

PROFESSIONAL FORUM



North Korean Infantry Battalions Organization and Equipment

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first article in a two-part series on the organization, equipment, and tactics of North Korean infantry battalions. This first part covers organization and equipment. The second part, which will appear in INFANTRY's November-December 1992 issue, will cover tactics.

With the decline of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, and with the defeat of Iraq during Operation DESERT STORM, North Korea has become the United States Army's primary threat. North Korea has an active army of more than one million men, the fourth largest in the world. Since North Korea has one of the most closed societies in the world, however, information about its army is limited.

If U.S. Army infantrymen are to be prepared to meet a North Korean threat, they must become familiar with the organization, equipment, and weapons of North Korea's infantry battalions.

The North Korean People's Army (NKPA) has several types of infantry battalions, as shown in Figure 1. There are more infantry battalions than any other type in the active duty force, and these serve as the organizational basis

for the motorized and mechanized battalions.

The NKPA also has special operations force (SOF) units that are designated *amphibious landing*, *seaborne sniper*, or *airborne*. But these terms signify only the planned means of insertion and the associated special training; the units themselves do not differ in structure from light infantry battalions or sniper battalions. Likewise, standard infantry battalions can be inserted by air or sea, but the tactical commands have no organic lift capability.

Infantry. Each infantry division has three infantry regiments, each of which has three infantry battalions. The infantry battalion (Figure 2) has about 476 soldiers and consists of a battalion headquarters, three infantry companies, an 82mm mortar company, and an anti-tank platoon. The battalion headquarters includes the staff, a signal platoon, and a supply platoon.

Each infantry company has 116 personnel and consists of a company headquarters and three 37-man infantry platoons. Each platoon has a platoon headquarters and three 12-man squads.

The basic individual squad weapon is the 7.62 x 39mm Type 68 (AKM) rifle. The squad also has a 7.62x39mm Type

62 (RPD) or RPK light machinegun and two RPG-7 antitank grenade launchers. The headquarters company has three sniper rifles, and each infantry company has a sniper rifle, the M1891/30. The antitank platoon has about 25 personnel and three 82mm B-10 recoilless guns, four RPG-7s, and three or four AT-3 SAGGER manportable ATGMs (anti-tank guided missiles).

The battalion's indirect fire support is provided by the mortar company, which has 62 personnel and nine 82mm M1937 mortars. This company consists of a company headquarters and three platoons of three mortar squads each. Normally, the mortar company operates as an entire unit, but the platoons may also operate independently. Mortars are used to destroy personnel and obstacles and to reinforce artillery firepower. The North Koreans have more than 9,000 mortars.

Light Infantry. A light infantry battalion has about 400 soldiers and consists of a battalion headquarters and six light infantry companies. Each company has a headquarters, three or four squads, and a 60mm mortar squad with two mortars. (It is unclear whether the light infantry battalion has a platoon organization.) Light infantry squads

have rifles, light machineguns, and RPG-7s.

The NKPA has two types of light infantry battalions. The first is found in each of the 35 divisions, and the second in each of the 24 light infantry brigades. The divisional light infantry battalion is employed in company or battalion strength, while the light infantry brigade's battalions are employed in platoon strength. The light infantry battalion provides a unique combination of conventional and unconventional capabilities.

Airborne. The army has two types of airborne qualified battalions: light infantry and sniper. Some light infantry battalions of light infantry brigades are airborne qualified. The NKPA may have as many as 72 airborne trained sniper battalions, but large-scale (battalion) airborne operations are unlikely. The An-2 Colt biplane, the primary airborne delivery method, carries up to ten combat troops.

Motorized Infantry. The organization of the motorized (truck-mobile) infantry battalions (Figure 3) is similar to that of the infantry battalions, but they have organic trucks (12 long-bed or 20 short-bed) for personnel transportation. Motorized infantrymen ride trucks to a forward assembly area, dismount, and walk to the line of departure and beyond.

Mechanized Infantry. Mechanized infantry battalions are organic to mechanized infantry brigades and armored brigades. The mechanized infantry battalion (Figure 4) is organized much like the infantry battalion, but it is equipped with 45 armored personnel carriers. Each mechanized infantry battalion has about 504 personnel and consists of a battalion headquarters, three mechanized infantry companies, an 82mm self-propelled mortar company, and a self-propelled antitank platoon. Each mechanized infantry company has 110 personnel and consists of a company headquarters and three mechanized infantry platoons of 37 personnel. Each platoon has a headquarters and three 12-man squads.

The North Koreans have 4,000 APCs. The M-1973 Sinhung VTT-323 APC,

NORTH KOREAN INFANTRY BATTALIONS						
	INFANTRY	LIGHT INF	MOTORIZED	MECHANIZED	SNIPER	RECON
# Personnel in Bn	476	400	506	504	NA	400
# Inf Cos in Bn	3	6	3	3	5	5
# Personnel in Inf Co	116	NA	110	110	NA	NA
# Inf Plt in Inf Co	3	NA	3	3	NA	NA
# Personnel in Inf Plt	37	NA	37	NA	NA	NA
# Inf Squads in Inf Co	9	3-4	9	9	NA	3-4
# Personnel in Inf Squad	12	NA	12	12	5-8	5-8
# Mortars x Cal in Bn	9 x 82mm	12 x 60mm	9 x 82mm	9 x 82mm	0	0
# & Type Wpns in AT Plt	3-4 x AT-3 3 x B-10 4 x RPG-7	0	3-4 x AT-3 3 x B-10 4 x B-10	3 x AT-3 Veh 3 x B-10 4 x RPG-7	0	0
Recon Plt	No	No	No	No	No	Yes*
# Armored Veh in Bn	0	0	0	30 x APC 9 x SP Mortars 3 x SP ATGM Veh 3 x Arm Cmd Veh	0	0
# Trucks in Bn	7-9	NA	37	15	0	0

NA - Not available.
* - Entire unit is recon.

Figure 1

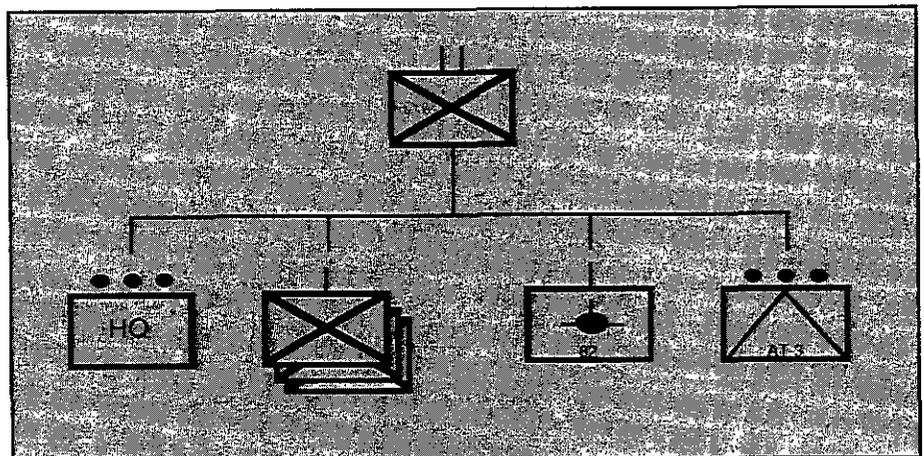


Figure 2. Infantry Battalion

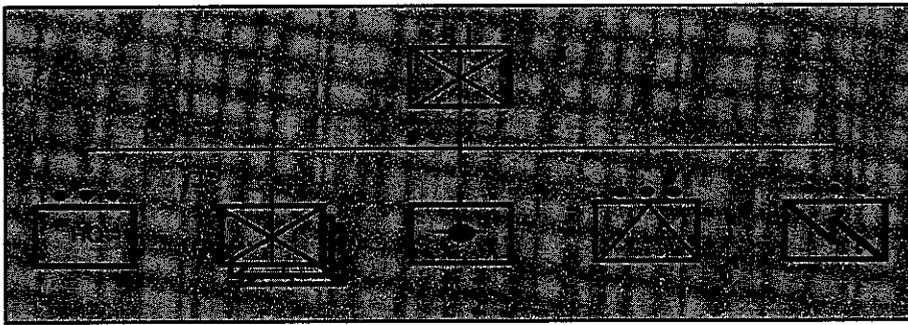


Figure 3. Motorized Infantry Battalion

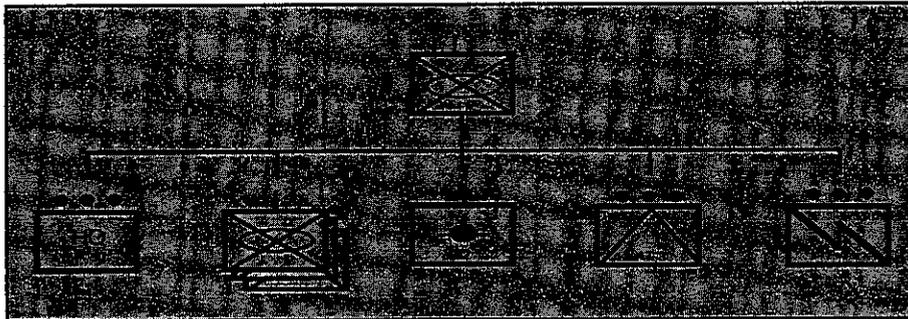


Figure 4. Mechanized Infantry Battalion

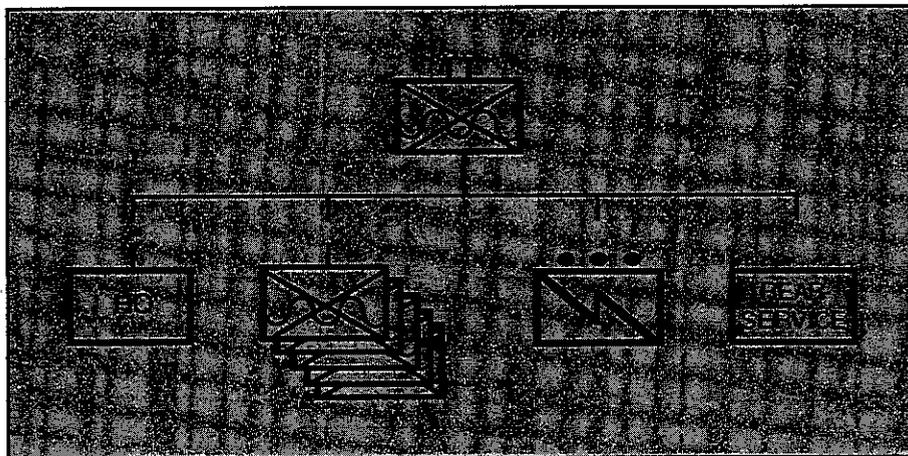


Figure 5. Seaborne Sniper Battalion

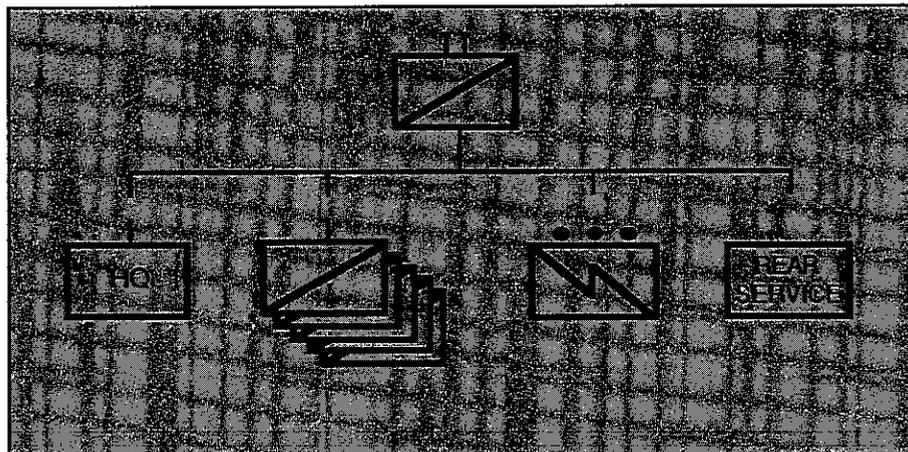


Figure 6. Reconnaissance Battalion

which is produced in North Korea, has become the NPKA standard. The M-1973 APC is a stretched version of the Chinese Type 63 or Type 531 APC. The M-1973 has five road wheels on each side and a turret with twin 14.5mm machineguns, an AT-3 wire-guided ATGM launch rail, and/or SA-14 SAM launchers. The self-propelled mortar company has its 82mm M1937 mortars mounted on either Type 63 or Type 531 APCs or on M-1973 APCs. The anti-tank platoon has three M-1985 ATGM carriers, mounting multiple AT-3 SAGGERS.

Sniper. In the sniper battalion, the term *sniper* is used to signify an elite unit rather than the U.S. Army definition of a trained marksman. A sniper battalion has a headquarters and five sniper companies. Its complete organization is not available.

The battalion is lightly armed, including silenced weapons, such as the 7.62mm NK Type 64 pistol. The companies are organized into sniper teams (usually five to eight men each). Sniper units are designed for guerrilla-type activities, and some are airborne or amphibious qualified.

Naval Infantry. There are special operations force units designated *amphibious landing* or *seaborne sniper* (Figure 5). Sniper battalions that are trained for amphibious operations are called *seaborne sniper battalions* and their organization is similar to that of the sniper battalions. Their primary missions are to conduct coastal reconnaissance, remove obstacles, and attack as the advanced wave during an amphibious landing. Upon completion of this phase of the operation, they occupy and destroy specially selected targets in the enemy rear, support guerrillas, and conduct guerrilla activities. The units designated seaborne conduct raids, while units designated amphibious landing take and hold terrain.

Reconnaissance. The Bureau of Reconnaissance has eight to ten reconnaissance battalions (Figure 6). A reconnaissance battalion has a headquarters and five reconnaissance companies. The battalion is lightly armed, and the companies are organized into

reconnaissance teams, usually of five to eight men each. These reconnaissance battalions conduct strategic and operational reconnaissance.

Weapons and Equipment

The North Koreans either manufacture or assemble various military hardware including the AT-3 SAGGER ATGM, the M-1973 APC, the T-62 tank, and numerous artillery systems. They produce the following infantry weapons: The Type 68 assault rifle; the Type 62, RPK, Type 68, and 14.5mm KPV machineguns; the RPG-7 antitank grenade launcher; and the 82mm B-10 recoilless gun. They produce the following small arms ammunition: 7.62 x 25mm, 7.62 x 39mm, 7.62 x 54mmR, 12.7 x 107mm and 14.5 x 114mm. In addition, they produce 82mm M1937 and 120mm M1938/43 mortars and ammunition.

Type 68 Rifle. The Type 68 is a lighter modified copy of the Soviet AKM/AKMS. It is capable of either semiautomatic or automatic fire. This rifle fires the 7.62 x 39mm round and has an effective range of 300 meters on semiautomatic. It has a practical rate of fire of 100 rounds per minute on automatic or 40 rounds per minute on semiautomatic. The rifle uses a 30-round magazine.

Type 62. The Type 62, a copy of the Soviet RPD, is an automatic, bipod mounted light machinegun that fires the 7.62 x 39mm round. It has an effective range of 800 meters and a practical rate of fire of 150 rounds per minute. Two 50-round belts of ammunition are carried in a drum magazine.

RPK. The North Korean RPK, a copy of the Soviet RPK, is an automatic, bipod-mounted light machinegun that fires the 7.62 x 39mm round. This light machinegun can use 30-, 40-, and 75-round magazines. It has an effective range of 800 meters and a practical rate of fire of 150 rounds per minute.

Type 68 Machinegun. The Type 68 is a copy of the Soviet PK general-purpose machinegun but with a longer PKT barrel, an odd-shaped butt stock, and a

ladder-type rear sight. The Type 68 is an automatic, bipod- or tripod-mounted general-purpose machinegun that fires the 7.62 x 54mmR round. It uses 100-, 200-, or 250-round belts of ammunition. It has an effective range of 1,000 meters and a practical rate of fire of 250 rounds per minute.

Type 1891/30. The Type 1891/30 is a copy of the Soviet 1891/30 7.62 x 54 mmR sniper rifle. The 1981/30 is a bolt-action rifle with a five-round capacity. With the 3.5-power PU or 4-power PE telescope, it has a maximum range of 800 meters.

RPG-7. The RPG-7V is a recoilless, shoulder-fired, muzzle-loaded, reloadable, antitank grenade launcher. It fires a rocket-assisted HEAT (high-explosive antitank) grenade. The grenadier normally carries two rounds of ammunition, and the assistant grenadier carries three rounds. In the defense, 20 rounds of ammunition may be positioned with each grenadier. The maximum effective range is 500 meters for stationary targets and 300 meters for moving targets. At the maximum range of 920 meters, the projectile self-destructs causing a shower of fragments. The RPG-7 grenade (PG-7 or PG-7M) will penetrate 330mm (13 inches) of armor. The RPG-7V has a rate of fire of six rounds per minute. Recently, an antipersonnel round (the OG-7) was also identified.

B-10. The B-10 is an 82mm smooth-bore recoilless gun. The HEAT round has an effective range of 400 meters and can penetrate 230mm of armor. The B-10 also fires HE rounds 4,000 meters at six rounds per minute and has a three-man crew.

AT-3. The AT-3 SAGGER is a wire-guided ATGM. The gunner must guide it to the target using a joy stick. The SAGGER can engage targets at ranges from 500 meters to 3,000 meters and can penetrate more than 400mm of armor. In the manpack version, the gunner carries the missile in a fiberglass suitcase. Each three-man team has a control box, four SAGGER missiles, and an RPG-7V antitank grenade launcher. The gunner can fire the missile remotely up to 15 meters from his

position, and all four missiles can be fired sequentially. The AT-3 is also mounted on the M1985 ATGM vehicle.

60mm Mortar. The North Korean Army uses the Chinese 60mm mortars; one of them is a copy of the U.S. 60mm M-2 mortar. The Type 31 and Type 63 have a minimum range of 74 meters and a maximum range of 1,530 meters. Each normally uses a two-man crew and fires high-explosive, smoke, and illumination ammunition.

82mm Mortar. The Soviet-designed M1937 is an 82mm smoothbore mortar that can be disassembled and carried in three one-man loads; it has a five-man crew. The M1937 has a minimum range of 90 meters and a maximum range of 4,000 meters. It fires high-explosive, smoke, and illumination rounds and has a rate of fire of 25 rounds per minute. The basic load for this mortar is 25 rounds. The smoke round uses white phosphorus to provide screening and incendiary capabilities. The round is designed to obscure and neutralize enemy observation points and artillery positions. The flying pieces of burning phosphorus can start fires, and the shell fragments can inflict injuries. The illumination round burns for 90 seconds.

120mm Mortar. The Soviet-designed M1943 is a 120mm smooth-bore mortar. The rounds can be either drop-fired or lanyard-fired. The mortar has a minimum range of 500 meters, a maximum range of 5,700 meters, and a muzzle device to prevent double loading. It fires high-explosive, smoke, and illumination rounds and has a rate of fire of 15 rounds per minute. Each North Korean infantry regiment has a battalion of 18 x 120mm mortars, and each mortar has a six-man crew.

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