

SbT Lessons Learned by 2-7 IN in the KTO

Enable the Fight:

HHC's Role in Supporting SbT and CWMD Operations

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The Korean Theater of Operations (KTO) offers a unique and challenging mission set that conventional forces rarely train on: subterranean (SbT) operations. While this concept is nothing new to the armed forces throughout the ages, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) adds a near-peer military threat to the equation. The DPRK has spent the last 70 years building and improving its military-grade underground facilities capable of housing men, weapons (to include weapons of mass destruction [WMD]), and equipment on a national scale.

Over the past nine months, the 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment executed various validation exercises focused on SbT and countering weapons of mass destruction (CWMD) operations. The battalion developed a series of tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) and standard operating procedures (SOPs) that are specific to SbT operations. The headquarters and headquarters company (HHC) is the command and control node for all enablers and battalion assets staged on the surface objective in a SbT operation. The HHC must shift its focus from the traditional combat trains command post (CTCP) in the rear to support battalion operations in the front and near the portal entrance of the underground facility (UGF). This would allow the UGF commander, who is in charge with the clearance of the UGF, to focus on the environmental and enemy threats within the UGF and not become distracted with



Soldiers from the 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division complete subterranean operations training in Korea. The Raider Brigade deployed to Korea as part of a regularly scheduled rotation of forces supporting the 2nd Infantry Division. (Photo by MAJ Pete Bogart)

managing the various enablers staged on the surface objective. This article will discuss three key tasks the HHC and its commander fulfill during SbT operations.

Key Task #1: Understand the Commander's Intent and the Maneuver Plan

The first task of the HHC commander is to understand the commander's intent and the maneuver plan. A clear understanding of the two allows the HHC commander to anticipate potential friction points and provide real-time enabler support to minimize any kinetic enemy or environmental threats. For any given CWMD task force mission, the battalion could be task organized as such:

- X Company (SO1) is responsible for establishing the outer cordon and isolating the objective;
- Y Company (SO2) is responsible for clearing the surface objective and securing any portals; and
- Z Company (DO) is responsible for clearing the UGF.

SbT operations are executed in phases, with each company needing to accomplish its mission to allow the underground clearance force (Z Company) the freedom of maneuver. Once the HHC commander has a firm understanding of the battalion mission, the next step is to set the conditions on the surface objective.

Key Task #2: Setting the Conditions on the Surface Objective

SbT operations often require a massive amount of enabler support, personnel, and equipment. This requirement can cause the surface objective to get extremely congested if the HHC commander is not present to set the conditions. To set the conditions on the surface objective, the HHC command node (think of a modified light CTCP) will align itself with the tactical command post (TAC). The HHC command node and TAC will occupy the surface objective once Company Y clears it. Co-locating the HHC command node and TAC will allow the HHC commander to manage the enablers on the surface objective and free the TAC to battle track the operation and conduct combined command post (CP) operations with any Republic of Korea (ROK) forces. Once the HHC establishes its command node, the HHC commander must ensure the enablers attached to the battalion are in a position on the surface objective where they will be most useful to support the clearance operation.

Enablers can consist of but are not limited to: hazardous assessment platoon (HAP), chemical response team (CRT), troop decontamination assets, Military Police for detainee collection and interrogation, human intelligence (HUMINT) team, signal intelligence (SIGINT) team, low-level voice intercept (LLVI) team, host nation military personnel, and main aid station (MAS)/forward aid station (FAS) operations. It is imperative that the HHC command team set the conditions by deconflicting time and space with all assets during the setup of the surface objective. All deconfliction of enabler placement on the surface objective needs to be completed before the breaching of the UGF.

Key Task #3: Enabler Management

The next step for the HHC commander is enabler management on the surface objective. At this point in the operation, the HHC commander owns all the enablers on the surface objective. He is responsible for pushing the enablers to the UGF commander as well as coordinating for the movement of combatant and noncombatant detainees from the UGF to holding facilities. HUMINT and SIGINT teams will need to have space to interrogate the detainees, and all intelligence must be passed to the combined CP in a timely manner. All classes of supplies will need to be brought to the portal entrance. Nuclear, biological, chemical (NBC) equipment will need to be swapped out every 24-48 hours. CRT and HAP personnel must be kept aware of the SbT clearance progress to allow enough time to turn on and test their equipment before entering the UGF for assessment and exploitation. It is important to remember that personnel moving to and from the UGF will potentially need to be decontaminated if there is a chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosives (CBRNE) threat. With all these moving pieces, the role of the HHC commander is to take care of all of the surface operations to allow the UGF commander to remain focused on the underground fight.

The most complicated part of enabler management is the medical support. Casualty collection and transportation are extremely difficult in a SbT operation, and the HHC first sergeant (1SG) plays a critical role in facilitating evacuation to the Role 1. The UGF company will only have enough resources to move casualties to the portal entrance; therefore, casualty evacuation (CASEVAC) from the portal entrance to Role 1 is the responsibility of HHC, which requires coordination. If CBRNE exposure occurs, then patient decontamination must be established along the route. This

is a massive undertaking requiring five stations, 25-plus Soldiers, and 10-plus medics — all in full mission-oriented protective posture (MOPP) gear — stretched over a 300-meter area. The decontamination lane can facilitate up to five Soldiers at once and can take 30 minutes per person to complete on average. It is imperative that the HHC 1SG manages the patient flow from UGF to surface casualty collection point to Role 1 to allow the UGF 1SG to focus on his duties in the UGF.

Conclusion

The HHC provides an integral role in SbT operations. From receipt of the mission, the HHC commander must be able to fully understand the commander's intent and the maneuver plan to anticipate friction points and deploy the enablers when and where they are most needed. Once the surface objective is cleared, the HHC commander must set the conditions by establishing all enabler support positions. The HHC commander must take control of all enablers on the surface objective and stage them in an area that is most advantageous to the underground fight. Finally, the HHC commander must manage all enabler movements on the surface objective throughout the operation. Having the HHC commander accomplish these key tasks will allow the SbT commander to focus on the kinetic and environmental threats within the UGF and the battalion to concentrate on battle tracking the fight rather than fighting the enablers.

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