

Team Spirit 88

Light Division, Heavy Challenges

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A light division's combat mission is to deploy rapidly to defeat enemy forces in a low intensity conflict and, when properly augmented, to fight and win in a mid-to high-intensity conflict as well. Nowhere has its ability to accomplish this mission been demonstrated more clearly than in Team Spirit 88 in Korea, the largest joint military exercise in the free world.

As a participant in that year's exercise, the 25th Infantry Division (Light) deployed from Hawaii to the Republic of Korea (ROK) in late February and early March 1988. The division quickly assembled and conducted interoperability training with a number of ROK and U.S. units. The division also participated in a ten-day joint/combined training exercise over rugged and unfamiliar terrain. It then conducted after-action reviews at all levels of command. These reviews not only provided valuable lessons for small units fighting in a mid-intensity environment, they also identified several issues that merit additional study.

First, to conduct sustained operations, a light division must be augmented by mission-specific combat, combat support, and combat service support units. During Team Spirit 88, the 25th Division deployed with an infantry brigade, a 105mm howitzer battalion, a 155mm howitzer battery, and the division base, which consisted of the division headquarters and elements from the division's signal, air defense, military intelligence (CEWI), and combat engineer battalions, as well as appropriate representation

from the division's organic service support commands.

The division's combat forces were rounded out with a ROK regimental combat team, a light attack brigade from the 9th Infantry Division (Motorized), a ROK armor battalion, two ROK 105mm howitzer battalions, a ROK 155mm howitzer battalion, a ROK engineer battalion, a U.S. floating bridge company, a Reserve Component TOW light antitank (TLAT) company, and other combat support and combat service support units.

LIAISON

Because of its structure, a light division does not easily accommodate augmenting units, particularly during a joint/combined exercise. For example, it does not have the manpower to provide enough liaison teams to coordinate with the augmented units. But liaison teams are essential to successful operations, and the necessary personnel, vehicles, and equipment have to be found somewhere in the division.

In addition, the selected liaison personnel must be carefully screened to make sure the teams are proficient in the necessary language requirements and operational terminology. The attachment of numerous specialized units, such as engineer and combat service support battalions, also requires a careful orchestration of the already scant number of command and control vehicles and equipment.

The entire concept of getting the combat service support from augmenting commands requires continued examination. Combat service support units are designed to support a division, not separate brigades. When they support separate brigades, there is no longer a habitual relationship between a support battalion and a maneuver brigade, and the light division support command base cannot be divided three ways. The receipt of attached brigades without a support package makes this situation worse.

Particular challenges arise when a non-U.S. battalion is attached to a U.S. light infantry force or when heavy forces are attached to a light force. According to the prevailing doctrine, support for an attached force comes from the unit to which it is attached. In joint/combined operations, though, differences usually complicate this effort, and a light division, in most instances, is simply not up to providing the necessary support.

Fortunately, early coordination to determine the exact requirements and an attempt to use common forms during the exercise, coupled with meticulous logistical planning, resulted in relatively smooth support being extended to the maneuver elements attached to the 25th Division.

Just as the major subordinate commands had problems with augmentation, small units and even battalions had similar problems. Ideally, a light division needs additional radios to make the command and control of augmenting units easier, but the division lacks communica-



tion flexibility. During Team Spirit 88, the 25th Division was reasonably successful in this regard because of prior training with task force elements and tactical exercises without troops. In fact, training as a task force before the exercise greatly eased the smooth absorption of non-organic units, but this may not always be easy to accomplish in other situations. This warrants a hard look at the command and control of augmenting forces to a light division.

STRENGTHS

In addition to identifying areas that need additional study, the exercise also confirmed several of the light infantry division's strengths. To succeed, light leaders must exploit the advantage that terrain can offer to their units. Throughout the exercise, small unit leaders made excellent use of secondary and tertiary trails in moving rapidly around and through enemy strongpoints. Constant reconnaissance of routes of entry and egress saved valuable time and gained a mobility differential over enemy armored units. Movement on the main road networks was kept to a minimum, and this reduced casualties considerably.

The most striking lesson learned dur-

ing the exercise was the tremendous advantage the conduct of night operations offered to light units. Platoons and companies were extremely successful when they fought during hours of limited visibility. The movement of units from squad to battalion size was not detected when conducted in the evening. The reconnaissance of routes and the rehearsal of actions en route and at the objective were also absolutely necessary.

Another factor that contributed to successful operations during the exercise was the careful scrutiny given to the load the soldiers carried. Obviously, the considerations of METT-T (mission, enemy, troops, terrain, and time) were the primary planning factors in determining the combat load. During periods when soldiers were required to move rapidly, for instance, they carried a "light fighter's load" consisting of load carrying equipment with poncho, poncho liner, entrenching tool, and a single MRE (meal, ready to eat). Non-essential equipment was cached, and the men remained confident in their unit's ability to provide additional ammunition and rations when they were needed. Light leaders must be willing to accept a certain degree of risk and avoid burdening their soldiers with unnecessary weight.

Dismounted fighting over a wide area

also demonstrated the need to conduct extensive leader training. When communications failed, units that had used tactical exercises without troops, command post exercises, situational training exercises, and officer professional development courses to train their leaders were generally successful. Similarly, units that had regularly conducted extensive radio/telephone operator training had fewer problems than their counterparts who had not. This was particularly true when these units received attachments and other augmenting forces. Careful preparation and first class training before Team Spirit 88 significantly improved the leaders' ability to command and control their units.

Finally, a clear understanding of the commander's intent proved to be the single indispensable factor in a unit's success on the battlefield. At times, units moved both day and night without being able to communicate with their commanders. Those units in which the commanders had required their subordinate leaders to brief them on their proposed schemes of maneuver and fire support plans to make certain they were in accordance with his intent were uniformly successful.

In summary, Team Spirit 88 clearly demonstrated the ability of a light division to perform its combat mission in a mid-intensity scenario. The exercise identified certain areas that merit additional study and confirmed that light forces can and will be successful if they are employed properly. Light leaders must become familiar not only with the doctrinal constraints, but also with the inherent advantages of a light force. A light force can and will survive on the modern battlefield if leaders train the force properly. Team Spirit 88 provides an excellent case study for just such an analysis.

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