

1968 Quarterly Operational Report for the 7th Infantry

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Division Artillery, Period Ending 30 April 1968 (H)

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In 1968, tensions were much higher in the Korean Peninsula than today. The United States had a variety of tactical and theater nuclear weapons deployed in South Korea and surrounding oceanic and airspace, and on other forward bases in the region including Okinawa and Guam.

To test the readiness of the 7th Infantry Division in Korea to use nuclear artillery, various command post and field training exercises were conducted, and subsequent training programs implemented. It is likely that both North and South Korean military intelligence and leadership was well-informed on these exercises which, in turn, may have affected Korean proliferation propensity via demonstration effects.

These documents reveal that the US Army was exploring whether it could reliably and efficiently lower the operational assignment of nuclear weapons from the Brigade to Division level in order to “facilitate the timely utilization of this type of fire [nuclear weapons]” to respond to a North Korean attack or threat. These exercises offered the following lessons learned on lowering assignment of nuclear artillery in the 7th Infantry Division:

“It was determined that nuclear weapons can be assigned as low as the brigade level; however, more training was necessary in the Division to adequately utilize the full nuclear resources.” [page 3]

“Another major mission undertaken by the Division Artillery was extensive planning and training in the employment of nuclear weapons. At its conception, discussion concerned the feasibility of assigning nuclear weapons to the Brigade Commander as opposed to the weapons assigned no lower than the Division. It was first determined that assigning weapons to this level would facilitate the timely utilization of this type of fire. This determination pointed out several problem areas to include the communications facilities available for such missions or requests and also the proper command and staff channels to be used...The results of the training showed that the Division and its organic units are presently capable of delivering effective nuclear fires on any target.” [page. 3]

“It was found that during field exercises nuclear fire planning was in effect however, the mechanics of nuclear fire requesting and the actual firing of the weapon were unrealistic. The fire missions concerned were not transmitted to the delivery unit on a timely manner and there was a general breakdown in the use of nuclear weapons on a training basis...If the nuclear weapons was to be assigned to the Brigade Commander then the personnel at that command level would require intensive training into the concepts of this type of weapon...Of primary concern was the plausibility of assigning weapons to a Brigade Commander as opposed to allocating these weapons.” [page 7]

“Workable plans and procedures could be developed for the effective delivery of special weapons on a target. The assignment of small yield weapons to the Brigade Commander was far more effective than the allocation of such weapons primarily because of the timely completion of the mission. Through adequate training the Division has become proficient in the timely transmission of nuclear requests and missions. The Division can adequately deliver a nuclear weapon on a target in a timely manner consistent with the assigned mission.” [page 7]

“Nuclear weapons are allocated to CG [Commanding General], Eighth Army, and are sub-allocated to major subordinate commands. For training purposes, the assignment of nuclear weapons can be simulated. Allocations of nuclear rounds are made for planning purposes. It is beyond the purview of CG, Eighth Army, to assign nuclear weapons at this time...This headquarters has been conducting bi-weekly allegro code exercises to assist subordinate commands in training their personnel in nuclear weapons messages. All units which have a nuclear capability participate in this training program.” [page 14]

This report was released to the Nautilus Institute under the US Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

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