point, the tankers need to open with machine guns and eliminate the remaining enemy. Imagine this scenario on the move. From open protected moving 10 km or faster — it will be increasingly

difficult to engage with accuracy. Most engagements in Korea, both offensive and defensive, occur within 1 km areas. This is why we need to bring back the canister round. The canister round can provide the necessary lethality and range that is necessary in the Korean theater. Our tank tables can and should be designed to train the platoons to engage in this environment.

Finally, tank and Bradley commanders have a tendency, when engaging targets, to move away from the target after it backs down. If it's not dead, stay on it. We refer to this as "Target Designation." Don't move your sights because that same vehicle probably knows where you are and after you stopped suppressing it, it will come up again and shoot you.

Observation 7. "I need a medic!"

We have the best medics in the world, but it won't matter if you die before they get there. Buddy aid is crucial. If you cut an artery, you have about one minute before you bleed to death, and you can live about three minutes without oxygen. No medic in the world can move into a firefight, get on a tank, and save a life in that amount of time unless good buddy aid has been applied to the soldier. Two bad habits often observed were: first, when a tank or vehicle is killed, the crews pop out and conduct buddy aid on top of a turret that is still under fire or would have been on fire. If the tank is a kill and you are still alive, evacuate and give buddy aid under cover. Second, if the tank remains under fire, but is not going to burn or explode, buddy aid should be conducted inside the turret until contact has moved away. Turret buddy aid begs the question "Where is your first aid kit and Combat Life Saver (CLS) bag? How many combat lifesavers do you have, and at what position is he located? If he is the driver, he may not be able to help. Also, ISG and medics are anxious to move in and do their job, but remember that PCs and HMMWVs are easy targets. They must not be called forward until it is safe.

Observation 8. "No Such Thing As a TAA."

All assembly areas should be tactical. During planning, specific timelines for guards, maintenance, chow, and verification of boresight should be published.

In Korea, we have a real-world threat during training known as the "slickey boys." A slickey boy is a local national that operates alone or in teams. He will monitor you closely, and once your routine is established, he will strike. Slickey boys will wear BDUs with LBE, Kevlar, and often have NVGs. If guards don't physically confront other soldiers in the perimeter at night, slickey boys will go unnoticed. I have personally experienced a situation where a team of slickey boys rolled up the wire of trip flares and breached concertina wire despite roving guards with NVGs. If a slickey boy can do it, a North Korean definitely can. When on security, tanks need to be off as much as possible. LP/OPs need to be emplaced far enough away from the vehicles that tank noise will not hinder the ability to hear infiltrators. A crewman with his CVC helmet on, either scanning in TIS or with PVS-7s, is not good enough. It is too easy to sneak up on tankers as they look forward and listen to radio traffic.

Observation 9. "Where Are My Engineers?"

Blade assets are invaluable, and every minute counts and needs to be used. All TCs need to know the standard on a proper fighting position and the leadership must understand the approximate time it takes to construct the desired position. See *FM 5-103* for timelines. With two pickets mounted on the back of a tank, it is possible to carry 4-6 rolls of concertina wire and 10 additional engineer pickets. Using your wire in creek beds and on trails reinforced with natural obstacles such as large rocks (moved by engineers or your M88) can become a very effective complex obstacle. With very little effort, a platoon engagement area can be reinforced quickly. Incorporate your engineers in the defense. Engineers can help with hasty protective obstacles and hide in positions to throw satchel charges. With a light infantry enemy threat, anything that has a weapon must be in the fight, to include your M88 and PCs.

Observation 10. "Say Again, Over."

Reports are critical in our line of business. Knowing your TACSOP and exactly how your boss wants to hear information will ease the stress during battles.

Along with knowing what your "higher" wants, leaders at all levels need tactical patience during development and execution during a given situation. Platoon leaders and CO/TM leaders need to be able to analyze and paint a picture, not just dump data. A catchall phrase is, "Know yourself, the enemy and the terrain — then report it." Listen to your platoon leaders during simulation and lane training. Are they reciting the mission you gave them? Do they understand doctrinal terms, like the difference between support by fire and attack by fire? Is there enough traffic on the nets during your simulation training to accurately represent what will happen during mounted training or war?

The typical report a company commander receives is, "Contact north, out," which does no good. Platoon leaders need to give a better location, whether it is a terrain feature or a graphic control measure. Most of the time, junior leaders only report contact under direct fire. Remember, there are six other forms of contact (visual, indirect, obstacle, aircraft, chemical, and electronic) that Co/Bn commanders need to know.

When training in simulation, request the staff's support. This will help develop junior staff leaders' abilities to track and develop a battle and replicates the enormous amount of traffic that leaders must decipher during a battle.

Observation 11. "Slice Guys."

As mentioned before, mechanical smoke was attached to CO/TMs during our maneuver. It is an outstanding resource. However, as quickly as it can help you, the wind can change and you may find yourself silhouetted. If placed correctly, you can screen your movement, create windows to fire, or obscure your withdrawal. Mechanical smoke can be very thick as well. Crews need to go back to *FM 17-15* and rehearse techniques for navigation in those conditions. Additionally, company XOs need to know the requirements of all slices. Each unit, whether it is smoke, engineer, or infantry, will have specific needs regarding PLL and POL.

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Observation: 12. “Crawl, Walk, Run.”

Whether you are going to a CTC or Twin Bridges, you need to develop a rigorous OPD cycle and quarterly training package. Topics for OPDs should range from the basic doctrinal knowledge tests, OPORDs, and TEWTS to historical battles similar to the exercise. Platoon leaders, don't assume all of your TCs are freshly battle-tested warriors. Many of our staff sergeants are coming from recruiting, AC/RC, or staff positions. Our skills are perishable, so take a close look at your strengths and weaknesses and provide NCOs that have been away an opportunity to re-hone their skills. Quarterly training packages, such as CASEVAC, breaching (mechanical and manual), and quartering party procedures need implementation. A question to ask yourself is, “When was the last time my quartering party operated the M8 alarm or the AN/PSS-11 mine detector?” Sergeants' Time should include dismounting a loader to look around terrain features, like spurs, mounting and dismounting rollers and plows, occupying and fighting from a BP, the use of mine detectors, NBC tasks, etc.

Summary

The Korean theater is a challenging training environment. Many of my observations are easy to train in SIMNET, CCTT, and Janus; however, we can't sacrifice our “dirt” time for simulations. Simulations can better prepare us for maneuver, but will never be able to replace it. Leaders may have to adapt doctrine or use “out-of-the-box” techniques to be successful in new and challenging areas of operations. These techniques must be incorporated in the unit TACSOP. The current 2-72 AR TACSOP was created in 1995 and continues to be a living document. Many of the techniques listed in the observations just discussed are addressed in our TACSOP, and the chain of command continually reinforces the use of the TACSOP in all our training. If we don't train our soldiers and NCOs to know and understand unit TACSOPs, then we

might as well throw them away. Along with TACSOP use, reinforce that doctrine is a guide. Each theater will lend itself to “out-of-the-box” techniques that may include burning the area prior to your entrance and firing MICLICs over and into trench lines to eradicate infantry forces.

Regardless of your post, with a strong long-range training plan, creation of a working TACSOP, conduct of rehearsals along with proper application of doctrine, armor forces will be ready to fight, whether it be in the Chorwon Valley, along the Sunchon Road, or in the deserts of the Middle East.

Recommended Reading:

Enter the Dragon: China's Undeclared War Against the U.S. in Korea, 1950-51 by Russell Spurr

This Kind of War by T.R. Fehrenbach

Armour of the Korean War 1950-53 by Simon Dunstan

Military History Magazine, “Eighth Army Ordeal in Korea,” by Ansil Walker, Dec. 1998

CPT Michael S. McCullough was commissioned through ROTC at Washington State University in 1993. He served as a tank platoon leader and S3 air in 2-64 AR, Schweinfurt, Germany, then served as HHC XO and S1 in 1-77 AR and deployed to Bosnia as a part of SFOR. After attending the Marine Amphibious Warfare School and CAS³, he was assigned as the assistant S3 at 4-7 Cavalry in the Republic of Korea. He is currently serving as Delta Company commander, 2-72 AR, Camp Casey, Korea.

Special thanks to LTC Wayne M. Brainerd, commander, 2-72 AR, for his review and mentorship while writing this article.