Cooperation of U.S. and South Korean Air and Ground Forces during the Korean War[1]

Bruce E. Bechtol, Jr.
U.S. Marine Corps Command and Staff College

ABSTRACT

An examination of the cooperation that existed between the air and ground forces of South Korea and the United States in the years leading up to the Korean War and in the early stages of the Korean War shows that there were many issues. The United Stated neither trained nor equipped the South Korean military with the forces or the equipment needed to defend itself against an attack from a well-trained and well-equipped North Korean People's Army. To be sure, there were also many readiness issues with U.S. forces The U.S. advisors to South Korea also lacked the language and cultural skills necessary to provide support to what was then an ally that was attempting to rebuild itself from the ravages of Japanese occupation and was struggling for legitimacy and survival. There are many lessons that can be learned today from this experience. Among them are better cultural understanding of an ally, better vision and planning for military forces, and improved cooperation at the highest levels of alliances.

Keywords: Korean War, NKPA, Soviet Union, Cold War, U.S.-ROK Alliance, South Korean Army, U.S. Army, U.S Air Force, U.S. Marine Corps, Military Readiness.

Introduction

The 60th anniversary of the Korean War marks an extremely important moment in American history. The Korean War was a wake-up call for American foreign policy. Despite the fact that World War II had been essentially a two-front war for Americans (Europe and Asia), much of the emphasis for supporting allies and for rebuilding nation-states went to Europe, not Asia (with Japan being the exception for obvious reasons). Americans knew very little about Korea—certainly far less than they do now. American government officials posted to Korea immediately after the war did not speak Korean for the most part, did not have a background or knowledge of Korea, and often did not even have background or experience in Asia at all.[2] This lack of knowledge—exhibited in both State Department and military personnel—would have an effect on cooperation between the United States and Korea as Washington looked to rebuilding a nation (partitioned artificially) ravaged by Japanese occupation and supporting a brand new government.

The focus of this article will be on cooperation between the air and ground forces of the United States and South Korea. As such, it will be necessary to focus on how the Americans helped to train and equip the forces of its ally. The only truly effective way to do this will be to conduct a "compare and contrast" of the key things that the Soviets did to prepare air and ground forces in North Korea, with an appropriate and matching analysis of how the United States did this with South Korean forces. I will not focus on all of the issues—and there are many. Rather, I will focus on what I consider to be some of the key issues involved in the training and equipping of the North Korean air force (NKAF) by the Soviets, and contrast that with how the United States did the same thing with the ROK air force (ROKAF). I will also compare and contrast how the Soviets trained and equipped (some of the key issues) the North Korean People's Army (NKPA), and contrast that with how the Americans trained and equipped the ROK army (ROKA), again focusing on what I believe to be some of the key issues.

While it is extremely important in my view to examine, compare, and contrast some of the key ways that the United States and the Soviet Union prepared (or failed to prepare) their allies in the North and South militarily, because much of the fighting throughout the entire war was carried out and led by American forces, it will be interesting to address the readiness and capabilities of U.S. forces in the years (1945-1950) before Washington obligated them to participate in the Korean War. Thus, I will examine the readiness for combat operations in Korea of U.S. Air Force, Army, and Marine units. I will also discuss the role that

U.S. airpower played in the early weeks of the war, and follow that up by conducting an examination of the role that U.S. ground power played in the early weeks and months of the war. I will complete my examination of the role of ground and air units by looking at how the United States "adjusted in mid-stream," or to be exact, how flexibility played a role in the war. The focus of this essay will be on the early phases of the war. Finally, I will conclude with some lessons learned from the Korean War for current and future warfare.

Soviet and U.S. Preparation of NKAF and ROKAF 1945-1950: A Sharp Contrast

The North Korean air force originally consisted of pilots who were either in Japanese or Chinese aviation units. It was originally founded as the Sinuiju air corps and the first class of 80 aviators graduated in 1946. In February 1948, the Korean Peoples Air Force (which I will continue to call NKAF throughout this paper) was formally established. From the very beginning, NKAF was trained and equipped by the USSR. Soviet advisers were involved in the training and indoctrination of North Korean officers and enlisted men from 1945 to 1949 (many North Korean pilots were also trained in the USSR). The Soviets began providing the Yak-20 and Po-2 trainers to the North Koreans by the end of 1948. By 1949, the training and equipping of the NKAF had truly intensified. The North Koreans were equipped with a small but efficient number of piston-driven aircraft. Key among these aircraft were the combat tested Il-10 attack aircraft, and the Yak-9 fighters. The North Koreans were also given numerous training, transport, and liaison aircraft. By 1950 as the North Korean government was gearing up for a full-scale war, the NKAF consisted of at least 210 aircraft, including at least 93 Il-10 attack aircraft, and 79 Yak-9 fighters. NKAF was organized into an air division (Soviet style), consisting of 2,200 men, and commanded by a major general.[3]

In sharp contrast to the focused build up, training, and equipping that the North Korean air force received from the Soviets, almost no formal training of ROKAF pilots was conducted by the United States between 1945-1950. In the years before the Korean War, the ROKAF only possessed 60 aircraft, all trainers: L-4's, L-5's, and T-6's. This rendered the ROKAF completely incapable of air interdiction, close air support, or strategic bombing missions. The very first aircraft that the ROKAF received that were capable of conducting any type of combat mission other than on an ad hoc basis were 10 P-51 fighters that they received from the U.S. Air Force in July of 1950.[4] Part of the problem for the ROKAF was that President Truman refused to provide President Rhee

with requested fighter and attack aircraft. Truman feared that a build-up of ROK combat power could lead to aspirations of an attack on the North.[5] Of course, the Soviets did not take this position with their North Korean allies. As stated above, the North Korean air force was given a small but effective air force that was then trained in Soviet doctrine and equipped with effective Soviet aircraft.

The results of the sharply contrasting styles that the United States and the Soviet Union used to deal with the two air forces of the divided Korean Peninsula were quite compelling. As North Korean attack aircraft swept down on South Korean military units, towns and cities, the South Korean air force literally had no fighters to interdict them. North Korean fighter aircraft were able to fly the skies over the entire peninsula limited only by the amount of fuel that they could carry. This also meant that South Korea could not provide close air support for its ground forces desperately trying to hold back North Korean forces driving down the Korean peninsula. This significantly enhanced the ability of NKAF not only to support its troops in offensive combat, but also to fly bombing missions against essentially unprotected South Korean towns, cities, industrial and agricultural centers, and military units. In short, the South Koreans had no real air force to speak of when war broke out in 1950, while the North Koreans had an air force capable of attack, fighter, and limited troops transport missions. This stark difference in capabilities led to an overwhelming advantage in airpower for North Korea in the early stages of the war before UN intervention.

More Sharp Contrast: The Equipping of ROK and North Korean Ground Forces

The reasons behind the philosophy and vision in the way the United States and the Soviet Union equipped the ground forces of their respective allies on the Korean Peninsula are really quite uncomplicated. The Soviet Union very quickly established a government in North Korea led by Kim Il-sung that was both brutal and well organized. It was centered on both the party and the military, and was based on an established ethos of men who had previously been guerrilla fighters against the Japanese during World War II.[6] In sharp contrast, the South Korean government was in many ways quite weak in the years from the end of World War II to the beginning of the Korean War in 1950. Those in government and in the military did not have the credibility of having fought against the Japanese as guerillas. In fact, during the early years of its occupation, the United States Army made the big mistake of placing former Japanese collaborators in positions both in the government and the military.[7]

The poor initial decisions made by U.S personnel as they helped establish a government in South Korea were among the factors that led to a very weak, unstable government, and one that was not viewed as truly legitimate by much of the populace in the country. This was important in the interwar years on the Korean Peninsula. The government in North Korea ruled the country, initially with heavy advice and support from the USSR, and with a Soviet-style iron hand. Thus, the army could focus on building itself up (again with strong Soviet support) for offensive operations against the South. In sharp contrast, the government in South Korea was, almost from the beginning, beset with instability and even uprising problems. Thus the South Korean military was from 1945 to 1950 viewed by the United States as more of a police force to keep order below the 38th parallel and the help keep the government in power. As former ambassador to South Korea John C. Muccio has stated, "Well, you have to bear in mind that the United States during military government days devoted no time at all towards developing the ROK militarily. They did concentrate on a police force aimed towards maintaining internal security, but very little was done in training and organizing military; an army or navy."[8]

Soviet support for North Korean ground forces equipping was perhaps most evident if one examines armor and artillery. The reason that these two elements are so important is that if combined with lethal airpower, the maneuver forces can move quickly and take ground—especially if their opponent does not have forces and equipment that can counter them. This was exactly the case with North Korea. The Soviets equipped the NKPA with enough tanks to initially form a brigade (about 120 tanks), and eventually (by June 1950) a full division of armor. The tank the North Koreans were equipped with (and trained to use) by the Soviets was the T-34 - a battle tested, rugged, and efficient weapons system in armor warfare at the time. The North Korean (Soviet supplied) tanks were put in the newly formed 105th Armor Division, which was formed from the nucleus of the 105th Armor Brigade (upgraded to a division because of the addition of another tank regiment by June 1950).[9]

Modern armor (for the time) was not the only way that the Soviets trained and equipped the North Koreans with effective and lethal weapons later used for an attack on the South. The North Koreans had seven combat-ready infantry divisions ready for attack into the South by June 1950. About a third of North Korean combat forces had experience fighting for Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) against the Nationalists in China, and this experience helped add to the readiness of the army. Within each division was a variety of artillery systems vital for inflicting casualties and pushing through defenses. As Roy Appleman said in his

excellent work, South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu:

> The artillery support of the North Korean division in 1950 closely resembled that of the older type of Soviet division in World War II. A division had 12 122-mm. howitzers, 24 76-mm. guns, 12 Su-76 self-propelled guns, 12 45-mm. antitank guns, and 36 14.5-mm. antitank rifles. In addition, the regiments and battalions had their own supporting weapons. Each regiment, for instance, had 6 120-mm. mortars, 4 76-mm. howitzers, and 6 45-mm. antitank guns. Each battalion had 9 82-mm. mortars, 2 45-mm. antitank guns, and 9 14.5-mm. antitank rifles. The companies had their own 61-mm. mortars.[10]

The way the United States trained and equipped the ROK army was starkly different from the way the Soviets to the North were helping their allies. The primary advisory unit to the South Korean military was known as the "Korea Military Advisory Group" (KMAG). This group of about 500 personnel was the core unit used to provide weapons and training to South Korea, and stayed in the ROK after the U.S. occupation force was withdrawn in 1949. The South Korean army had eight infantry divisions by June of 1950, but because (as discussed earlier) the United States was focused more on helping South Korea to build a military that Washington felt would be more of a "police force," these divisions did not have much of the combat equipment needed, not only for offensive operations, but for defensive operations should they have to fight a war against the well-equipped North Korean army.[11]

The largest caliber of artillery that the South Korean army had was an older version of the 105mm howitzer, and it had no armor shield for artillery crews. But the South Koreans also had no tanks, no medium artillery, and no recoilless rifles. In addition, the few bazookas and anti-tank weapons that the South Korean army did have when the war began in 1950 were highly ineffective against the armor on the North Koreans' T-34 tanks. It was not a situation where the South Koreans did not realize their lack of capabilities. In fact the ROK government had requested tanks. To once again quote Appleman's book, "In October of 1949 the ROK Minister of Defense had requested 189 M26 tanks but the acting chief of KMAG told him the KMAG staff held the view that the Korean terrain and the condition of roads and bridges would not lend themselves to efficient tank operations. About the same time a KMAG officer pointed out to Ambassador Muccio that the equipment provided the ROK's was not adequate to maintain the border, and he cited the fact that North Korean artillery out-ranged by several thousand yards the ROK 105-mm. howitzer M3 and shelled ROK positions at will while

being out of range of retaliatory fire."[12]

The vision, philosophy, training, and equipping of forces that the Soviet Union and the United States applied to their two allies reflected two very different styles of supporting an ally, in what would prove to be the first "proxy war" of the Cold War. If one looks at the evidence that is now widely available today, it becomes obvious that United States intelligence assets either did not know about the lethal weapons systems that the Soviets gave to the North Koreans, or did not think the North Koreans would ever attack the South. Regardless of the reasoning behind the failure to equip South Korea with the weapons systems needed to defend themselves against the North, the fact is now evident that this was a mistake. When the war broke out in 1950, the South Koreans were almost completely incapable of doing anything to stop the division of tanks the North Koreans had, or of matching up with the medium and heavy artillery each NKPA division was equipped with. This situation, combined with the fact that the South Koreans had no real air force to match up with North Korean fighter and attack aircraft, and did not have nearly the combat training or experience of most North Korean units, was a recipe for disaster in a conflict with the DPRK. This lack of capability is perhaps summed up best by award-winning historian Allan Millet, who says: "The American troops departed South Korea and left nothing behind that could stop a brigade of T-34-85 tanks covered by Soviet artillery and accompanied by tough, veteran Korean infantry. The 'puppet army' might be able to chase guerrillas and abuse villagers, but it was ill prepared to stop tanks with its small arms and limited numbers of antitank artillery."[13]

Supporting an Ally: Readiness of U.S. Airpower for the Korean War

As I have discussed earlier, the South Koreans had no air force or airpower capable of carrying out any of the missions necessary for sustained combat operations. Thus, left the mission in the early weeks and months of the Korean War was left to UN and U.S. airpower. For the purposes of this article I will focus on some of the challenges facing U.S. airpower in the early weeks and months of the war. Because the United States in essence has three services who conduct air combat operations, I will address each of them separately: the Air Force, the Navy, and the Marine Corps.

The primary responsibility for U.S. Air Force operations in the Far East in the years leading up to the Korean War fell to Far Eastern Air Forces (FEAF). This command was tasked with a wide variety of missions, but as a result of cutbacks did not train for all of them. The results of this budget shortfall were rather striking. In 1949, FEAF flew

350 anti-aircraft artillery tracking training missions, but only 14 close-air support training missions. By 1949, few aircraft in FEAF were configured for close-air support, and most of the famous (for their exploits during World War II) close-air support piston-engine aircraft P-51s were in storage. The transition to the F-80 occurred in 1949. The F-80 was certainly a faster aircraft than the P-51, but it had shorter dwell time. This meant that in a conflict, the F-80 would be far less effective for close-air support than the already proven P-51. Training and aircraft reflected the Air Force philosophy at the time that the main threat to prepare for was the Soviet Union, so there was no need to prepare for small wars that were considered unlikely to occur.[14] In what would prove to be a disastrous mistake in the early weeks of the Korean War, the Air Force had decided that it did not need forward air controllers for combat missions (primarily close-air support) and thus got rid of its "FAC's" in the late 1940s prior to the Korean War. This mistake was of course quickly realized in the early days of fighting during the Korean War, and the Air Force had to once again press "FAC's" into service, using the "Mosquito" airborne forward air controller system.[15]

Naval aviation was also severely limited by budget shortfalls in the interwar years between 1945 and 1950. Carrier warfare was severely underfunded in the post-World War II years as a result of the "peace dividend." The Navy was engaged in squabbles with the Air Force over budge and funding for major systems as American policy makers sought to adjust to major paradigm shifts in foreign policy and the "new world order" that was a result of the end of World War II. Nevertheless, Navy pilots engaged in training that would be useful for combat missions in the skies over Korea. This can, in my view, be attributed to the "nature of the beast." Naval aviators are trained for both air interdiction missions and close-air support missions. This would prove to be important for them, particularly in the early weeks and months of the Korean War.[16]

The Marine Corps experienced the largest cuts of any service following World War II. Aviation was no exception. On a shoestring budget, Marine Corps planners focused on close-air support for amphibious operations, land-based operations, and the support of littoral operations from expeditionary airfields and carriers. In what would prove to be a vital aspect of operations later in the Korean War, the Marines also focused on the integration of helicopters into combat and combat support operations. Marine pilots in 1950 were well trained, often still flying aircraft left over from World War II, and prepared to fight a war that involved supporting troops on the ground at all levels. This too would prove to be very important when it came the early operations in the Korean War. Close-air support was then and is now the

primary focus of the Marine Corps aviation mission.[17]

If one is to examine the evidence, it appears clear that there was both rivalry among the services and (particularly in the Air Force) a lack of focus on the kinds of missions that would prove to be vital for the Korean War. The United States was convinced after World War II that the "peace dividend" meant it could severely cut back on the budgets for all of its military services. As it became apparent that the Soviet Union had no intention of disbanding its military forces, the focus then became strategic forces that could meet the Soviet military threat.[18] This is not to say that the Soviet threat was not real or that preparation and readiness to meet that threat was not a vital mission. But a failure (again particularly on the part of the Air Force) to understand that military forces must still be prepared to fight smaller wars—and more traditional conflict—resulted in airpower not being ready to meet the North Korean military air threat as effectively as most would have hoped in the early days and weeks of the Korean War. The Marine Corps and the Navy in the interwar years continued to focus largely on more tactical missions, perhaps as much as anything because of budget concerns. Thus, while U.S. airpower did have a significant impact in the early days and weeks of the U.S. entry into the Korean War, its effectiveness was limited by the lack of planning for tactical warfare and close-air support missions exhibited by the Air Force in the time span of 1945-1950.

Supporting an Ally: Readiness of U.S. Ground/Marine Forces for the Korean War

Because there were a great number of factors affecting the readiness and capabilities of American ground power prior to the Korean War, space does not allow me to address all of them, or even a major portion. Thus, the focus of this article will be on two key units that played vital roles in the early stages of the war, and throughout. These two units, widely written about in numerous historical accounts, are the 1st Marine Division and the U.S. Army 7th Infantry Division. I will address the many challenges these two key units faced in the years leading up to the Korean War, and then briefly examine how this affected their ability to carry out effective combat operations.

The 7th Infantry Division was originally assigned occupation duty in Korea after the conclusion of World War II. By 1948 after elections had been held, all or most elements of the division had been pulled back to occupation duty in (mostly) northern Japan. The assignment in Japan was largely garrison duty. There was little time for actual field training, and the duty in Japan was far easier than most G.I.'s would have expected. The units in Japan were also experiencing the same budgetary

problems that all of the U.S. military was forced to go through in the interwar years and thus had little money for field training for a war that was not expected.[19] When the war began units were pulled piecemeal from the 7th Infantry Division, and this took away from unit cohesion, morale, experience, and troop strength. In the early days and weeks of the Korean War, the 7th Infantry Division contributed key personnel to the 24th and 25th and the 1st Cavalry Divisions as they loaded out to Korea.[20] Thus, when the 7th Infantry Division was called on to move out as a division for the landing at Inchon, it was literally down to 50-percent strength. In order to bring the division up to personnel strength, it was augmented by 8,600 Korean Augmentation to the US Army (KATUSA). These raw recruits had literally been pulled off of the streets of the towns and villages of South Korea and shipped to Japan for training. For many of them, this training was no more than two weeks of "orientation" training. Most spoke no English, and none of them had any training in amphibious warfare.[21] If one can imagine the leadership challenge that that the division commander faced, try to imagine commanding a division where 40 percent of your troops don't speak your language, have almost no formal combat training, and you are leading them into a highly complicated, volatile, combat environment.

In the interwar years the Marine Corps ground units faced all of the same challenges that their aviation brothers had. President Truman had a strong bias against the Marine Corps, and once is quoted to have said that "the Marine propaganda machine rivaled Stalin's." From a peak strength of nearly half a million men at the end of World War II, the Marine Corps strength was down to 74,279 men by early 1950. By 1950, the Marine Corps was still using World War II equipment, even uniforms, and training and deployment budgets had been cut to the bone. To the credit of the Marine Corps, and its leadership, this did not matter. July 1950 found a Marine Corps that was combat ready and a Marine Reserve that was comprised largely of World War II veterans. In 1950, though small, the Marine Corps was quickly able to contribute efficient combat power in the form of the 1st Marine Provisional Brigade to the fight at the Pusan perimeter. For the landing at Inchon, the brigade was pulled out of the Pusan perimeter (after contributing to some quite ferocious fighting), and reformed as the 5th Marine Regiment. The 1st Marine Regiment was hastily assembled from posts and stations throughout the Corps, as well as recalled reservists (many combat veterans), the 7th Marine Regiment only existed on paper in 1950 and included pulling in Marines who were deployed "on float" in Europe. These three regiments would then form the 1st Marine Division—the division that spearheaded the landing at Inchon.[22]

A "compare and contrast" of the 1st Marine Division and the 7th Infantry Division shows two units that sharply varied in both readiness and capabilities. Despite huge budgetary concerns, slashed personnel, and equipment that was mostly older than that of the other services, in 1950, the Marines were trained and ready to go to war. This is a textbook example of how a military service can overcome challenges faced in tough political and economic times. That said, many of the problems encountered by the 7th Infantry Division at the beginning of the Korean War were the fault neither of the commanders or the troops who were in the various regiments. The 7th Infantry Division was placed on occupation duty that tended to reduce the readiness of its troops. When the war broke out, the piecemeal way that units were pulled out of Japan to support other divisions in Korea tended to take away from the cohesion of the division and depleted its personnel strength. Finally, being augmented (by almost 40 percent) with poorly trained Korean troops almost right before going into combat was not the kind of reinforcement that the division needed as it went into the tough fighting in Inchon and Seoul.

U.S. Air and Ground Power in the Early Weeks of the War

In the early weeks of the war—once UN forces joined the fight—U.S. Air Force and Navy air was effective in taking out some armor and artillery units. When U.S. troops arrived, the largest portion of sorties focused on close air support, and remained so until the end of the war. The North Korean air force was effectively destroyed within the first few weeks of U.S. entry into the war.[23] Air to air combat missions did not again become an issue until 1951, when the famous "MiG Alley" confrontations occurred.[24]

Weaknesses of early U.S. Air Force combat missions were many. In the opening weeks of the American entry into the war, the Air Force had no effective forward air control system in effect. In these early stages of the conflict, there were no airfields for U.S. Air Force combat aircraft to take off from on the Korean peninsula. Thus, in the beginning, all combat sorties for the Air Force originated in Japan. This was an issue for F-80s that because of the long flight time did not have long dwell time for air to air interdiction or close air support combat missions. P-51s were quickly pressed into service, as extra P-51s were acquired from the Air National Guard (the P-51 piston-driven aircraft had longer dwell time). FEAF quickly adapted to the situation by using many of the older P-51s which could remain over targets longer. This remained important until airfields on the Korean peninsula could later be procured as UN forces took back much of the geography of the Korean peninsula. By

mid-July, the Air Force had developed use of the T-6 aircraft for forward air controller missions, and this ad hoc usage proved effective. U.S. Air Force airlift and airdrop capabilities proved to be effective almost immediately.[25] The proximity of the Pusan perimeter to airfields in Japan was ideal for both air interdiction and close air support missions. FEAF interdiction missions focused on taking out key rail and highway targets. Interdiction had to take a back seat to close air support because of the intensity of the battle in the Pusan perimeter. Nevertheless, interdiction had an enormous impact on the capabilities of the NKPA to fight UN forces.[26]

Navy aviation was able to join the fight early from the decks of carriers deployed on the coastline of the Korean peninsula. Many Navy pilots were already experienced at flying both counter-land/sea and counter-air missions, which was part of naval doctrine. Initially, key weaknesses the Navy had included small numbers of aircraft, and a small number of carriers to participate in combat operations.[27] The Marine Corps mission for its aviation units lent itself to the Korean War. The Marine Air-Ground concept and the fact that Marine officers were trained to use that concept effectively meant that USMC aircraft provided the most effective close air support during combat operations, particularly during the early phases of the war. That said, command and control problems existed between the Marines and Air Force units, though these issues were worked out later in the war.[28]

Ground and Marine forces in the early weeks of the war faced perhaps the toughest missions. The readiness and capabilities of 7th Infantry Division have previously been described. As units were pulled piecemeal from the division the readiness was hurt even more than it would have been because of the circumstances described earlier. To exacerbate the issue, the first unit to go toe to toe with the NKPA (Task Force Smith), was badly outgunned and undermanned compared with the armor and infantry forces it faced. The first ground battle in Korea with U.S. forces occurred near Osan on July 5, 1950. It has been described as follows:

> Fire from two American 75 mm recoilless rifles did not damage the advancing T-34s. No anti-tank mines had been brought along, and anti-tank guns, a vital part of World War II armies, were no longer used. As the tanks continued, the Americans opened up with the 2.36 inch bazookas. These weapons were quickly obsolete in World War II and predictably could not penetrate the T-34s' frontal armor. They were even of questionable use against the weaker areas of the tanks.[29]

The battle of Osan was the first ground combat engagement that Americans were involved in, but as more units quickly were called into action, U.S. combat power began to build up. Of course, despite this, UN forces were pushed back to what is now famously known as the Pusan perimeter. It was at the Pusan perimeter that U.S. Marines first saw action. The 1st Marine Provisional Brigade, comprised of the 5th Marine Regiment and supporting Marine Air Group, almost immediately had an impact. Part of the reason for this was because the Marines brought weapons with them that were capable of taking out North Korean tanks, medium and heavy artillery, and advancing infantry forces. Marine artillery, tanks, and aviation proved to be effective against the NKPA, until the brigade was pulled out to once again fight with the rest of its division at Inchon.[30] Of course, UN forces, the majority of which were U.S. and ROK forces, did manage to hold on at the Pusan perimeter. It was this brave defensive action that allowed the 1st Marine Division and the 7th Infantry Division to land at Inchon, disrupt and destroy NKPA lines of communication, take Seoul, and turn the tide of the war.31 There is no arguing with success—and allied forces proved that they could adjust in mid-stream.

Lessons Learned from the Korean War for Future Warfare

The Korean War is a classic example of keeping in mind the saying, "Don't lose sight of the forest for the trees." The U.S. Air Force was preparing for large-scale nuclear conflict with the USSR and did not anticipate fighting wars on a smaller scale or against a "more primitive" though well-armed (by the Soviets) enemy. It is apparent from the Korean War that proper readiness for airpower should include doctrine and training for a wide variety of conflicts. The same lessons apply to the U.S. Army. Focused on Europe more than Asia, funding and manning of units in the Far East led to a gap in capabilities and readiness that would prove quite costly in the early weeks of the war.[32] The Marines did not have these problems, but only because the Marine Corps had been largely overlooked in the interwar years by high-level defense officials and was so small that many thought it might actually cease to exist as a service. The need for a Marine Corps in any conflict the United States would face was never again called into question after the Korean War.

When it comes to cooperation between allies, particularly the United States and South Korea, there are also valuable lessons that can be learned by examining the pre-Korean War years and the early weeks and months of the conflict. When providing training and equipment to an important regional ally, the United States must look not only at the

internal situation of that ally but also at the readiness and capabilities of that ally's main threat—in this case North Korea. Certainly this applies today. North Korea, despite its dire economic woes, has spent 30 to 50 percent of its GDP on maintaining a military than can legitimately threaten the South.[33] Thus, when senior South Korean officials tell the United States that they have gaps in their ability to defend against the North Korean threat—as they did in 1949-1950—the United States would be wise to listen to them. This has relevance in the current context of Korean peninsula issues as the debate of transfer of wartime operational control from a unified command to a split command (scheduled for 2012) is in reality based on an analysis of whether or not the South Korean military has the capabilities to carry out the roles and missions called for should a split command structure come into effect in 2012.[34]

Finally, the importance of understanding an ally's culture, politics, and motivations are highly important in the military context. The United States had few advisers between 1945 and 1950 who could speak Korean, had an Asian background, or who understood the history and politics of the Korean peninsula.[35] This led to many mistakes in Washington's early dealings with South Korea—and one hopes that these mistakes have been alleviated in today's context of modern East Asian affairs.

Notes:

---

[1] The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Marine Corps Command and Staff College, the Marine Corps University, or the United States government.

[2] For an excellent analysis of the challenges facing the early American occupation of South Korea in 1945 and how the United States military met those challenges, see William Stueck and Boram Yi, "'An Alliance Forged in Blood': The American Occupation of Korea, the Korean War, and the US–South Korean Alliance," Journal of Strategic Studies, vol. 33, No. 2 (April, 2010), online at http://pdfserve. informaworld.com/943432__921637609.pdf.

[3] See Gordon L. Rottman, Korean War Order of Battle: United States, United Nations, and Communist Ground, Naval, and Air Forces, 1950-1953 (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Praeger, 2002), pp. 169-170.

[4] For an excellent analysis of the ROK air force prior to the beginning of the Korean War, see Jim Givens, "Republic of Korea Air Force (ROKAF)," in The Korean War, March 15, 2010, at www.korean-war.com/AirWar/ROKAF.html.

[5] See James F. Schnabel, United States Army in the Korean War, Policy And

Direction: The First Year (Center Of Military History, U.S. Army, Washington, D. C., 1992), online at www.history.army.mil/

books/pd-c-02.htm.

[6] For more on how former guerrilla fighters helped to form the ethos of the government and the army in North Korea, see Dae-sook Suh, Kim Il-sung: The North Korean Leader (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 98-101.

[7] See Kim Young Sik, "The Left-Right Confrontation in Korea – Its Origin," Association for Asian Research, November 17, 2003, at www.asianresearch.org/articles/1636.html.

[8] "Oral History Interview with John C. Muccio," Harry S Truman Library and Museum Transcript, Harry S Truman Library and Museum Homepage, December 7, 1973, www.trumanlibrary.org/

oralhist/muccio3.htm

[9] Roy Appleman, South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu (Center of Military History, United States Army, Washington, DC, 1961), at www.kmike.com/Appleman/Chapter2.htm.

[10] Ibid.

[11] "The Korean War: The Outbreak," Center of Military History, United States Army, Washington, DC, 1961 (September 13, 2006), at www.history.army.mil/

brochures/kw-outbreak/outbreak.htm.

[12] Appleman, South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu.

[13] Allan R. Millett, The War for Korea, 1945-1950: A House Burning, (Lawrence, Kans.: University Press of Kansas, 2005), p. 229.

[14] For more on the readiness and capabilities of the U.S. Air Force FEAF units, see Wayne Thompson and Bernard C. Nalty, Within Limits: The U.S. Air Force and the Korean War (Dayton, Ohio: Air Force History and Museum Programs, 1996), pp. 2-18.

[15] See "Mosquito Airborne Controllers," National Museum of the U.S. Air Force, 2010, at www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=15079.

[16] See Thomas J. Cutler, "Sea Power and Defense of the Pusan Pocket, June-September 1950," in Edward J. Marolda, ed., U.S. Navy in the Korean War (Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 2007), pp. 2-4.

[17] For details about the budgeting issues the Marine Corps faced after World War II, and how planners and senior officers adjusted their operations to ensure the readiness and capabilities of aviation units, see Victor H. Krulak, First to Fight: An Inside View of the Marine Corps (Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 1984), pp. 5-113.

[18] See James Schlesinger, "European Security and the Nuclear Threat Since 1945," Rand Corporation Paper, April 1967, at www.rand.org/pubs/papers/2008/

P3574.pdf.

[19]See Karl H. Lowe, "America's Foreign Legion: The 31st Infantry Regiment at War and Peace," 31st U.S. Infantry Regiment, 2010, at http://31stinfantry.org/Documents/Chapter%2009.pdf.

[20] Harry G. Summers, "The Korean War: A Fresh Perspective," The Korean War, June 10, 2008, at www.rt66.com/~korteng/SmallArms/24thID.htm.

[21] See Lowe, "America's Foreign Legion."

[22] Krulak, First to Fight, pp. 120-140.

[23] See Pamela Feltus, "The Korean War," U.S. Centennial of Flight Commission, 2000, at www.centennialofflight.gov/essay/Air_Power/korea/

AP38.htm.

[24] John T. Correll, "MiG Alley," Air Force-Magazine, vol. 93, No. 4 (April, 2010), online at www.airforce-magazine.com/MagazineArchive/Pages/2010/

April%202010/0410alley.aspx.

[25] See "Mosquito Airborne Controllers" and "Korean War: The First Major Air War After World War II," Air Force Armament Museum, at www.afarmamentmuseum.com/korean_war.shtml.

[26] Roger F. Kropf, "The U.S. Air Force in Korea: Problems that Hindered the Effectiveness of Airpower," Airpower Journal, Spring, 1990, online at www.airpower.au.af.mil/airchronicles/ apj/apj90/spr90/3spr90.htm.

[27] Cutler, "Sea Power and Defense of the Pusan Pocket," pp. 5-51.

[28] See: "Korea," History of Marine Corps Aviation," 2008, at www.acepilots.com/usmc/hist14.html, and Kropf, "The U.S. Air Force in Korea."

[29] "Task Force Smith," Return to Korea, 2006, at www.johnsmilitaryhistory.

com/tfsmith.html.

[30] See John C. Chapin, Fire Brigade: U.S. Marines at the Pusan Perimeter, Korean War Commemorative Series, (Washington DC: Marine Corps Historical Center, 2000), online at www.koreanwar.org/ usmckorea/PDF_Monographs/

KoreanWar.FireBrigade.pdf.

[31] See Carl H. Builder, Steven C. Bankes, and Richard Nordin, Command Concepts: A Theory Derived from the Practice of Command and Control (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand Corporation, 1999), pp. 73-87.

[32] See Cliff Staten, "U.S. Foreign Policy Since World War II: An Essay on Reality's Corrective Qualities," American Diplomacy, July 30, 2005, online at www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/ item/2005/0709/stat/

staten_reality.html.

[33] "Kim Jong-il Gets 20% of N. Korea's Budget for His Own Use," Chosun Ilbo, April 12, 2010, at http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2010/04/12/20

10041200587.html.

[34] For more analysis on the debate regarding the transfer of wartime operations control in the South Korea-U.S. military alliance that was scheduled for implementation in 2012 (but has now been postponed), see Bruce E. Bechtol Jr., "The U.S. and South Korea: Prospects for Transformation, Combined Forces Operations, and Wartime Operational Control: Problems and Remedies," International Journal of Korean Studies, vol. 13, No. 2 (Fall/Winter, 2009), pp. 71-96.

[35] See Robert D. Ramsey III, Advising Indigenous Forces: American Advisors in Korea, Vietnam, and El Salvador, Global War on Terrorism Occasional Paper 18 (Fort Leavenworth, Kans.: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006), online at www.cgsc.edu/carl/download/csipubs/ramsey.pdf.