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Operation FOEL Eagle, Korea, 03/03/03 to 06/10/03

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Abstract

Forward Operations Exercise in Logistics (FOEL Eagle) rotation was a training exercise conducted on the South Korean Peninsula with a task force size element of approximately 450 Soldiers from different combat, combat support, and combat service support Military Occupational Skill (MOS) with a Battalion Headquarters for a higher headquarters. I will discuss my personal experiences when it came to the notification, mission, task organization of the units, execution phase which consists of training conducted prior to movement, movement into country focusing on being received by the host unit addressing Army and local policies, in addition, the vehicle draw and maintenance, gunnery, and opportunity training. The lessons learned and recommendations are from the standpoint and view of an Armored Company First Sergeant.

Bibliography

I entered the Army September 9, 1986 as a 19K Armor Crewman. My duty assignments include; Germany, Fort Stewart, Fort Knox, United States Army Recruiting Command, Fort Carson, and Fort Riley. I held positions as a Driver, Gunner, Tank Commander, Recruiter, and instructor. In August 2001, my assignment to HHC, 2nd Battalion, 34th Armor, 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division would be very challenging. I was assigned as the Battalion Operations Sergeant Major for twelve months during that time my learning curve sharply increased. My first responsibility was to assist the other battalions and post with the response of September 11, 2001. My next duty position was the Battalion S2 NCOIC. June 2002, I took responsibility of C Co. 2-34 AR, 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division. Prior to FOEL Eagle, the battalion had conducted numerous training exercises; National Training Center, local gunneries, force on force maneuver exercises and individual training. The leadership within the battalion changed very little. The strong point of our battalion was its continuity within the ranks of soldiers, NCOs and officers. The tactical situation deploying to Korea was not a high-level threat however, that would change.

Operation FOEL Eagle

25 June 1950 forces from the North Korean Peoples Army (NKPA) crossed the Demilitarized Zone and attacked forces of the Republic of South Korea initiating years of fighting (Evanhoe, 2006). The destruction and loss of lives on North and South Korean Armies, the loss of over 53,000 American Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, and Air force personnel, and the thousands of civilians were devastating to that region of the world. Over the past 46 years, the respective governments have been conducting an ongoing cold war, which has claimed lives of service members from both sides while maintaining a fragile official cease-fire that could explode at any time. The United States Government maintains a sizeable military force on the South Korean Peninsula, which continues to sustain the original cease-fire conditions, which we live by today. The United States Army conducts military training exercises designed to enforce our pledge to the South Korean government that we are steadfast in our commitment to the people of South Korea and maintaining a presence in Asia.

November 2002, started with physical training in the morning and then personal hygiene afterwards. I was assigned as the First Sergeant, Charlie Company, 2nd Battalion, 34th Armored Regiment, 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, Fort Riley, Kansas. I returned to my office and received a message that the Battalion Command Sergeant Major (CSM) wanted to see me ASAP. I went to battalion headquarters to find the rumor mill spinning out of control. Initially, I was the only first sergeant in his office. CSM informed me that I would be deploying my tank company to Korea in support of a Battalion Task Force element conducting logistical and maneuver missions. The warning order notification spun me in my chair as thoughts filled my head of Soldier readiness and family notifications and a million other unanswered questions. As I left his

office, I came to the realization that I was part of the commitment to the people of South Korea, and at the same time sending a message to the North Korean regime.

Notification

How do you inform Soldiers that they would be conducting an exercise in an area of the world that some have just heard about in history books? The commander and I decided that we would notify the company once we had an organized Warning Order grounded in concrete. I had to be careful throughout the day to kill all rumors, until the commander and I were ready. I received the task to inform the company.

I called my platoon sergeants together and gave them a warning order of exactly what I was informed, and what the commander and I put together earlier that day. I knew that I would be flooded with questions from my Soldiers about timelines, what we were going to do, family issues, along with a host of other questions that they would have after the initial shock wore off. I typically held an outside formation behind the company area however; this information was for our ears only. I was pleasantly surprised with the reaction of the entire company. The Soldiers were extremely positive and motivated with the opportunity to train outside the United States. I had not made it home yet from my office on the first day, when my wife called asking me why she was receiving phone calls from Soldier's spouses in reference deploying to Korea.

As part of the notification process three days later the commander and I called a Family Support Group (FRG) meeting for all the family members to ask their questions. The family members were full of questions and the commander and I were ready for the task. We initially informed them that we did not have all the answers yet however, as information came down we would get it to them in the form of a company newsletter. I was worried that some of the Soldiers would not tell their family the whole story.

Mission

The mission in my eyes was very simple. The task force on order was to prepare Soldiers and equipment to conduct a thirty-day Forward Operational Exercise in Logistic and Maneuver on the South Korean Peninsula. The company was to prepare to move from Fort Riley, Kansas and arrive in South Korea with all personnel and equipment trained and accounted for without accident or injury. I ensured that the Soldier individual training requirements were accomplished, maintained Soldier readiness packets, and reported any changes in Soldier deployable status. Once in country, we linked up with our host battalion representatives and counterparts, conducted host nation policy and procedure familiarization, and moved to our initial living area of Camp Carroll, Korea. My personal mission expanded when I hit the ground in Korea. As the First Sergeant, I had responsibility of ensuring that the Soldiers establish their living quarters and the accountability for all their personal equipment plus sensitive items. The higher headquarters mission changed about everyday with mandatory training requirements prior to movement; however, the essences of the mission stayed the same.

Task Organization

The task organization started first with identifying the internal companies that would be deploying with our battalion headquarters. My tank company of 57 soldiers was the first identified. Bravo Company, 2-34 Armor had just returned from a field training exercise (FTX), in JRTC, Fort Polk, LA, was in their recovery phase, and would not deploy. Alpha Company, 2-34 Armor would deploy because of the ability of their company commander and platoon sergeants. Alpha Company added another 56 Soldiers. Headquarter and Headquarters Company, 2-34 Armor would be deployed with only selected personnel. The majority of HHC came from

their support and maintenance platoons and the command group in all 200 Soldiers. Since this was a task force, there were some attached units. Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, added an additional 80 soldiers. Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 5th field Artillery, 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division deployed with 57 Soldiers rounding out the task force at 450 deployable soldiers (Appendix A), (FM 1-02, 2004).

Execution of Training

The training was conducted in phases: pre-deployment, equipment and vehicle draw, maintenance, rail-operations training, gunnery, and redeployment operation. During our stay at Camp Carroll, Korea the company linked help with permanent party Soldiers to conduct opportunity training. During all phases of training, the company's NCOs led from the front. The NCOs set the example, and demonstrated their can-do attitude by providing purpose, motivation and direction to their Soldiers, fellow NCOs and officers.

Pre-deployment phase started with Korean drivers licensing of all wheeled, track, and key personnel. Our host unit sent us the requirements for drivers' licenses. The command had to ensure that licensing of Soldiers was complete to ensure an easier draw of vehicles from the maintenance fleet. We administrated a forty-hour block of instructions where each Soldier took a written exam as well as, hands-on testing. Throughout all phases of execution records had to be maintained, filed, and hand carried forward with the company.

The company's NCOs were paramount during this training phase. They made sure that their Soldiers were informed about training times, location, and uniform, which made training run efficiently and effectively. Individual training consisted of weapons training, first aid, NBC, communications, and physical training. Again, NCOs led the way to ensure that Soldiers remained focused on the local mission, while driving home the big picture. Besides individual

training, the Company Commander and I looked at the collective crew training requirements. The company conducted Unit Conduct of Fire Trainer (UCOFT), which an individual tank crew simulator trains tank commanders and gunner target acquisition and symbology. It also allows the tank crew to train on their fire commands and crew coordination. The Company Master Gunner devised a well-organized gunnery-training plan, which allowed the company to train without too many outside influences from higher headquarters. The company went through Soldier Readiness Processing (SRP) to ensure that the deployment status of each individual Soldier was updated and able to deploy, and correct all identified short falls. NCOs played a significant part in getting Soldiers through the process.

The company load plans were checked, rechecked, and triple checked before packing, and inventoried prior to sealing in order to get them to port on time for shipment. Through out this phase the NCOs and Soldiers performed well above the company command team expectations.

The movement into country was a training exercise in reception and integration not only for us but also for the receiving host unit, 2nd Battalion, 72nd Armor, 2nd Infantry Division. They were chosen to be our reception unit. The battalion chain of command met us on the ground to ensure that our documentation and training records were on hand to guarantee that we met all policies and procedures established by 2nd Infantry Division chain of command. Briefings and meetings were conducted to reinforce training requirements and regulate our movement within country. These were instrumental in our country orientation with local laws and the civilian population. While pre-staged at Camp Carroll, Korea, Soldiers set a new standard, the Army standard. The Battalion chain of command implemented certain orders, of which general order number 1, no alcohol consumed during the entire deployment. The company's NCOs made sure that our Soldiers complied with the order. They constantly supervised their Soldiers during duty

hours and down time hours. The Soldiers did not complain one time about their NCOs being in their hip pocket. After the deployment, some Soldiers told me that it showed a caring that they never have seen before by their immediate supervisors. Another visible difference was that we looked like a military organization. The company marched and conducted physical training together, something that the host camp was not performing. At first, the host units were extremely upset that this unit from the states was coming into their house messing up their good thing however; as time went on, they started to develop some of the traits of our task force.

Vehicle draw and maintenance was the hardest mission that we had, and the most time consuming. I will not be able to give this mission its' full justification, what we had to go through in order to accomplish it. My NCOs and Soldiers drew wheeled and track vehicles that had been sitting in a warehouse for about four years. The Company Commander had briefed the company on the difficulties in receiving vehicles in this shape. All vehicles had to be test driven to ensure they could start and move. We discovered that the majority of every fixture, hose, and coupling had to be replaced. Gunnery sights were tested and over 75 percent were found to be faulty, which replacement was an all day task. The tank crews worked from sun up to well beyond sun down to fulfill the company mission, which supported the task force commander's intent.

One of the biggest foresight advantages was railroad operations. The task force was able to certify our rail teams at our home station by coordinating ahead with our host unit. The unit sent us the requirements to certify our Soldiers, which cut down on a complete day of training, allowing us to focus on maintenance training. Rail operations execution went without any injury and damage to equipment. This was an NCO led event. The execution was completely to

standard and the NCOs were always cognitive to the safety of our Soldiers and leaders around the railhead area.

The gunnery phase started when the task force arrived on Camp Casey, Korea, which was our staging area to move into the Northern sector of South Korea. We were ready to execute our training mission. The task force spent five days of training on gunnery skills utilizing the UCOFT and preparing for our roadmarch north. The task force conducted a combined arms tactical vehicle roadmarch rehearsal. This rehearsal was the most detailed rehearsal that I had ever seen before. The personnel that attended included all the Soldiers, NCOs and Officers within the company and task force. The USFK commanding general attended the rehearsal, which made some of my Soldiers nervous; they had never seen so much high-ranking command visibility at a vehicle rehearsal. The host unit had the mission to ensure that the task force complied with United States Forces Korea (USFK) regulations on conducting a tactical roadmarch.

The task force conducted the roadmarch at night. The first company out the gate was my company and I was the lead vehicle. Every company had a Military Police (MP) escort along the route to ensure that we would not get lost along the way. The only problem I had was that the MP went the wrong way about one third of the way into the roadmarch. I alerted the commander of the problem and told him that I was staying to the graphics and the route of march and left the escort behind. We arrived to the cantonment area, performed maintenance, and established our living quarters on the range. My NCOs, without any reminders reported all personnel and sensitive items accounted for. The Soldiers and NCOs conducted themselves like professionals. The company conducted one day of gunnery training and roadmarched back to Camp Casey without any complications. The vehicles were rail loaded and we were back on way back to

Camp Carroll to complete our thirty-day rotation. The company had one more week in country and then we were to deploy back to the United States and home station. On day, three of the recovery rumors started floating around that the task force would remain in country for an undetermined amount of time. Apparently, the North Korean regime was announcing that they were going through with their nuclear program and that our task force was going to be used as a show of military and diplomatic deterrent. The Task Force Commander and CSM called the company commanders and first sergeants into a meeting before alerting the task force. We wanted to make sure that we were ready for questions and the reaction from the Soldiers within the task force. The response from the Soldiers was amazing, not one complained, groaned, moaned. The only question was “What do we do now?” The fall out from this drastic change in mission led to some great opportunity training.

Opportunity training

The company command group was given a task to identify and brief the task force chain of command on training that could be conducted. The task was given to me to determine individual training that could be accomplished with limited resources. I approached the local permanent party first sergeants and received great support. The following is a list of tasks that I reported:

1. Weapons qualification, we had carried our personal weapons with us and I was able to get support from the MP unit on camp for ammunition requirement support.
2. Platoon level Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical (NBC) training on wheeled and track vehicles. The NBC training gave the local chemical company the training that they never had the opportunity to conduct.
3. Platoons conducted first aid training, which was not resource dependant.

4. Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) events were scheduled. Softball became the organized sport of the task force. I recommended to the chain of command that the teams could not be from one company level unit. My thought was that each team be comprised of players from different companies to promote unity within the task force and build on the one team concept. Trips to the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) were scheduled for the troops. Shopping trips were offered, because you cannot go to Korea without buying a mink blanket.
5. The biggest event was a Spur Ride event. The Spur Ride gave an opportunity for non-armor units to earn something that they would not be able to compete for within their own Military Occupational Skill (MOS). We authorized all personnel, who met prerequisites to earn their spurs. This was by far the most resource intense training event, other than the gunnery training. We were able to get the camp involved not just the Army personnel, but also the civilians that supported the camp.

Lessons Learned

During the notification process, I learned immediately that I should have recommended to the Company Commander that we pull in the company and brief the Soldiers. I believe that instead of waiting all day and allowing the rumors to spread, we could have reduced the rumor factor and many of the uncertainty questions that were being asked throughout the day. My recommendation was to notify the Soldiers as soon as you get the warning order. Keep your Soldiers informed and it will cut down on the rumor mill.

Another notification lesson was not to conduct a Family Readiness Group (FRG) meeting so early into the initial announcement. I felt that the initial warning order and guidance was too vague, we did not have all the answers to the questions. My recommendation was that the FRG

briefing should be conducted after the chain of command has given the units their first official Operations Order. The official Operations Order answers about eighty-five percent of the questions that were asked at a following FRG briefing.

Task organization training should have been conducted down to the platoon level. I felt that the younger Soldiers did not have the combined arms concept knowledge. Recommendation: conduct cross training at the platoon level during the pre-deployment train-up phase. This will build an understanding between units at that level that typically do not train together. This will build a more cohesive team.

Summary

The Operation FOEL Eagle has been the best training exercise that I have conducted during my military career. The Soldiers executed their duty with professionalism, discipline, and a dedication that I had not experienced in sixteen years of Army service. The NCOs conducted themselves with the same professionalism and discipline; however, it was their sense of responsibility to their Soldiers that made me proud. Their attitude toward mission accomplishment was visible everyday of the rotation. They took every mission to the extreme and serious, no matter how big or small. It was my privilege to be a member of the task force but more than anything else was the first sergeant of a company with so much dedication. This made my time during the rotation was very enjoyable and I would do it again tomorrow.

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