

Training Infantry in the ROK Army

LIEUTENANT COLONEL GARY E. WOODRING

The organization and training of the Republic of Korea Army (ROKA) are similar to our own in many ways. (Exact comparisons are left to the reader's discretion.)

This article is intended to give my fellow infantrymen some general information about the ROKA and its infantry training. (The examples and the observations and comments are illustrative only and are based on my brief exposure to the ROKA 26th Infantry Division — the "sister division" of the U.S. 2d Infantry Division.

The tone for conducting training in the ROKA has been set by its Chief of Staff, General CHUNG, Ho Yong. Here is the guidance he has issued to all ROKA units:

- Units are to conduct mission oriented unit training by echelon (MOUTRE).
- Each echelon is responsible for the individual and collective training of its organic soldiers.
- Unity of command must be established during peacetime in preparation for war.
- Leaders and commanders must understand the training plans and priorities of their superiors and subordinates.
- Squad leaders must master all the tasks required of their men and be proficient instructors in those tasks.
- Battalion commanders are to personally lead cadre training for officers and noncommissioned officers.

The ROKA 26th Infantry Division, organized on 7 September 1953, is

commanded by Major General RHEE, Byoung Tae. It presently serves as the ROKA 6th Corps reserve. Its motto is "Can Do," and this spirit is apparent in the attitudes and actions of its members.

The 26th Infantry Division's insignia consists of a red ball (representing the sun and the prosperity of Korea) overlapping a yellow ball (representing the moon and happiness, and the freedom of Korea) on a field of blue (representing the mission of the ROK armed forces). The whole is circled by a band of white, which represents unity of effort among all of the division's elements. (The ROKA 26th is therefore known as the "Fireball" division.)

The division has three infantry regiments (the 73d, 74th, and 75th), an artillery regiment, a reconnaissance battalion, a signal battalion, an engineer battalion, a tank company, and various combat service and combat service support units.

Each infantry regiment has four infantry battalions, but during peacetime, the fourth battalion of each regiment is staffed with only a cadre of permanent party members and serves as a training battalion. The three training battalions form an organic, dedicated, division training base.

All new recruits receive basic infantry training. Some of the soldiers are also trained to be mortar, machinegun, and antiarmor crewmen, while selected soldiers are trained to be future squad leaders. Battalion-sized units receive training in patrolling

and in Ranger operations.

The 4th Battalion, 73d Infantry Regiment, is tasked with conducting basic infantry training, and with training crewmen for the M60 machinegun, the 81mm mortar, and the 90mm recoilless rifle. Each year, the unit conducts nine basic training courses and nine classes for crew-served weapon crewmen.

The basic infantry course covers 24 subjects presented in 264 hours of instruction. The subjects are grouped into three general categories: general subjects (76 hours), weapons (82 hours), and tactics (94 hours). An additional 12 hours is programmed as commander's time, which he can use for reinforcement and remedial training as needed.

Each soldier's performance is monitored and evaluated throughout the training cycle, and individual progress is measured by a point system. Each soldier must accrue a minimum of 600 points (out of a possible 1,000) to graduate. In addition, he must qualify with the M16 rifle; pass a five-event physical fitness test; meet minimum standards in bayonet drill, squad tactical formations, and dismounted drill; and demonstrate proficiency in Tae Kwon Do by breaking a brick with the edge of his hand. (Several of the proficiency demonstration events are incorporated into the graduation ceremony, to which parents and relatives are invited.) Upon graduation, the soldiers are immediately transferred to their new units. Only a few of the outstanding ones

receive a seven-day pass before they have to report for duty.

ROKA enlisted soldiers who make the Army a career can expect to spend their entire service with the same regiment. The minimum tour of duty for the draftees is 30 months. (Service is compulsory for all South Korean males.)

The 4th Battalion, 75th Infantry Regiment, also a training unit, has the mission of training squad leaders. The course of instruction is eight weeks in length and each class has about 80 students.

The division spends a good deal of time and effort in selecting the students for this course. For example, basic trainees who demonstrate leadership qualities during their basic training program are brought to the attention of their permanent unit; then the unit conducts its own evaluation of those soldiers during the following 16 to 20 months. If at the end of that time a soldier has further demonstrated his leadership potential, he may be scheduled to attend the course. Those who graduate from the course usually receive accelerated promotion to the grade of staff sergeant (U.S. equivalent).

The squad leader course consists of 360 hours of formal instruction, and a student must earn at least 700 out of a possible 1,000 points. The subjects include individual soldier skills, NBC warfare, first aid, dismounted drill, bayonet drill, hand grenades, squad battle drill, and weapons qualification.

One of the most interesting aspects of the curriculum is the emphasis the course places on the use of hand-and-arm signals. The number of commands that can be communicated by these signals far exceeds the number taught in our own army. And in the ROKA, a small unit's responsiveness to these commands is considered a critical determinant of its success in battle.

The 4th Battalion, 76th Infantry Regiment, the third of the division's training units, provides company and battalion collective training in patrolling and in Ranger operations. This bat-

tion also operates live fire ranges in support of squad and platoon tactics and airborne ground training for the division's units.

Each infantry battalion in the division attends a two-week Ranger course every year. The first week of the course is devoted to a review of patrolling fundamentals, river crossing and mountain operations, and small unit tactics. The second week is used for platoon level operations in the division's area of operations. This two-week annual training period includes extensive night training.

Training for the division's nine infantry line battalions is designed to



ROKA soldier on platoon attack course.

sustain a high level of rational readiness. The fact that a real, almost tangible threat exists is a critical factor in maintaining this readiness.

Accordingly, individual soldiers as well as units are frequently evaluated. In physical training, for example, soldiers are expected to attain a black belt status in Tae Kwon Do within 18 months after they enter service. The soldiers are also required to take a physical fitness test during each quarter of the year, a test that consists of pull ups, push ups, a 25-meter sprint, a 100-meter dash, and a 1,500-meter run. Each infantryman must also complete road marches that total 400-kilometers each year. These include a single 100-kilometer road march each year and one 10-kilometer forced march in one hour during each year.

NBC training is conducted monthly

and includes a one-kilometer run while masked. Semi-annual NBC performance-oriented tests are administered, while each platoon-sized unit in the division takes part in an evaluated tactical exercise conducted in an NBC environment.

The infantry battalions also conduct a one-week field exercise four times each year using a reverse-cycle (night training) format. Each week, too, the battalions conduct 24-hour training sessions. Twice a year, each battalion takes part in a four-week field training exercise. Company and battalion tactical evaluations are held annually.

As mentioned earlier, each battalion commander is responsible for personally leading cadre training. The 26th Infantry Division's commander has ordered that at least 300 hours each year be devoted to this program. The units make extensive use of unit journals dating from the Korean War to reconstruct and to wargame specific battles. This stage of cadre training is often conducted indoors over detailed sandtables and is supplemented by the use of terrain walks over the actual scene of the battle under discussion.

Finally, a field exercise with troops is conducted to rehearse and to execute offensive and defensive operations. Often, the battles studied took place on terrain located in a unit's current area of operations, and this lends considerable realism to the exercise.

While it is difficult to measure the exact degree of esprit, motivation, and confidence that has been instilled in the soldiers of the ROKA 26th Infantry Division, those factors are very much in evidence in every aspect of their activities. It is reassuring to confirm that the spirit of the professional infantryman is being upheld by such a close ally.

Lieutenant Colonel Gary E. Woodring, an Infantry officer, is Logistics Management Officer, Army Section, Joint U.S. Military Advisory Group-Korea. He previously served as an advisor to the 42d Infantry Division, New York Army National Guard. He is a 1972 graduate of the University of Puget Sound.
