

THE DANGER OF POOR TRAINING
MANAGEMENT: THE US ARMY IN
KOREA - JULY, 1950

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Poor training management caused American soldiers to enter the Korean War untrained in July, 1950. This unpreparedness is especially unsettling because, "Training management is the major peacetime activity of leaders in Army units"¹, according to FM 25-2, Unit Training Management. Further, Korea was America's only "come as you are" war and the US has the potential to fight another such war today. Therefore, the factors affecting the Army's readiness in 1950 must be studied to prevent a possible repeat performance in the 1980s.

Examples of the initial US units' performance in Korea should highlight the state of unreadiness caused by the Army of 1950's poor training management.

LTC Charles G. Smith, battalion commander of the 1-21st Infantry, received his orders to deploy to Korea from MG Dean at 0800, 1 July 1950, at Itazuki Air Base, Japan. By 0800 on 5 July, LTC Smith and his battalion task force were dug-in along the main North-South highway connecting Osan to Suwon. Task Force Smith consisted of two understrength companies and a 105mm battery from the 52nd Field Artillery deployed 2000 yards to its rear.²

"It was generally agreed [by TF Smith] that the North Koreans, when they found out who they were fighting, would turn around and go back."³ However, unexpected North Korean armor appeared on the road to their front which was engaged by the US artillery. However, the armor was

unaffected by this artillery fire or the infantry and continued on past to the artillery's position. The battery then engaged these tanks with direct fire and managed to destroy two before they ran out of anti-tank rounds. The majority of tanks just continued past unaware of the battery's location due to being buttoned up.⁴ A second wave of tanks straggled past the infantry and when they reached the howitzers, the battery's troops panicked and ran. "The officers and senior sergeants suddenly found themselves alone,"⁵ and they were forced to man the guns themselves.

An hour later, a six-mile long convoy consisting of four North Korean tanks and trucks filled with troops appeared. TF Smith engaged these forces with only 4.2 inch mortar fire because there was no communication with the artillery. This unexpected fire inflicted casualties but caused the North Korean troops to swarm to the battalion's flanks. The four tanks moved up to within 200 yards of the dug-in troops and blasted US positions with impunity, for the battalion had no more AT ammo or any AT mines.⁶

The North Korean's quick reaction forced LTC Smith to initiate a withdrawal. "The withdrawal immediately became ragged and chaotic. The men got out of their holes, leaving their crew-served weapons."⁷ Further, "They left their dead where they lay, and abandoned the 30 or so wounded who were too hurt to walk."⁸ The withdrawal turned into a

rout under enemy pressure. The following describes the extent of the rout:

Covered with slime and running, these men had tossed aside their steel helmets. Some had dropped their shoes and many had lost their shirts. None of them had weapons, other than a few rifles.⁹

The 34th Infantry Regiment was deployed 15 miles south of TF Smith and met the same North Korean infantry a few hours later along the Pyontaek-Ansong line. Unlike TF Smith, which at least fought, the 1-34th's battalion commander ordered his troops to withdraw before the enemy infantry got within 200 yards of his positions! His chaotic withdrawal led to a rout which almost destroyed his A Company.¹⁰ However, this poor performance was the highpoint for the regiment because, "The 3rd Battalion had retreated back 20 miles to Chonan without even making contact with the enemy."¹¹

General Dean knew that these two units had to buy the time needed to gather his division from all over Japan. "Where he had made his mistake was believing the understrength, untrained, undisciplined and unprepared regiments to which he gave the orders were capable of carrying out such a mission."¹²

Before analyzing the specific causes of this debacle, training management itself must be defined.

DEFINITION OF TRAINING MANAGEMENT

According to FM 25-2, "Training management is the process commanders and their staffs use to plan training and to identify the related resources needed to conduct and evaluate training."¹³ This manual further states that, "Training management is a continuous process consisting of four phases: planning, resourcing, training and evaluating."¹⁴ LTG Collins, in Common Sense Training, emphasizes the importance of this process by stating, "Inadequate training most often results from poor training management."¹⁵ Therefore, by studying how the 1950 Army managed the four phases of training management, the root causes of its poor training should be uncovered.

PLANNING INDIVIDUAL TRAINING

The Army in the Far East Command failed to adequately plan individual training. "Until March, 1944 basic training lasted only 8 weeks, and graduates sent overseas usually had to undergo further basic training."¹⁶ Today's basic training lasts only 8 weeks, but is followed by an extensive Advanced Individual Training period. However, even today's extended training covers only selected tasks and, "Once assigned to their units, soldiers complete their Skill Level 1 training."¹⁷

Obviously, an intensive individual combat skill training program should have been established in Japan to

address the poor individual training status of new troops. However, this was not the case for until 1949, "Units were engaged in administrative and housekeeping tasks and had little time or inclination for combat training."¹⁸ The Army lost sight of its combat mission and instead planned individual training to help achieve its garrison duties! "Training in the rudimentary functions of the soldier was carried out as time and facilities permitted during the period from 1945-1949 with emphasis on discipline, courtesy and conduct."¹⁹ Clearly this Army in Japan forgot that soldiers must sometimes be called upon to fight and emphasized the incorrect type of individual training as a result. The dismal individual performance in July, 1950 can be directly attributed to this misplaced training priority.

AN EXAMPLE OF POORLY TRAINED INDIVIDUALS IN COMBAT IN KOREA

A new platoon sergeant in A Company, 1-34th Infantry, SFC Collins, inherited these untrained soldiers along the Ansong-Pyontaek line. While the North Koreans were deploying in front of his platoon, only he and the few combat veterans in the platoon fired their weapons. The company quickly crumbled and withdrew in chaos.²⁰ Collins later gathered what survivors he could and sought to find out why they had not fired. He found that:

A dozen of them said their weapons would not work. Checking, Collins found their rifles were jammed with dirt or incorrectly assembled. Many of them did not know how to put a rifle together.²¹

His men had not received the rudimentary individual training normally associated with a professional army. These soldiers' leaders failed to give them the individual combat training needed to perform their jobs. This misplaced priority cost many soldiers their lives.

In Common Sense Training, Gen. Hamilton Howze addresses the peril of forgetting the Army's mission when planning training. He stated that, "Whatever the requirements for administration, maintenance, and education, if training for combat is not vigorously pursued, the Army will lose its reason for being."²² Today's commanders must work hard to squeeze preparing for combat into an administration-clogged training schedule. They must first develop individual proficiency in combat-related skills and use this as the foundation on which all other training can build on. Otherwise, collective training will be a waste of the precious resource of time.

PLANNING TRAINING PROGRESSION

The Army also failed to plan for the proper progression of training. An obvious training fundamental is that, "Developing basic individual skills before training more advanced skills results in better comprehension"²³; however, this rule was not followed in Japan. For instance, "The 1-7th Cavalry conducted battalion tests ahead of basic individual training"²⁴ to make use of an available training area.

This battalion's training could not have been productive, for there was no progressive train-up of the components of the battalion. Unit training should follow a heirarchy consisting of 5 levels; individual proficiency, crew proficiency, platoon proficiency, unit proficiency, and combined arms proficiency.²⁵ The 1-7th Cavalry attempted combined arms-level training before it developed well trained individuals, platoons, and companies.

There is a temptation by commanders to skip the basics and train at the company level at the expense of squad and individual training. Without well trained soldiers and squads, platoon and definitely company training will be ineffective and a waste of valuable training time. While defending the Naktong River outside of Pusan, the 1-7th Cavalry probably wished it had followed the heirarchy of training and had made better use of its training time.

PLANNING PHYSICAL TRAINING

Physical training was also overlooked in the Army's training plans. S.L.A. Marshall, in The Soldier's Load, and the Mobility of a Nation, emphasizes the importance of physical fitness with:

In battle, whatever wears out the muscle reacts on the mind and whatever impairs the mind drains physical strength. Tired men frightened²⁶ more easily. Frightened men swiftly tire.

LTC Collins also emphasized this point in Common Sense Training by stating that, "Fatigue, weakness of body and spirit, lack of stamina and poor morale are usually found together."²⁷ Both of these statements were made after the Korean War. Perhaps the US Army's terrible Korean War performance caused by fatigue, among other things, inspired both authors!

Due to the steep nature of Korean hills and hot Korean summers, US troops had great physical difficulties, "When they left their trucks and moved up onto the hills and ridges, American soldiers, as one officer put it, 'dropped like flies.'"²⁸

Further, this physical weakness was one of the most significant factors affecting the Army's tactical performance. The Army had, in effect, become dependent on roads and its trucks for movement. Unfortunately, Korea in 1950 did not support much vehicular movement due to having poor roads and many hills. The North Koreans were forced off the roads by American air superiority but easily traversed the hills. They consistently used the hills to conceal their movement through US units and interdicted supply lines.²⁹ However, "American troops, physically unhardened for foot marches, were road bound. If their vehicles did not go, they did not either."³⁰ The North Koreans quickly realized this and would stay in the high ground because the flabby Americans lacked the strength to go up and fight them.

Sufficient physical fitness in today's Army may still be as much a problem as it was in 1950. Many commanders push sports programs and preparation for the APRT. However, being able to win the Brigade Soccer tournament does not mean that the soccer team can road march 20 miles a day for 5 days. Too often, transportation is arranged for movement to a range 2 miles from the barracks. A dangerous precedent is being established in some units that transportation will always be available and that walking is not done anymore. Commanders should seek opportunities to integrate conditioning into as many training events as possible, such as marching to a range instead of taking trucks, in order to ensure their men are physically ready for combat.

PLANNING SOLDIERS' MENTAL PREPARATION

Apparently, planning for individual mental preparation for combat was omitted. TR Fehrenbach states in This Kind of War that, "Citizens, unless they hear the clarion call, or the angel's trumpet, are apt to be a rabble in arms."³¹ Korea was the first war America fought where there was no cause to stir the nation and its citizen soldiers into a fervor. The Army tried to liberalize itself after WWII and was conscious of individual rights and privileges. What the Army did was to form an army of citizens, "Who, though they were in uniform, were mostly unfit for combat, for orders to go out and die."³² When these citizen soldiers were sent

to do a soldier's job in Korea without the benefit of a cause to fight for, they were mentally unprepared for what they faced. No one had trained them on what to expect in combat!

Again, A Company, 1-34th Infantry illustrates what this mental unpreparedness does to a unit. When the North Koreans deployed in front of SFC Collins' platoon, "Most of the men stood slack jawed, staring out at the advancing Koreans, as if unwilling to believe that these men were really trying to kill them."³³ More than one-half of these men never fired a shot!

FM 22-100 suggests individual training that can be planned to address this fear-induced paralysis. "Competence and belief in one's ability to succeed if he tries are powerful agents in counteracting fear."³⁴ Accept that fear will occur naturally in all men in combat. However, understand competence builds confidence and if a soldier feels he, his unit and his leaders are competent, he may possess enough confidence to overcome fear. Therefore, daily demonstrate your professional competence and ensure your soldiers feel competent both as individuals and as a unit.

In addition, prepare your soldiers for the fears of battle. Describe the carnage and confusion of the battlefield.³⁵ Read books like Keegan's, The Face of Battle, and S.L.A. Marshall's, Men Against Fire for good

examples of the horrors soldiers can face in battle. Most importantly, the soldiers must never be allowed to forget that they may be called upon to do a soldier's duty and kill or be killed in battle. Units like the 82nd Airborne Division, the 3rd Mechanized Infantry Division, or the Second Infantry Division probably will not have the luxury of mentally transitioning their soldiers from peace to war and training must be conducted accordingly.

RESOURCING TRAINING

Resourcing was a major component of training management that was poorly handled by the Army in 1950.

The most glaring resource mistake made was the failure to train with troops available. "Budget limitations and the low enlistment rates forced the Department of the Army to devise a troop program and troop list which could not be manned at 100 percent."³⁶ The strength of combat units was cut ahead of administrative units because administrative needs were seemingly more pressing in the peacetime prior to 1950. Each division in Japan had only a tank company instead of its authorized battalion and tank company per regiment, only 2 of its 3 authorized infantry battalions per regiment, and 2 batteries in each of its DIVARTY's battalions.³⁷ In actual troop strength, "Each division was short of its war strength by nearly 7,000 men, 3 rifle battalions, 6 heavy tank companies and (3) 105mm howitzer

best unit possible and not as a gaggle of individuals, wishing they had trained together, as the 34th Infantry did in Korea in July, 1950.

RESOURCING TRAINING AREAS AVAILABLE

Further, the garrison army in Japan reduced its training potential by misallocating training areas. Japan is a small country, burdened with a large population. This fact limited training areas and forced troops to concentrate in regimental-sized posts. "Exploitation of the relatively few training areas during favorable training weather required some units to undertake field problems and tests ahead of the actual phasing of such training."⁴² Limited training areas was the excuse used by the 1-7th Cavalry to train as a battalion before it trained its individuals! Commanders cannot afford to train only when major areas are available.

AN EXAMPLE OF EXCELLENT TRAINING WITH LIMITED TRAINING AREAS

By 1950, the US Army had forgotten the lessons taught by the German Army of the 1930's. Almost all their training was conducted in small areas nearby their Kasernes. The Germans emphasized excellence at the individual level. This goal was easily attainable for this level of training and required mainly imagination, and not much space or resources. Almost all large operations were worked with war

games and staff exercises. The army that developed from this training attitude was one of the most efficient of modern times.⁴³ The Germans knew that, "Generally, the bigger the exercise, the poorer the training at small unit level."⁴⁴ However, this efficiency lesson was lost on the trainers of 1950 and the precious training areas available were misused through scheduling their use by units unready to use them.

More importantly, training areas available in their garrison area were not used and individual and small unit training was neglected with tragic consequences.

EVALUATING/EXECUTING TRAINING

The evaluation of the Army's training in Japan was also weak. Gen. MacArthur recognized in April, 1949 that his command was shaky. He ordered a training program by unit-type implemented according to the following schedule: Company proficiency by 15 December, 1949; Battalion proficiency by 15 May, 1950; Regimental proficiency by 31 July, 1950; and Division proficiency by 31 December, 1950.⁴⁵ Ironically, "By 15 May, 1950, all units of the 8th Army had completed battalion level training with from 84% to 65% full combat efficiency."⁴⁶ Unfortunately, the standards applied were not high, as the 34th and 21st Regiments were part of 8th Army at this time and their combat performance was nowhere near these reported efficiency levels.

Gen. MacArthur clearly set a timetable which should have guaranteed him success in Korea. Obviously, training was conducted more to satisfy an administrative requirement than to meet the standards required for combat.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAINERS' INTEREST

Gen. Hamilton Howze feels, "The key word with respect to proper training is interest."⁴⁷ Apparently, the trainers in the 8th Army lacked the interest needed to ensure their units were trained to the standard required to survive in combat.

DISCIPLINE AND STANDARDS

By allowing poor standards, these same 8th Army trainers also adversely affected discipline. "Laxness of discipline in routine matters invariably leads to breakdown in control and discipline."⁴⁸ Precision must be the goal of every unit in combat. Unfortunately, combat is mainly chaos. Therefore, "Only by habitually doing the little things right can soldiers maintain and retain a semblance of order in the combat environment."⁴⁹ The battalions and regiments in Japan were not forced to meet the standards on maneuvers and in field training. By not being forced to train correctly, these same units were fated to perform poorly in combat.

FACTORS UNRELATED TO TRAINING MANAGEMENT

Besides poor training management, other factors influenced the Army's unpreparedness in 1950. The increased liberalization of American society led to more civilian intervention in military affairs. The Uniform Code of Military Justice Act of 1949 resulted from this trend and attempted to curb commanding officers' abuses as reported in World War II.⁵⁰ However, these influences and others were either beyond the Army's control or were minimal in their effect.

CONCLUSIONS

By April, 1949, the Army had become aware that its training management was weak and had attempted to train for combat. However, "On the eve of the storm, the command was flabby and soft, still hampered by an infectious lassitude, unready to respond quickly and decisively to a full scale military emergency."⁵¹ The Army's trainers had committed an unpardonable sin; they had forgotten that their reason for being was to fight in combat and not to garrison conquered countries. The training planned, resourced, executed, and evaluated during this time reflected this misperception, which in turn led to the Army's unpreparedness in July, 1950.

To summarize, the Army garrisoning Japan failed to adequately manage training by forgetting that an army must

sometimes fight in war. By placing greater emphasis on its administrative duties, the Army neglected preparing its soldiers and units for combat. This attitude was harmless in the halcyon days prior to July, 1950 but would almost lead to the Eighth Army being pushed into the sea by the North Koreans. Today's commanders must avoid the complacency that plagued the army up to July, 1950. The goal of every commander must be to plan training that will prepare his unit for combat. In the next war, today's army may not be able to find another Pusan to buy time to retrain and recover from poor peacetime training management procedures.

ENDNOTES

¹US Department of the Army, Unit Training Management, Field Manual 25-2 (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1984), p. 16.

²The events surrounding the initial order and disposition of TF Smith have been summarized from T.R. Fehrenbach's This Kind of War, (New York: MacMillan Co., 1963), pp. 97-98.

³T.R. Fehrenbach, This Kind of War, A Study in Unpreparedness, (New York: MacMillan Co., 1963), p. 98. Hereafter cited as Fehrenbach, This Kind of War.

⁴The actions of TF Smith's troops were summarized from Fehrenbach's This Kind of War, (New York: MacMillan Co., 1963), pp. 100-102.

⁵Fehrenbach, p. 102.

⁶The actions of the battalion during the second assault were summarized from Fehrenbach's This Kind of War, (New York: MacMillan, Co., 1963), pp. 104-107.

⁷Fehrenbach, p. 106.

⁸Fehrenbach, p. 106.

⁹Fehrenbach, p. 106.

¹⁰The disposition, orders and initial actions of the 34th Infantry were summarized from T.R. Fehrenbach's This Kind of War, (New York: MacMillan Co., 1963), pp. 108-115.

¹¹Fehrenbach, p. 116.

¹²Fehrenbach, p. 116.

¹³ US Department of the Army, Unit Training Management, Field Manual 25-2, (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1984), p. 11.

¹⁴FM 25-2, p. 16.

¹⁵ Arthur S. Collins, Common Sense Training, (San Rafael, CA: Presidio Press, 1978), p. 15.

¹⁶ James Schnabel, The US Army in the Korean War, Policy and Direction: The First Year, (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1972), p. 45.

¹⁷ FM 25-2, p. 4.

¹⁸ Schnabel, p. 54.

¹⁹ Schnabel, p. 54.

²⁰ The events surrounding A/1-34th's rout were summarized from T.R. Fehrenbach's This Kind of War, (New York: MacMillan Co., 1963), p. 112.

²¹ Fehrenbach, p. 115.

²² Collins, p. XIV.

²³ FM 25-2, p. 8.

²⁴ Schnabel, p. 35.

²⁵ FM 25-2, p. 8

²⁶ S.L.A. Marshall, The Soldier's Load and the Mobility of a Nation, (Quantico, Virginia: The Marine Corps Association, 1980), pp. 46-47.

²⁷ Collins, p. 128.

²⁸ Fehrenbach, p. 154.

²⁹ The North Korean tactics and effects were summarized from T.R. Fehrenbach's This Kind of War, (New York: MacMillan Co., 1963), pp. 155-158.

³⁰ Fehrenbach, p. 155.

³¹ Fehrenbach, p. 93.

³²Fehrenbach, p. 92.

³³Fehrenbach, p. 113.

³⁴ US Department of the Army, Military Leadership, Field Manual 22-100, (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1983), p. 138.

³⁵FM 22-100, p. 139.

³⁶Schnabel, p. 53.

³⁷Schnabel, p. 53.

³⁸Schnabel, p. 54.

³⁹Fehrenbach, p. 128.

⁴⁰Collins, p. 5.

⁴¹Collins, p. 6.

⁴²Schnabel, p. 55.

⁴³The German Army training techniques were summarized from J. Lawton Collins' Common Sense Training, (San Rafael, CA: Presidio Press, 1978), p. 8.

⁴⁴Collins, p. 8.

⁴⁵Schnabel, p. 55.

⁴⁶Schnabel, p. 57.

⁴⁷Collins, p. XIV.

⁴⁸Collins, p. 108.

⁴⁹Collins, p. 57.

⁵⁰Allan R. Millet and Peter Maslowski, For The Common Defense, (New York: The Free Press, 1984), p. 482.

⁵¹Schnabel, p. 60.

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