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KNOW YOUR ENEMY: THE NORTH KOREAN SOLDIER

Across the mud-colored water of the Imjin River is one of the most formidable armies in the Communist world. The North Korean soldiers deployed along the DMZ stand as a vivid reminder to the burden that faces the world — to preserve the peace in the Western Hemisphere.

If the status is disrupted, if once again the 8th Army soldier is called upon to fight against the aggressor, then his greatest weapon will be his knowledge of the enemy — his understanding of the man who will oppose him in the face of violent warfare.

Who is this individual? — What does his army expect from him? Let's follow Yi — an average North Korean soldier.

Although Yi never relished the idea of compulsory military service, for sometime he knew he would be called in the next draft. He registered at the local mobilization station after his 16th birthday and he knew that most young men between 18 and 23 would have to serve. So when he received orders to report to his country induction center, he took it in stride. And he was promised that food, clothing and working conditions would be much better than in civilian life.

Yi knew he was healthy and could pass the physical exams even though requirements had become more rigid. He did worry a little about the mental exam, though, as he hadn't finished school. But he passed both exams and was "in."

After Yi reported to the induction center, he arrived at his basic training unit. Like most new soldiers during the first weeks of army life, he experienced problems adjusting to new duties and surroundings. But in spite of occasional doubts, Yi survived the rigors of basic training and two months later is assigned to an infantry company near the DMZ.

Yi may not be burning with enthusiasm to fight, but neither does he intend to back down if he is called into combat. Yi is well-trained, has proven himself tough, hardy, and capable of withstanding severe terrain and climatic conditions. But there is one major difference between Yi and us. :

Yi is a Communist -- a member of the North Korean Army (NKA).

The Communist Threat

Yi is dedicated to bringing all of Korea under Communist control and will fight anyone who stands in his way. Today, approximately 350,000 men like Yi fill the ranks of the North Korean Army, making it the third largest army in the Communist world after Russia and China. The so-called "Korean People's Army" now has 100,000 more men than it had in 1953. Its capabilities have also mushroomed under the guidance of Soviet and Chinese technicians and advisors.

Today's North Korean soldier is equipped with modern conventional weapons manufactured in the Soviet Union and shipped into North Korea after July 1953, in direct violation of the Armistice Agreement. They range from rifles firing the same caliber bullet (7.62mm) fired by our M-14, to modern large caliber artillery pieces. North Korean support weapons include the Soviet T-34 tank, 76mm guns and 122mm guns and howitzers.

Conscript or Volunteer

In accordance with NKA regulations, Yi expects to be discharged about three years after induction. Although Yi was conscripted for a three year term when he became 18 years of age, he learned later that his company commander has the authority to extend the length of service if an adequate replacement is not available.

But Yi's replacement, like himself, will enter the army with some knowledge of the military. Both men underwent training for 30 days annually after the age of 16. And since Yi, like most of his compatriots, comes from a rural area he is accustomed to hard work and long hours. He is much more suited to rugged army training and rigid discipline than those of us raised in a highly technical environment.

All soldiers in the NKA are not conscripts. A large majority are "volunteers" who have been led to believe better conditions exist in the military than in civilian life. Political pressures are often used to influence men to enlist.

"Greetings"

After his selection for induction, Yi was ordered to report to his Kun (country) mobilization station where he passed a rigid physical exam. The following day was allotted Yi to put his personal affairs in order. Then he journeyed to the Do (province) mobilization board where he was given a second physical exam. After passing this he was inducted into the service and issued his uniform. From here he travelled to a corps area where he was briefed, then interviewed to determine his educational level, vocational skills and general physical condition. On the basis of this data, Yi was assigned to an infantry regiment.

Yi's Training

The NKA's training periods follow an annual cycle, generally divided into winter and summer terms with several stages to each. The general combat training cycle for all branches and services includes training in conjunction with general housekeeping chores, construction activities, agricultural assistance and winter preparations.

As one of 200 conscripts, he is assigned to a typical NKA infantry regiment. The regiment in turn, created a provisional basic training company with officers and NCOs already assigned to the regiment as leaders and instructors. This cadre train the recruits for 30 to 60 days, after which the new soldiers are assigned to subordinate units of the same regiment. In most cases, the recruits replace personnel who have served at least three years and are now ready for discharge.

Technical services also create training companies, usually at battalion level. Recruits here are selected for more specialized duties.

During basic training recruits received 44 hours of instruction per week, which is standardized throughout the NKA. In addition to the 20 hours of instruction in general military subjects he receives each week, Yi is subjected to approximately four hours of formal political training and is pressured into "voluntarily" attending politically oriented study sessions and rallies. General military subjects include military courtesy, discipline, sanitation, close order drill, PT, infantry tactics and marksmanship. The remaining 20 hours are used for specialized subjects. These subjects vary with the branch.

An Average Day

Yi's daily schedule begins with reveille at 0600 followed at 0610 by 20 minutes of PT which is mandatory for all personnel and consists of calisthenics and light gymnastics known as the "People's Health Physical Exercises."

In the NKA, great emphasis is placed upon the physical conditioning of its soldiers. Horizontal and parallel exercise bars are placed in each company area and all personnel are encouraged to use them.

A twenty-minute period between 0640 and 0700 is allotted Yi for washing, shaving, etc., before morning roll-call and inspection which begins at 0700. Following breakfast at 0720, Yi prepares for classes which begin at 0800.

Morning study periods are divided into four 50-minute classes separated by 10-minute breaks to prevent drowsiness.

Following the noon meal, Yi prepares for afternoon classes beginning at 1300. The afternoon instruction period is broken into four periods, as in the morning. Since classrooms are not available in the company area, training is conducted in open areas during good weather, in troop billets during bad weather.

The instructors detailed to the provisional training company normally have received instructor training in NCO or officer schools. This has done much to improve the quality of instruction since the armistice.

Lecture is the basic means of instruction, supplemented by demonstrations and recruit participation in practical exercises. Graphic aids and cutaways are available for use in technical training. Recently revised training manuals, mainly translations of Soviet manuals, have been used by the instructors to make up the lesson plans. The instructors make use of regimental or battalion unit equipment for demonstrations and practical exercises. USSR, Communist Chinese, and locally made motion pictures are often available, and normally are utilized as part of the regular unit training program.

After the afternoon's instruction, the time from 1700 to 1800 is set aside for the cleaning of personal weapons followed by the evening meal. From 1900 to 2000 Yi reviews the day's instruction and prepares, if necessary, for the next day's classes. Thirty minutes of planned recreation beginning at 2000 is followed by the only hour of free time allotted to Yi. Taps is at 2200, but immediately preceding this, a muster is taken so every man can be accounted for.

This was Yi's daily schedule in basic training. The schedule was long, with very little free time, and very similar to the schedule that he still follows in his regular company. What little free time Yi had was closely supervised and consisted of political meetings, participation in group recreational activities and self-study hours.

Training Never Ends

This training process doesn't stop with basic training. It is still a part of Yi's army life. Not only was he receiving training within his unit, but he could be selected to attend an NCO school or an officer school.

NCO Training

Privates and senior privates with outstanding military records who have been recommended by their unit commanders may be admitted to an NCO school subordinate to their army group. Each candidate must be a member of the North Korean Labor Party and have a good family background. Instruction is divided into two three-month periods. During the first three months, NCO candidates are trained in their particular arm or technical service; the remaining three months are devoted to developing the candidates into potential instructors. General military subjects similar to those covered in normal unit training are studied in detail. Leadership duties are emphasized in keeping with the ultimate aim of the North Korean Army training program: to equip the individual soldier and NCO with the knowledge and capability of performing not only his own duties, but those of his immediate superior as well. The normal schedule for candidates in the NCO school is similar to the basic training schedule. The day is an hour longer, with a shortened afternoon rest hour, and more recreation time during the evenings. The NCO school graduate is promoted to the rank of junior sergeant.

Officer Training

The North Korean officer training program now seems better organized and directed than at any time since the armistice. The program begins with the entrance of selected politically reliable enlisted men and civilian candidates into what are known as Combined Service Schools. Graduates are commissioned as junior lieutenants.

Candidates for these schools are selected from lower grade NCOs between 21 and 27 years old. The candidate must pass a rigid physical examination and physical fitness test. A candidate must also have an outstanding military record and be a member of the North Korean Labor Party. Schools vary in length from 1-5 years; the graduate is commissioned a junior lieutenant in the branch of the school he attends. There are also advanced schools for commissioned officers to prepare them for higher command and staff positions.

The Ministry of National Defense controls the military schools and military training for non-military schools. All students of senior technical schools and colleges are given military training. Military instructors for technical schools are reserve NKA officers and instructors for colleges are regular NKA officers. Upon completion of the school, students who pass an examination on military subjects are commissioned as reserve junior lieutenants.

The Most Important Improvement

Yi's training in the NKA is based upon Soviet and Red Chinese tactical doctrine. Schools teach that the enemy may employ atomic weapons, and emphasis is placed on defensive rather than offensive atomic training in the curriculum. However, following Soviet doctrine, the NKA does not believe that nuclear warfare has diminished the decisive significance of the infantry. In another conventional war, the NKA may use "human wave" tactics as they did in the early stages of the Korean War; however, such tactics would probably not be used except as a last resort. Infantry firepower, mobility and communications have also undergone strengthening. Of the three, the increase in firepower has been the most marked improvement.

North Korean troops are taught sound tactics. Contrary to the popular notion during the Korean War of the enemy as a screaming horde, NKA forces were well coordinated and their attacks showed considerable planning.

The two major combat arms of the North Korean Army are infantry and tank divisions, to which are added engineer, artillery and other needed support units. The largest tactical ground force is the army which compares to our field army.

In all combat actions the North Korean Army stresses surprise, camouflage the grouping of forces at the last practical moment and night movement. The basic offensive arm at any time or place is the infantry. Tanks and assault guns, when conditions permit, support all infantry action. All armor equipment of importance comes from the Soviet Union.

The NKA believes in firing enough artillery to support an action, but does not adhere to the "overkill" use of artillery practiced by the Soviet Army. The North Korean Air Force directly supports ground action.

Basically, the Army stresses the offense as the way to win a war. Defense is accepted as a necessary form of combat, but one that should be adopted only temporarily while awaiting the opportunity for offensive action. Stress is put on seizing and controlling the initiative.

Politics In The Military

Political courses comprise a major portion of both officer and NCO schools, as well as of basic and unit training. Political officers are assigned to company-sized units and higher echelons. These officers are responsible for political indoctrination and propaganda dissemination during duty and off-duty hours. The political officer's rank is equivalent to that of the unit commander and he is responsible to the political officer at the next higher echelon.

Communist Party cell meetings are held in the military organizations and are attended by Party members. Non-Party members are urged to attend and become members if they possess the necessary political qualifications.

A predominant feature borrowed from the Soviets is the system of group study in political and military training classes. Political group study is conducted regularly for all personnel. More emphasis, however, is placed on indoctrinating officers, due to the greater responsibility of their position. The discipline in the North Korean Army is usually rigid because both officers and EM fear criticism at political meetings.

Uniforms

Soldiers who visit the Joint Security Area at Panmunjom can see the uniforms worn by North Korean soldiers. In general, they are made of cotton material, although certain wool items are issued to high ranking and special-duty officers.

Yi's summer uniform is brownish-green in color, although some appear to be faded brown or green. In the last few years, uniforms have improved in texture, quality of workmanship, consistency of design, and permanency of dyes. As production capabilities improve, uniforms should become more standardized.

His winter uniform is padded and quilted both inside and out. His cotton overcoat is form-fitting and made of wool and hair-felt material. Dress uniforms are generally issued only to officers on special duty, such as those assigned to the Military Armistice Commission.

The North Korean soldier's headgear consists of a field-type cap and is the same for all ranks. Although it has not been adopted universally, a service cap apparently has been issued only to officers for wear with the summer uniform. Soviet-type steel helmets are issued to combat units.

Collar tabs have replaced the shoulder boards of Yi's uniform. The collar tabs are red with branch insignia and rank superimposed; they are worn by both EM and officers.

The Ranks and Pay Are Quite Different

The grade structure Yi is familiar with is quite different from ours. There are only six enlisted grades and two of the officers' ranks have no equivalent in our army.

Private is the lowest enlisted grade, followed by senior private, junior sergeant, sergeant, senior sergeant, and master sergeant.

Yi's monthly pay when compared to the U.S. soldier's pay quickly establishes the fact that the U.S. soldier earns more in one month than the North Korean soldier will earn in 15 years. A private earns the equivalent of .50 per month while a master sergeant earns the equivalent of \$3.00 per month.

There are four company grade officer ranks, four field grade ranks, and six flag ranks. Company grade ranks include junior lieutenant, lieutenant, senior lieutenant, and captain. Field grade ranks are the same as our ranks with an added senior colonel. Senior officer ranks include major general, lieutenant general, colonel general, general, vice marshal, and marshal.

Little Education Handicaps Training

Although Yi's North Korean Army training is considered superior to the pre-war army, deficiencies still exist. The biggest training handicap is the low educational level of the average soldier. Currently, drafted recruits average about 19 years of age and have had five years of formal schooling. This great shortage of trained technical personnel is a handicap to NKA reorganization and re-equipping with modern arms.

The low educational level of the average officer candidate, for instance, forces the army to conduct two and three year courses, much longer than those of U.S. officer candidate schools. The candidate spends part of his time getting a general education in addition to NKA officer training.

Although the state of training of Yi and other North Korean soldiers can be considered good, the very nature of the government that demands and exacts unthinking obedience precludes individual initiative. Even though he is continually harangued with Communist Party propaganda, the average North Korean soldier is not known to be a fanatic supporter of the party. Although better trained than his wartime counterpart, the new recruit, drafted into service since the armistice, is still an untested and unknown quantity, as a combat soldier. In addition, Yi's duties in his line company not only include the normal routine of occupying defensive positions and training, but work details such as civil construction, and lending assistance to farmers during planting and harvest season. Such interruptions certainly do not increase combat readiness.

Why We Are Here

But in spite of these drawbacks, should hostilities be resumed, he will present a far more formidable opponent on the battlefield than did the ill-trained, under-equipped North Korean soldier encountered by the U.N. forces in the fighting between 1950 and 1953.

Yi and his fellow soldiers are well-trained and well equipped. In some ways, they may appear to be similar to us; however, there is one big difference: they are Communists. Given an opportunity, they will fight to take away our freedom and our way of life. It is therefore apparent that their presence in North Korea is a threat to the peace of Korea and the Free World.

Our job here in Korea is to deter Yi and his leaders from further aggression. But, should deterrence fail, we must be prepared to defeat Yi and his Red comrades on the battlefield. To do this, each of us must do our part to keep our army the strongest in the world.

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