



Sgt. Brian Pease of the 3rd General Support Aviation Battalion, 2nd Aviation Regiment, 2nd Combat Aviation Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division, checks a helicopter for cracks and erosion at Camp Humphreys, South Korea. “We work real hard over here because we have a constant mission, so we have to constantly keep our aircraft in the best working condition possible,” Pease said. “We’re constantly flying, so we just keep these aircraft coming in and out all day.”

2nd Combat Aviation Brigade in Korea First to Test Rotational Units

By Jonathan (Jay) Koester

NCO Journal

Like all Soldiers arriving to Korea, NCOs of the 2nd Combat Aviation Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division, quickly learn the importance of being ready to defend South Korea at a moment’s notice in case of an attack from the north.

“It’s pretty much been the focus of every brief that we’ve gotten from anybody since we’ve been on the peninsula,” said 1st Sgt. Joel Green, the first sergeant of D Troop, 4th Squadron, 6th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Combat Aviation Brigade. “Fight Tonight. Be ready to go right now.”

As part of the preparation to be ready to “Fight Tonight” — the motto of the 2nd Infantry Division in Korea — the brigade is beginning to use rotational units. Rotational units are entire units rotating into Korea for about nine months, while most of the Soldiers serving in Korea come over individually for longer stints.

The 4th Attack Reconnaissance Squadron, 6th Cavalry Regiment, from Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash.,

was the first rotational unit to take a spot at Camp Humphreys, South Korea. The squadron deployed to Camp Humphreys in late September. Green said the rotation has worked well.

“I think there are a lot of benefits to it,” Green said. “The logistical problem would be the worst part about it, moving a large group as opposed to individuals. But when you have a ready unit, a whole unit, coming over ready to go, you don’t have to worry about integrating one or two people, or losing a key member of the team. We’re bringing the whole team with us. I think it’s a plus.”

The unit deployed with 30 OH-58D Kiowa Warrior helicopters, which will be left behind at the end of their deployment for the next rotational unit. Command Sgt. Maj. Stanley Williams, command sergeant major of the 4-6 Cavalry, agreed that deploying as a rotational unit has strong benefits for the mission of defending South Korea.



Sgt. David Henson and Spc. Justin Stack work on removing the pitch control links on a helicopter at Camp Humphreys, South Korea. Henson said NCOs in Korea get lots of experience teaching and mentoring young Soldiers. (Photos by Jonathan (Jay) Koester)

“There are an absolute ton of positives related to deploying a rotational force versus the turnover rate of a unit,” Williams said. “There are a few negatives, but they’re personal negatives, like we don’t get some of the benefits that the permanent party gets here. We don’t get [cost of living allowances], we don’t get [privately owned vehicles]. But on the positive side, the amount of training we’ve been able to do is heads-and-shoulders above what we would normally do in the States. We’re a stronger team than we’ve ever been. ... And over here, the mission is real. There is no fake enemy across that DMZ. They’re real.”

Air power

The training for the 2nd CAB in Korea is constant because the mission is constant and important, said Sgt. Maj. Christopher Hawkins, the brigade’s S-3 (operations) sergeant major.

“It’s the only Army aviation brigade in the country,” Hawkins said. “We cover every aspect of the aviation mission there is to be had. We have [unmanned aerial vehicles], and are getting more. We have scouts. We have an attack battalion. We have fixed-wing. We have

medevac, Chinook, Black Hawk. So even though we’re not a theater asset, we are a theater asset. We work with Eighth Army. We work with the 19th Expeditionary Sustainment Command. We’re the only aviation asset here, so you can almost consider us a theater asset, but we’re with the 2nd Infantry Division.”

If fighting starts on the peninsula, not only will Soldiers need to be ready to fight immediately, they will need to fight together. That means their preparation needs to include all those Soldiers they will fight with, whether that means other battalions or their partners in the Republic of Korea army, Hawkins said.

“In the states, many units focus on their own mission and don’t really interact much with the other battalions,” Hawkins said. “Here, it’s day-to-day operations where you are going to go do a mission with another battalion. That’s kind of unique. I’ve been in 22 years, and it’s one of the first times I’ve seen that.”

“With the CAB — this CAB in particular — we have partnership agreements with the ROK army aviation units and our ROK Army counterparts,” Hawkins said. “When we go to the field, a lot of times, we’ll go to the field with them, and it’s a joint learning environment where we have back briefs each night on what we’re doing, helping them bring their aviation assets further along.”

Training with the ROK army is made easier by those serving as a Korean Augmentation to the United States Army, or KATUSA. KATUSAs are Korean soldiers who serve with the U.S. Army during their required time of 21 months of Korean military service. KATUSAs have studied English and can ease communication, Williams said.

“Just to have the KATUSAs in your formations brings a vast amount of information and resources, because they speak the language and they know the customs,” Williams said. “We’ve done some training with the ROKs, and the good news is we’ve done a lot of joint training. We’ve done a lot of training with the infantry units and the armor units, along with our ROK counterparts, up at Rodriguez Range. We’ve done huge amounts of training.”

Importance of junior NCOs

Junior NCOs also appreciate the training environment in South Korea. Sgt. Matthew Godbold, an aircraft mechanic with B Company, 602nd Aviation Support Battalion, 2nd Combat Aviation Brigade, said the opportunities for professional development are many.

“It is an amazing place for professional development because you actually have a lot more time to focus on your job,” Godbold said. “It’s really good for first-assignment Soldiers because you have a wealth of knowledge from your senior NCOs and your junior NCOs. A lot of them have combat experience and a lot of experience on the job, so this is a great place for new Soldiers to come to get really good on-the-job training. The hours put into maintenance here are a lot more than in the States. So

they get a lot more time on the aircraft and a lot more time to learn other skills, because they focus a lot here on soldiering skills as well, not just maintenance — the whole spectrum: whether it be soldiering, counseling, combat-skills training or overall maintenance, too.”

With so many young Soldiers arriving to Korea, it’s a good trial-by-fire for NCOs, Godbold said. NCOs in Korea have to be ready to mentor young Soldiers in their duties and responsibilities.

“Soldiering and mentoring junior soldiers is really big here because there is a really big flow of, I guess you’d say, trouble,” Godbold said. “Soldiers come here, and this being their first unit, some just go crazy. It’s their first time getting a paycheck, so they go out and experience things. It’s a good thing to experience Korea and what the culture has to offer, but do it responsibly. It’s a big issue with NCOs having to keep an eye on their Soldiers to keep them out of trouble.”

“Also, know your job well,” Godbold said. “Because new Soldiers, coming fresh out of training, coming here for the first time, you have to know how to train them so they can learn their job. So, job knowledge and basic Soldier skills would be good things for NCOs to have here.”

Sgt. David Henson, an aircraft mechanic with A Company, 4th Aerial Reconnaissance Battalion (Attack), 2nd Aviation Regiment, 2nd Combat Aviation Brigade, also spoke of the pressure of mentoring young Soldiers in Korea.

“A lot of new people fresh out of school come here, the newer privates,” Henson said. “As an NCO, you’ll have a lot of privates, so you get to do a lot of education, a lot of teaching and training. In that regard, for NCOs it’s great. Privates get a lot of training; they’re fresh and ready to learn.”

Adding to the heavy focus on training is the knowledge that the threat from North Korea is so immediate, Godbold said.

“The training here is high-impact,” Godbold said. “Our motto is ‘Fight Tonight.’ So we train in a way to always be prepared, because at any moment we could be stuck in a combat situation. Part of our training method is ‘train as you fight,’ so we go out in full battle rattle and shoot at these ranges.”

“The training tempo is high, and they focus a lot on it,” Godbold said. “But on the opposite side, they also focus a lot on maintenance, especially in the combat aviation brigade. So you get the best of both worlds — it’s soldiering, combat skills and maintenance. You’re always busy at work.” ■



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