

Experiences of Lieutenants in Korea

*By Second Lieutenant Max Z. Liang, First Lieutenant Jordan D. Ashley,
First Lieutenant Dymon D. Brown, and First Lieutenant Alyssa D. Powell*

An officer's first unit of assignment is critical to his or her personal and professional development. New officers experience fundamental positions of leadership, gain staff understanding, and set the foundations for their future careers in their first units. No other location offers as many opportunities for newly assigned chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) officers to serve in leadership and staff positions as the Republic of Korea, which includes a wealth of positions with geopolitical impacts on the U.S. Department of Defense and its Allies.

Newly assigned CBRN officers fill a variety of positions throughout the Korean peninsula. Many second lieutenants are assigned to battalion or brigade staffs, where they learn the fundamental aspects of the orders-based U.S. Army. Staff assignments are available in a myriad of unit types, including, but not limited to, aviation, field artillery, military intelligence, and engineer. CBRN staff officers are immersed in the military decision-making process; they can leverage their CBRN knowledge to provide critical input and recommendations to their commander while operating in CBRN conditions.

Some officers are assigned to leadership positions in the 23d Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and Explosives (CBRNE) Battalion, Camp Humphreys, Korea—the only forward-stationed CBRNE battalion in the U.S. Army. As platoon leaders in heavy decontamination, mounted reconnaissance, or hazard assessment platoons, junior officers, with the guidance of platoon sergeants, lead approximately 30 Soldiers. In chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosives response teams (CRTs), junior officers lead teams of approximately 13 individuals on highly technical CBRNE missions.

Officers of the 501st CBRNE Company (Technical Escort), 23d CBRNE Battalion, Camp Humphreys (ranging from a newly assigned second lieutenant to experienced staff lieutenants serving as company CRT leaders and executive officers), have compiled their individual experiences from their own perspectives and the unique cultural positioning of Korea. Hopefully, by sharing their experiences, they can persuade more incoming CBRN lieutenants to embrace these challenging and rewarding assignments.

Second Lieutenant Max Z. Liang (CRT Leader)

The responsibilities and challenges of serving as a CRT leader in Korea are exhilarating and demanding. The Korean peninsula offers a unique setting for military service,

blending the rich history of the region with the geopolitical complexities of present day. Stepping into the role of a CRT leader in Korea involves leading Soldiers and navigating the cultural nuances and strategic considerations that define the Korean theater.

My days begin with the crisp morning air of the Korean landscape, conducting physical training with my team as the sun rises over the horizon. The commitment to physical fitness is not only a personal pursuit but also a crucial element in fostering the resilience and readiness of the unit. Following physical training, the focus shifts to mission planning and coordination. Given the political tension on the Korean peninsula, maintaining a high level of readiness is paramount. Training exercises simulate real-world scenarios, preparing us for any eventuality that may arise in this dynamic and strategic environment.

Cultural immersion is a constant aspect of my experience as a leader in Korea. I lead and work closely with Korean Augmentation to the U.S. Army (KATUSA) soldiers. This provides a unique opportunity for me to learn about Korean culture, customs, and military practices; expand my knowledge of international affairs; and develop my leadership skills by managing a diverse team with different cultural backgrounds and perspectives. Interacting with members of the local communities and building positive relationships with them are essential components of the mission. Whether participating in combined exercises with the Republic of Korea Army or engaging in community outreach, the diplomatic role of a second lieutenant in Korea offers valuable professional and personal growth.

Despite the inevitable challenges, my unit has a strong sense of camaraderie and the bonds forged with fellow officers, noncommissioned officers, and enlisted Soldiers are vital to mission success. The resilience, adaptability, and discipline instilled through our experiences contribute not only to the effectiveness of our military unit but also to our personal and professional growth.

Serving as a second lieutenant in Korea is a dynamic and fulfilling journey, shaped by the unique blend of military service, cultural immersion, and strategic significance on the global stage.

First Lieutenant Jordan D. Ashley (Company Executive Officer)

As a company executive officer in Korea, I work in a challenging and dynamic environment. The role requires a deep

understanding of the nuances of operating as an executive officer under CBRN conditions as well as the ability to effectively lead a team. I have learned the importance of quick and efficient decision making, strong communication skills, and the need to prioritize the safety of team members.

The KATUSA Soldier Program makes my assignment in Korea unique. My experience in working with KATUSAs, who are soldiers conscripted and assigned to augment U.S. Army units, has been a pivotal chapter in my military career. The partnership between U.S. forces and KATUSAs is founded on mutual respect, shared goals, and a commitment to fostering strong military cooperation. The collaboration between the two countries showcases the strength of our alliance and underscores the power of cross-cultural teamwork. Serving alongside U.S. forces, KATUSAs bring a unique perspective and skill set to the team. Understanding and embracing the cultural nuances is essential in creating a cohesive and effective working relationship.

First Lieutenant Dymon D. Brown (CRT Leader)

I have been stationed at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, for 2 years. During that time, I have served as a battalion CBRN officer, land and ammunition manager, and unit status report coordinator for the 4th Aerial Reconnaissance Battalion (Attack), 2d Aviation Regiment. I currently serve as a CRT leader with the 501st CBRNE Company, 23d CBRNE Battalion; but with 1 year remaining on my assignment in Korea, I am looking forward to serving as the company executive officer so that I can develop my leadership and decision-making skills.

Korea is an excellent place for lieutenants to learn, develop, and become groomed professional leaders in today's Army. I have forged close bonds with my senior leaders and peers, who are always willing to lend an empathic ear and offer guidance. Using their guidance, I have successfully trained and developed my Soldiers with regard to critical individual and team tasks while also meeting my commander's intent. My time as a CRT leader with the 501st CBRNE Company has taught me the importance of being a competent and proactive leader.

Being stationed in Korea has allowed me to develop professionally and to travel to Thailand, Vietnam, and Guam. I have enjoyed learning about different cultures and ways of life, which has widened my perspective. I genuinely appreciate the opportunities and experiences I have had while serving in Korea.

First Lieutenant Alyssa D. Powell (CRT Leader)

Serving as a team leader in a technical escort company in Korea has been challenging and fun. Because I was new to the Army, the operational tempo was high, and the assignment was short (with a 1-year timeline), training the unit to be proficient required the art and science of managing. However, in Korea I have learned the importance of time

management, the need for a good training plan, and ways to learn from the leadership experiences around me.

One of the best features of a CRT is that the leadership structure is top-heavy. As a new lieutenant, I have had to learn a lot about CRT missions and functions in a short amount of time. At times, this task has seemed daunting, but many leaders have provided valuable input to my professional development. Numerous team sergeants, peer lieutenants, and warrant officers have provided valuable resources and help along the way. I have become aware of the importance of continually learning from the Soldiers around me and not being afraid of making mistakes. While Korea may not be every Soldier's preferred assignment, I am thankful that I have had the opportunity to lead a CRT and learn from the leaders around me.

Conclusion

Despite the challenges faced by new lieutenants, there are opportunities to learn, train, explore, and grow as people and Soldiers while stationed in Korea. There is not one specific thing that would make Korea the best assignment location—rather, many aspects make an opportunity in Korea worthwhile. The combination of being assigned to a geopolitically significant location where CBRN operations are critical, training with allies and joint partners, facing demanding leadership challenges, and benefiting from the opportunity for personal travel is genuinely unique to an assignment to Korea. A remarkable legacy is being built on the peninsula every day, and it is an honor to contribute to that legacy.



Vipers! Lion Up!

Second Lieutenant Liang is currently a student in the CBRN Captain's Career Course. He is assigned as a CRT leader for the 501st CBRNE Company, 23d CBRNE Battalion. He holds a bachelor's degree in economics/administration from the University of California, Riverside.

First Lieutenant Ashley is currently a student in the CBRN Captain's Career Course. He is assigned as an executive officer for the 501st CBRNE Company, 23d CBRNE Battalion. He holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from Florida A&M University, Tallahassee.

First Lieutenant Brown is currently a student in the CBRN Captain's Career Course. She is assigned as a CRT leader for the 501st CBRNE Company, 23d CBRNE Battalion. She holds a bachelor's degree in biology and a master's degree in organizational leadership.

First Lieutenant Powell is currently a student in the CBRN Captain's Career Course. She is assigned as a CRT leader for the 501st CBRNE Company, 23d CBRNE Battalion. She holds a bachelor's degree in political science from Belmont University, Nashville, Tennessee.