

North Korea: "Fight Tonight"

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NCO Journal

Dec. 15, 2017



U.S. soldiers receive a mission brief during exercise Foal Eagle 2015 on Warrior Base, South Korea, March 16, 2015. Foal Eagle is an annual joint exercise between the U.S. and South Korean soldiers. The soldiers are assigned to the 25th Infantry Division's 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Steven Hitchcock)

"Being ready to 'Fight Tonight' (2nd Infantry Division's motto) is the way of life here. It is the reason we are stationed on the Korean Peninsula and what we do as Soldiers. Everything we do must be focused on readiness as well as improving it because, should deterrence fail, we must be ready to engage in combat operations with little or no warning. In order to improve our readiness, we must train on warrior tasks and battle drills that are realistic, tough, and combat focused. We must also be fit to fight by ensuring we are physically, mentally, and morally ready for anything."
- Eighth Army Blue Book (<https://www.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/464093.pdf>), under "Readiness." Added parenthesis by author.

North Korea in the News

Tensions between the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea have been a hot topic of discussion in the past few months. They launched two ballistic missiles over Japan and threatened to test a hydrogen bomb over the Pacific Ocean.

September 3, an underground explosion at the Punggye-ri nuclear test site in North Korea created tremors felt along the Chinese border and the eastern seaport of Vladivostok, Russia.¹

October 26, a U.S. aircraft carrier strike group joined two previously deployed forces in the western Pacific. The carrier deployment came a few weeks prior to the beginning of President Donald J. Trump's tour to Asia. North Korean President Kim Jong-un called the deployments "a rehearsal for war."²

October 29, Gen. Vincent K. Brooks, commander of U.S. Forces Korea, Combined Forces Command, and United Nations Command, attended a trilateral conference with South Korean and Japanese military leaders hosted by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Marine Corps Gen. Joseph F. Dunford.³ The focus of the meeting was on "trilateral cooperation in Northeast Asia to respond to increasingly provocative actions from North Korean leader Kim Jong Un."⁴

November 5, Committee for Human Rights in North Korea members, David Hawk and Amanda Mortwedt, compiled a report from satellite photography of what appear to be prison camps.⁵ Satellite imagery spotted the camps in nearly every North Korean province with an estimated 70,000 or more prisoners;⁶ thus creating additional concerns of human right violations in addition to previously exposed camps.

November 7, President Trump visited South Korea, the second destination of his Asia tour. He joined U.S. and South Korean forces in U.S. Army Garrison Humphreys for lunch before later speaking at a joint news conference with South Korean President Moon Jae-in.⁷

November 12, the U.S. Navy sailed three aircraft carriers into the Sea of Japan, displaying the largest show of U.S. naval firepower in the region for a decade.⁸ Combined training exercises by U.S., Japanese, and South Korean forces ran through November 14.⁹

North Korean Threats and Cyber Attacks

In early October, Rhee Cheol-hee, a South Korean National Assembly member, announced that North Korean hackers stole classified military documents from a South Korean Defense Ministry database in September 2016.¹⁰

South Korean officials are unsure how this cyber-attack happened. This is not the first time North Korea has pulled one over on South Korea. Since the 1970's, officials have discovered tunnels crossing beneath the Demilitarized Zone into South Korea, spurring fears of a possible North Korean attack.

However, North Korea can attack without using conventional or nuclear weapons; they also have access to biological and chemical materials. A recent Chicago Tribune article outlines a possible scenario where North Koreans hack into Seoul's utilities, shutting off the city's water and electricity.¹¹

Another scenario is the use of electromagnetic pulse attacks, bursts of electromagnetic radiation that damage or disrupt equipment and power grids, which North Korea has threatened to use against the U.S. During a committee meeting with U.S. House of Representatives and Homeland Security officials, Chairman Dr. William R. Graham and Chief of Staff Peter Vincent Pry argued that the U.S. is ignoring the threat of an EMP attack.

"[An EMP attack could] shut down the U.S. electric power grid for an indefinite period, leading to the death, within a year, of up to 90 percent of all Americans," said Ambassador Henry F. Cooper, former director of the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative.¹²

History Revisited

At the end of World War II, the Korean peninsula broke into two separate territories with the Russians occupying the north and the U.S. occupying the south.¹³

Kim Il-sung, then North Korea premier and Kim Jong-un's grandfather, gained the support of Chinese President Mao Zedong and Russian dictator Joseph Stalin by convincing them that if he attacked the south, he would quickly win the entire peninsula. Russia aided the North Koreans in building their army, while China supplied soldiers and supplies.¹⁴ In June of 1950, Kim Il-sung attacked South Korea and pushed U.S. and South Korean forces to the Pusan perimeter.¹⁵

President Harry S. Truman sought assistance from the U.N. to defend South Korea. U.S. forces and their allies pushed the North Korean soldiers back to the Yalu River.¹⁶ In November of 1950, China sent 300,000 soldiers to aid North Korea, driving U.S. and South Korean forces back again to Seoul.¹⁷

The war continued until both forces signed an armistice in July 1953, ending the fighting, but not the war.

NCOs' Roles in Korea

With the threat of North Korean attacks ever increasing, noncommissioned officers play a vital role in maintaining Soldiers' readiness and equipment in preparation for a possible war.

NCOs assigned to the Multiple Launch Rocket System unit play an important role in counter-fire missions against North Korean threats.¹⁸ Their commanders depend heavily on them to provide training since they have the final say in whether to fire or not.

"Hands on training is crucial," said Sgt. Maj. George B. Bunn Jr., former Command Sgt. Maj. of 2nd Battalion, 18th Field Artillery Regiment.

"Teaching those individual skills and MOS skills are essential."¹⁹

NCOs are also responsible for keeping current on training requirements and implementing updates.

"The pressure is [on the NCOs] to maintain training and standards," said Staff Sgt. John Hartley, MLRS section chief, Company B, 2nd Battalion, 18th Field Artillery Regiment, since rotations to South Korea provide training opportunities or roles which NCOs may not usually experience, such as conducting ammunition reloading, cold weather preparation, or land navigation.²⁰

Along with the Eighth Army's priorities of combat focused fitness, rifle marksmanship, trauma care training, and "fire and movement," NCOs must also train their Soldiers in land navigation.²¹

"Sometimes [the GPS gets] wonky," said Sgt. Dallas Reece May, mechanic and vehicle recovery specialist of Company F, 1st Attack Reconnaissance Battalion, 1st Aviation Regiment Brigade, former wheel mechanic and wrecker operator of 194th Combat Sustainment Support

Battalion, 501st Sustainment Brigade, "and you can't get anything out of it because you lose signal— so you have to be able to do it on your own."²²

Overall, NCO duties in the Korean peninsula involve preparing Soldiers for new training tasks, being creative in overcoming challenges such as large vehicle road restrictions, language barriers, and leading KATUSA soldiers.

Terminal High Altitude Area Defense

To counter the ballistic missile threat posed by North Korea, the U.S. has deployed several THAAD units to South Korea and Guam. THAAD is a missile launcher system designed to intercept ballistic missiles.

Over the last year, tensions between the U.S. and South Korea increased as China attempted to coerce Seoul into discontinuing and refusing additional THAAD deployments by placing economic pressure and sanctions.²³ China is concerned that the U.S. could use the ballistic interceptors to "snoop inside China and negate its own deterrent capabilities."²⁴

In May, the U.S. military deployed additional THAADs to South Korea. South Korean President Moon Jae-in found the news "very shocking," according to his spokesperson Yoon Young-chan, especially since the deployments came without notification from the South Korean Ministry of Defense.²⁵ As a result, 400 South Korean protesters closed off a road to a new THAAD installation site for several days before the South Korean police stepped in.²⁶

Because of these deployments, some South Korean citizens are afraid of Chinese retaliation and others fear the launchers' environmental effects. While others do not like how quietly the latest four deployments occurred without their president's knowledge.²⁷

Tensions between South Korea and China have eased lately with the announcement of an agreement to repair bilateral relations between Beijing and Seoul.²⁸ The announcement came as a result of a trilateral meeting (<https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/U.S.-ROK-Japan-Trilateral-Joint-Statement.pdf>) between U.S., Japanese, and South Korean defense ministers "to work toward greater trilateral cooperation."²⁹

On November 2, a U.S. official revealed that North Korea is currently developing an "advanced version of its existing KN-20 intercontinental ballistic missile," with the potential to reach the state of Alaska.³⁰ In response, on November 8, the U.S. Missile Defense Agency confirmed its installation of the final ground-based interceptor for the Ground-based Midcourse Defense system in Fort Greely, Alaska with the purpose of mitigating intercontinental ballistic missiles threats from North Korea and Iran.³¹

To gain a better understanding of the history of THAADs, go to <https://missilethreat.csis.org/system/thaad/> (<https://missilethreat.csis.org/system/thaad/>).

Weather

Veterans of the "Forgotten War" are all too familiar with the harsh winters, muggy summers, and mountainous terrain of the Korean peninsula. Many suffered from the below zero temperatures, losing toes and limbs to frostbite.

"The weather was extremely cold, most days below zero degrees Fahrenheit," said Korean War veteran, Vincent J. Yeasted, one of the many veterans who suffered from cold-related disabilities. "We walked up and down rugged mountains. The ground was covered with snow twelve to twenty inches deep."³²

More than 67 years later, the Korean climate remains the same, with freezing winters and high rainfall; and though the Army is adept at handling Korean weather, it is still essential for NCOs to keep its climate in mind when training and preparing for combat.

Section 6-9 of the Small Unit Safety Officer/ Noncommissioned Officer Guide, Department of the Army Pamphlet 385-1, states that NCOs are responsible for considering the effects of weather during planning and instructing Soldiers in awareness, prevention, and first aid for weather-related injuries and when to expect these conditions.³³

Section 5-3, page 18, of The 2017 Eighth Army Blue Book (<http://8tharmy.korea.army.mil/site/assets/doc/resource/8A-Blue-Book-22-MAY-17-revised.pdf>) states, "Leaders shall ensure all Soldiers are protected and safeguarded against cold weather injuries. Leaders at every level will use their best judgment in all situations to mitigate the risks of injuries when outdoors during cold weather."³⁴

To read more about regulations concerning cold weather in the Korean peninsula, consult the Eighth Army Blue Book.

Conclusion

NCOs must take 2nd ID's motto to heart and be prepared to "fight tonight." As tensions continue to play out between the U.S. and North Korea, Soldiers must be prepared to go into battle and NCO leadership is key to Soldier readiness.

As news about North Korea continue to develop, it is important for NCOs to stay up to date on current events to prepare themselves and their Soldiers for future challenges.

Related Articles

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- How to Build an Armadillo: Lessons Learned from the First Forward-Deployed THAAD Battery (<http://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/May-June-2017/How-to-Build-An-Armadillo/>) by Lt. Col. Jonathan C. Stafford, U.S. Army
- North Korea Policy: Changed Regime (<http://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/military-review/online-exclusive/2017-online-exclusive-articles/north-korea-policy/>) by Col. James M. Minnich, U.S. Army
- Letter to the Editor- North Korea: Is ICBM a Threat? (http://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/LETTER_TO_EDITOR_North_Korean_Threat.pdf) by Charles T. Stewart Jr., Washington, D.C.
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- NCOs Take Over THAAD Instruction at New Fort Sill Facility (<http://ncojournal.dodlive.mil/tag/thaad/>) by Clifford Kyle Jones, NCO Journal
- Finding America's Role in a Collapsed North Korean State (<http://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/Hot%20Spots/Documents/North-Korea/North-Korea-1.pdf>) by Capt. Jonathan Stafford, U.S. Army
- The Ineffectiveness of the Total Army Sponsorship Program (<http://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/Archives/2017/October/Ineffectiveness-of-TASP/>) by Master Sgt. Scott J. Feldt, 2nd Infantry Division, Camp Humphreys, South Korea

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