

Lessons Learned from Warrior Fortitude 23

by MAJ Devin Osburn

The challenges experienced during the deployment readiness exercise (DRE) “Warrior Fortitude 23” highlighted the importance of routinely conducting DRE exercises from the continental United States to the Korean Theater of Operations (KTO). Given that service in Korea is generally a short tour, ranging between 9 to 12 months, there is a high-rate of personnel turnover, which impacts unit continuity. Thus, Warrior Fortitude 23 and similar exercises should be conducted annually to ensure resilient systems and processes exist to rapidly generate and integrate combat power persist. The execution of Warrior Fortitude 23 presented unforeseen challenges in several areas, most notably in communications, mobility, and training area requirements and limitations. This article will capture lessons learned and provide recommendations for future Korea Rotational Force (KRF) units.

Eighth Army conducted a partial validation of the KTO’s operational employment data in August 2023. 3rd Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, supported the operation by accommodating training for a combined arms battalion minus (CAB (-)) from 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team (ABCT), 1st Armored Division (AD), using equipment from the Army’s Prepositioned Stock (APS). 3-61 Cavalry’s mission was to facilitate reception, staging, onward movement and integration (RSOI) of 1st Battalion, 77th Armored Regiment, 3rd ABCT, 1 AD - the gaining tactical unit (GTU) - with a primary emphasis directed towards onward movement of equipment and integration responsibilities.

Communications and reporting procedures caused friction during the initial stages of the exercise due to the speed of trans-Pacific information without a defined PACE plan or specified

reporting requirements. During the planning phase, all parties signed non-disclosure agreements (NDA), which limited coordination and collaboration. Due to the NDA and relative inexperience of the staff at echelon, reporting requirements were frantic after the first alert. The desire/need for information outpaced the capability of the GTU. With limited prior experience in the KTO, communications between 1 AD, III Corps, Eighth Army and subordinate commands required deliberate liaison officer emplacement. Future iterations of the DRE must include a clearly defined primary, alternate, contingency and emergency (PACE) plan and reporting requirements to mitigate communication shortfalls and to establish battle rhythm reporting requirements. By conducting a DRE annually, the staff at echelon will further optimize the information flow and enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of deployment operations. Since the exercise will be iterative, the staff can continue refining the required products to standardize RSOI.

The onward movement of equipment from Camp Carroll to Rodriguez Live Fire Complex (RLFC) was challenging due to the constrained timeline. Korea licensing requirements in armistice did not allow 1-77 Armor to conduct ground convoys. Therefore, all equipment required line haul and rail movement of APS equipment. Moreover, the Camp Casey Rail Yard has limited capability for a large influx of equipment, which constrains the generation of combat power. During rail operations, one train arrived with equipment facing the wrong direction, requiring a crane to offload each railcar and causing further delays to the timeline. Thus, when conducting rail operations in the KTO, it is imperative to understand the capabilities and timelines associated with planning the buildup of combat power on the Korean Peninsula. Furthermore, tactics, techniques and procedures need to be established at the outgoing railyard to ensure equipment is facing the correct direction at the receiving railyard to expedite the equipment transfer.

Figure 1. Cranes provide support to unload tanks at the Camp Casey Railyard, August 2023 (U.S. Army photo by MAJ Devin R. Osburn, Operations Officer, 3-61 Cavalry, 2nd SBCT, 4th ID)





Figure 2: Members of the Republic of Korea Army (ROKA); U.S. Forces Korea (USFK); 2nd Infantry Division; 2nd Stryker Brigade, 4th Infantry Division; and 1-77 Armor pose following the completion of Warrior Fortitude 23. (U.S. Army photo by LTC Daniel R. Bell, squadron commander, 3-61 Cavalry, 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division)

Training at RLFC has restrictions not typical to ranges in the United States due to impacts on surrounding communities. For instance, the live fire training timeline is 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., Monday through Saturday, unlike 24-hour training timelines allowed in the United States. This forced the GTU to adhere to a strict timeline to meet mission requirements.

To test and validate the readiness of the APS fleet, 1-77 Armor conducted tank gunnery and Bradley test fire at RLFC once the equipment arrived. Concurrently, 1-77 Armor conducted small arms qualification ranges and team/squad live-fire exercises at the Story Live Fire Complex – an adjacent training area about an hour from RLFC. 3-61 Cavalry provided 1-77 Armor with templates to facilitate their planning efforts based on their experience on the Peninsula. Due to the limited time to plan, resource, and execute the training, 3-61 Cavalry also established contacts and coordination for contracting, reserving training areas, and required life support. As the KRF-13 Unit, 3-61 Cavalry had direct contact with RLFC Range Operations to set conditions for the GTU to accomplish all U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) tasks and train with minimal distractions.

Since KRF units change every nine months, there was a knowledge gap in KTO training requirements, which could be codified by conducting DREs annually and establishing standing operating procedures that could be transferred during relief in place/transfer of authority operations.

The lessons learned in communications, mobility, and training area requirements are enough to justify an annual DRE exercise in the Korean Theater of Operations. Warrior Fortitude 23 was a successful DRE exercise due to the tenacity of 3-61 Cavalry and all parties involved. Still, several lessons were learned at each echelon, from FORSCOM to the battalion level. Every obstacle encountered forced leaders to adapt and overcome to accomplish the mission. Continued and iterative DRE exercises are essential to validate capabilities and to develop leaders able to fight tonight and win in the Indo-Pacific.

MAJ Devin Osburn is the brigade operations officer, 194th Armored Brigade, Fort Benning, GA. He most recently served as the S-3 of 3rd Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division. He has served in multiple assignments as an armor officer, including time as a

platoon leader and executive officer of 5th Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment at Fort Riley, KS; Caisson Platoon leader of 1st Battalion, 3rd Infantry Regiment, The Old Guard, Fort Myer, VA; troop commander, 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry Regiment, 173rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), Grafenwoehr, Germany; and exercise officer, 4th Infantry Division. He holds a master of business administration (MBA) from Purdue University, a master of operational studies (MOS) degree from Army University, Command and General Staff College, and he has a bachelor's of science degree in natural resource management from the University of Wyoming.

ACRONYM QUICK-SCAN

- ABCT** – armored brigade combat team
- APS** – army prepositioned stock
- DRE** – deployment readiness exercise
- FORSCOM** – U.S. Army Forces Command
- GTU** – gaining tactical unit
- KRF** – Korea Rotational Force
- KTO** – Korean Theater of Operations
- NDA** – non-disclosure agreements
- PACE** – primary, alternate, contingency and emergency
- RLFC** – Rodriguez Live Fire Complex