



# Nearby Threat Means Training, Tempo, PRT All Increase For NCOs Serving in Korea

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**W**ith U.S. troops out of Iraq and the war in Afghanistan winding down, there are few places left where Soldiers serve on the knife's edge. One of those places is South Korea. Though the Cold War seems to be over almost everywhere else, it is still alive on the border between South and North Korea.

Because of that threat, U.S. Army Soldiers serving in South Korea must train harder and be more prepared for battle than almost anywhere else, senior leaders said. Soldiers must learn about the risk North Korea poses and be prepared to fight alongside their Republic of Korea army counterparts at any time.

With a group of top NCOs sitting in the audience, Command Sgt. Maj. John W. Troxell, the senior enlisted leader of United States Forces Korea, spoke in stark terms of what Soldiers serving in Korea need to be prepared for.

If North Korea were to attack, mobilizing combat power would be just one of many worries, Troxell

told the NCOs gathered in an auditorium on Yong-san Garrison in Seoul, South Korea. Though the U.S. Army's motto in Korea is "Fight Tonight," many young Soldiers may not understand all that motto entails.

"What does it mean to be prepared to 'Fight Tonight?'" Troxell asked. "That's the question we have to ask ourselves every day. ... We have to prepare our young men and women for the chaos that will probably happen if we are called upon to 'Fight Tonight.' We, the senior enlisted leaders of this great fighting force, are the ones who have to make sure that our junior enlisted are prepared mentally, physically and emotionally for what can happen."

U.S. Army NCOs serving in Korea are reminded every day that readiness and the ability to "Fight Tonight" is key to enforcing the armistice, which has (mostly) kept the peace between North Korea and South Korea since 1953.

"I know some of you are out there saying, 'Hey look, it's been 60 years since this war ended.' But I will tell





Sgt. Johnston Albert Jr. (right) and Cpl. Il Shin Kim, both Soldiers with A Detachment, 176th Financial Management Support Unit, 501st Special Troops Battalion, 501st Sustainment Brigade, demonstrate immediate lifesaving measures while U.S. and South Korean soldiers observe during sergeant's time training in October on Yongsan Garrison, South Korea. (Photo by Jonathan (Jay) Koester)

you, we don't have a peace treaty or anything like that," Troxell said. "We have a time-out. We said, in 1953, we're going to sign this armistice that says we are going to stop shooting at each other. The armistice is in place now."

The most important piece of keeping that armistice in place is making sure that North Korea knows the punishment for breaking it would be swift and severe, said Command Sgt. Maj. Ray Devens, command sergeant major of Eighth Army, the Army component of U.S. Forces Korea, which is headquartered on Yongsan Garrison.

"The primary part of our mission is really deterrence — deterrence, understanding the armistice, maintaining a level of focus that will allow that armistice to remain in

place," Devens said. "If a decision is going to be made to break [the armistice], it's going to be on that side. We're not going to put anything out there to cause them to get angered or provoke them. We do that through our example. The best deterrence is North Korea knows that we are together with South Korea. They know they'd have two strong forces they would have to deal with: the Republic of Korea and the whole United States."

### Partnership

The U.S. Army's partnership with the Republic of Korea's army is special, forged with the knowledge that, should the worst happen, they will be counting on each other in combat.

"I was pleasantly surprised when I learned of the ROK and U.S. alliance," Devens said. "Before arriving in country, I really didn't understand the extent of our relationship with the ROK army. I assumed it was like any other partnered nation. The alliance here is beyond compare to any other. We train together, and, if called upon, we fight and win together, not only with the ROK Army but with the key contribution to our US forces, the KATUSA. The KATUSA program is a 60-year tradition that places a Korean soldier in our formations so Eighth Army leaders are responsible for their U.S. Soldiers and the KATUSA soldier in their formation. It is an outstanding program to witness."

Troxell urged NCOs in Korea to not only sustain the alliance with the

ROK army, but to strengthen it. Strengthening the alliance will take a concerted effort by NCOs to make sure some of the natural segregation that can occur is avoided.

"What this means to us is everything we do should be along with our ROK partners," Troxell said. "It should be a combined and joint effort. Whether it's training, whether it's leader development, whether it's battlefield circulation, whether it's social events, we should be building this team."

"I've gone out and visited some areas out here, and when I walk into a chow hall, sometimes it can look like the prison yard at Pelican Bay prison," Troxell said. "What I mean by that is the ROK army folks will be over

here eating, the airmen will be over here eating, the Soldiers will be over here eating. We're kind of in our little groups when really we ought to be figuring out how we all fit together as a team."

"Let there be no doubt: We all know that if the balloon goes up, we have to rely on each other — both in the joint world and in the combined world — because of the nature of the enemy up north," Troxell said. "So I would ask you that if you are doing something and you have ROK partners who you're training with and working with every day, you ought to be doing something with them to build the team. You should not just be going through the motions."

Working on that partnership can be very rewarding for NCOs who do it right, said Sgt. Maj. Robert Groover, the Eighth Army G-7 (military information support operations) sergeant major.

"It's a great experience," Groover said. "You are going to see things here that you won't see stateside, and you get to interact with a partner. This is one of the few places where we have a partnership like this. Our Korean counterparts are equal and in tune with us. I salute Korean officers every day, and they salute back. We have KATUSAs working here with us, so you get that true interaction. It's interesting. You get to see it firsthand, instead of reading about it in The NCO Journal."

Though Soldiers may have worked with foreign partners in the past, the partnership in Korea is different because of the closeness, said Staff Sgt. Erika Ortiz, an intelligence sergeant for the Eighth Army G-2 (military intelligence).

"It's different than other partnerships," Ortiz said. "You get to see them working next to you. You get to see the exchange of communication and job-related information. It's a larger experience, and it puts you at an advantage because, if you deploy anywhere, you already have that experience. It gives you an overview of what our allies can be capable of."

### Op-tempo

One thing each Soldier in Eighth Army will tell you about serving in South Korea is that you have to be prepared to work — and work hard — immediately upon arriving in the country. Assignments in South Korea usually last only a year, so that quick rotation adds to the work speed, said Staff Sgt. Latoya Barrett, a career counselor for Eighth Army.

"Because of the in-and-out of personnel, and people coming in and leaving, when you come here, your job is already set and ready for you to take it and run with it," Barrett said. "You come into Korea with work piled up and waiting for you to get here. By the time you clear your desk, it's your time to leave."

Staff Sgt. Tommy Morales, a manpower NCO for Eighth Army, agreed that the high operational tempo in Korea is something Soldiers notice right away.

"Eighth Army is a great organization," Morales said. "It is very challenging. The op-tempo, the workload, is high. We're always working; it's a hardship tour. When you come to Korea, you are going to work. That's a good thing. You learn more. You develop relationships. It builds you. You can gain all this experience and pass it on."

Part of the high op-tempo in Korea is a serious focus on Physical Readiness Training. It's something Sgt. Martarius McCaleb, a logistics NCO with Eighth Army's G-4, said Soldiers need to be prepared for.

"The tempo is high-speed," McCaleb said. "We take the new PRT very seriously over here. You're going to work hard. One thing I would tell Soldiers coming over is they will have to get used to running up and down hills."

The focus on PRT in Korea is necessary because of the nature of the enemy and the mindset needed for combat readiness, Troxell said.

"The key to us being ready to 'Fight Tonight' is how physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually prepared we are to do our duties," Troxell said. "The cornerstone of that is our health and physical fitness. When I see a service member that looks to be overweight or in bad shape, I look at that person as a potential liability as we move forward into combat operations here, if we have to, God forbid."

Eighth Army has set aside 0630 to 0800 for PRT, with no meetings or other events allowed to start before 0900, Groover said.

"0630 to 0800 is the only time of the day you do PRT, and it's the only thing you are doing during those hours," Groover said. "You're not going to a meeting, you're not having an appointment, you don't have anything else. You're getting your body ready to go through the day. That's a big change — the re-energizing, refocusing on being physically and mentally prepared to 'Fight Tonight.'"

Senior leaders want units doing PRT together between 0630 and 0800, and not creating their own PRT schedule, because PRT is not designed solely for individual physical fitness and readiness, it is to progressively develop the teams' combat-focused fitness level each duty day, Devens said.

"The Army put the 'R' between 'PT' because our senior leadership saw that PT had become an individually focused event, and was missing the 'readiness' part," Devens said. "Soldiers would lift weights to develop a single body part, and that's their PT plan, or train for the 10-mile team, or a triathlon. It was PT outside of what we are expected to do as warriors."

"We want units to use PRT as a leader-development tool," Devens said. "I want my E-7s and above to assess young Soldiers and leaders to be prepared for WLC and to be a future NCO for our Army. PRT is the only common tool we all can use throughout the Peninsula — and our Army for that matter — to assess our young Soldiers' and leaders' ability to plan, coordinate and





Both U.S. and South Korean soldiers gather around Sgt. Jeremy Landers as he conducts sergeant's time training in October on Yongsan Garrison, South Korea. (Photo by Jonathan (Jay) Koester)

execute. Trust them, and they will amaze you with their warrior fitness plans.”

## Policies

One of the most difficult jobs for an NCO in Korea is making sure his or her Soldiers understand the policies they are serving under and follow those policies. Though they probably won't be carded during a night out in Itaewon, next to Yongsan Garrison where the drinking age is 19, Soldiers younger than 21 aren't allowed to drink alcohol. And unlike any post stateside, there is a curfew between 0100 and 0500 for all U.S. Army Soldiers.

“One of the biggest pieces of advice I would give is to follow policy,” Ortiz said. “We have policies. Read them. One important thing is we have a curfew. In the States, you don't have that. On top of that, the drinking age is a little lower in Korea, but we enforce no under-21 drinking. It's hard for some of the young Soldiers, because they see that the KATUSAs can drink. Our Soldiers cannot. Seeing that culture and being so young, they can be vulnerable.”

Though living under a curfew can be a difficult adjustment for some Soldiers, there are no plans to change the policy, Troxell said.

“There will not be a revisit on the policy on curfews,” Troxell said. “Who here can tell me some good stuff that

happens in off-post bars and clubs between 0100 and 0500? Why not have a curfew? [Because], the curfew is getting the effects we want out of it. Is it preventing everything? No.

Serving in a foreign country calls for a different mindset and policies, said Staff Sgt. John Dills, community relations NCO for Eighth Army.

“You need to have the attitude of knowing that you are an ambassador the entire time you are here,” Dills said. “In your interactions with other people, you need to put the best foot forward. You can't let yourself slip as maybe you could in another unit. Here, if you do something wrong, maybe something small, it snowballs.”

## Focus on the Pacific

But if NCOs and Soldiers make sure to understand and follow the policies, the professional development opportunities in Korea are incredible, said Staff Sgt. William Sobczak, intelligence sergeant for Eighth Army's G-2 (military intelligence). As the Army begins to focus more on the Pacific, those professional development opportunities will only increase.

“I have noticed it [the Army's focus on the Pacific] personally,” Sobczak said. “You read in the news that the Department of Defense is Pacific-focused now, especially with the drawdown. Iraq is no more; Afghanistan is

soon to be no more. The next threat is really in the Pacific. We need to maintain the balance of power between us and China, and obviously North Korea is always going to be a threat.

“It's different from what the Army's mission is elsewhere,” Sobczak said. “Like counterinsurgency, we don't deal with that here. Korea is obviously force-on-force. It's the last bastion of the Cold War. If NCOs want to get a different experience and experience that, it's still going on here. You have one of the largest armies in the world across the border.”

McCalebb agreed that the experience of serving in Korea has helped him develop as an NCO.

“The battle rhythm is a little different than in the States because the threat here is only a couple hundred miles away,” McCalebb said. “In Korea, you could be put in charge at any time, and you have to be ready for it. It helps you ... you get called on a lot, so you're not shy. You are ready to go. You think, ‘I have done this. I've been in Korea. I'm always in charge. I'm always on the detail. I'm ready to go.’”

It's a spirit Troxell said he has seen often while visiting garrisons in Korea. NCOs and Soldiers understand the threat and are aggressively pursuing the necessary education and professional development to move forward.

“I was down in Daegu (South Korea) last week, and I was talking to the folks down there who are responsible for supplying people up front logistically,” Troxell said.

“I was amazed how some of those leaders understood the potential for North Korean special operations forces and asymmetric threats ending up in the rear areas performing sabotage, terrorist activities and other things to try to sever our supply line. That's the kind of fidelity we have to have when we talk about the enemy.

“Our young men and women need to truly understand what the threat is up there,” Troxell said. “They have the largest special operations forces in sheer numbers in the world. They have the most artillery pieces in the whole world. They have nuclear weapons. They may be suspect a little bit in some areas like combined arms maneuver, but we have to know that.”

What it comes down to is that Korea, and specifically Eighth Army, is a great place for high-speed NCOs to come and develop professionally, Groover said. It's a place to find intense training and be able to work with an ally on equal footing.

“When I came here the first time in 1999, we weren't at war anywhere, and this was the only place you could come to see what it really was to be on the front lines,” Groover said. “As the war in Afghanistan slows down, this will be the front line to get that battlefield, battle-focused training opportunity that you're not going to see anywhere else. You're not going to see it in Germany; there is no real enemy there. But there is a multimillion-man army north of us by a couple clicks that could come at any time.” ■



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