

KATUSA

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THE word KATUSA* is almost forgotten. About the most it produces today is a faint glimmer of recollection. Yet it wasn't long ago that KATUSA seemed like the answer to many soldiers' prayers. For a while it promised to solve what was probably the most pressing problem in Korea at the time—combat manpower. How the unusual, perhaps unique program worked is in itself interesting; why it failed is significant; together, these items add up to a lesson.

In studying the KATUSA lesson it must be emphasized that we are examining a specific, separate program and the draftees it produced—not the trained Republic of Korea (ROK) soldier or the ROK Army in general.

Many Obvious Advantages

KATUSA came into being not long after the start of the Korean conflict. The army of the Republic of Korea had been hit hard and faced a staggering task of reorganization while still under attack. The American units committed on the Korean peninsula had been maintained at low peacetime strengths and they suffered extremely large numbers of casualties in the early engagements. Some infantry companies quickly were reduced in size to 50 men; a company of 75 soldiers was not uncommon. Out of this situation emerged the KATUSA idea—augmenting US combat units by integrating Republic of Korea soldiers into American ranks.

The idea had many advantages. Since American replacements were not immediately available, Korean troops rapidly would build up the committed US units to near-authorized strengths. They would give American units troops familiar with the unusual terrain, climate, and language of that remote part of the world. They would, in a relatively short time, become familiar with and trained in US military methods and techniques. Also, reconstituting depleted American ranks with Koreans would make it possible to absorb into the armed forces for immediate use against the aggressor more Koreans than the Korean Army could handle at the moment.

The details were worked out by representatives of the Eighth US Army in Korea, the US Military Advisory Group to Korea, and the Republic of Korea Army who met in mid-August 1950 and formulated the KATUSA plan. It was no easy task. They had to decide how they might best procure, equip, train, transport, and integrate approximately 40,000 Korean soldiers quickly into the four American divisions then committed in Korea and a fifth still in Japan.

They decided to share the burden. The Republic of Korea would procure the troops by means of its own regular governmental machinery. The ROK Army, with the help of American supervisors, would train the new troops. The US Army would equip and transport them to the units which would integrate them. Pay-

* Korean Army Troops, US Army.

The KATUSA experiment—augmenting US combat units by integrating ROK soldiers—was adopted as an expediency in time of great crisis. An analysis of the results provides valuable lessons for the future

ment of troops, disciplinary control, and courts-martial jurisdiction would remain a responsibility of the ROK Army. Special Korean teams were to be placed on duty with US units to administer KATUSA personnel, and a special section of the ROK Army Adjutant General's Department would handle KATUSA records.

The way it worked was simple. Each KATUSA soldier was processed through a ROK Army reception center where he received a uniform and a carbine or a rifle. (The initial American problem here was obtaining clothing—particularly shoes—in small sizes for Koreans.) Equipped, the KATUSA soldier then went to one of several training centers for 10 days, during which he learned to fire his weapon and was given basic instruction in such subjects as personal hygiene, field sanitation, and military discipline. The centers turned out a total of at least 500 trained Koreans each day for the US divisions. Thus every fourth day each of the four American divisions in Korea received 500 KATUSA troops. Additional troops in training were assembled for shipment to the fifth US division still in Japan. The plan looked so good that the decision was made to augment a sixth US division, also in Japan.

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To Bolster Company Units

The augmentation of US units was to take place at the infantry company and artillery battery level. Each company and battery was to receive no more than 100 Koreans. How they were to be integrated was left to the discretion of each US division commander. Yet he was not to use them as common laborers or cargo carriers. He was to provide them with the same gratuitous issue of quartermaster items that US soldiers received. He was to give them the same medical care in the combat area, but KATUSA soldiers requiring hospital treatment would be evacuated to ROK Army hospitals.

When KATUSA soldiers first appeared at US units, American officers and men welcomed them with open arms. They were glad to see fresh troops coming in. Unfortunately, initial optimism soon faded. The program did not work out as expected.

The first place where the system broke down was in the procurement of KATUSA troops. Because of the chaos in South Korea during the first few months of the conflict, recruiting was simply a matter of gathering people off the streets. One soldier showed up at his US unit carrying his briefcase containing business papers; he had been on his way to work when recruited. Another KATUSA soldier had been enlisted while he was on his way home from the pharmacy with medicine for his sick wife; he still had the pills in his pocket when he reported for duty.

Not only recruiting but processing the draftees posed difficulties which resulted in deficiencies. Because of a lack of Korean medical facilities, KATUSA soldiers were not immunized against disease. American medical officers, operating with shortages of supplies for Americans, naturally were concerned about the possible introduction of disease and the increased potentiality of epidemic disease.

Lacking classification machinery, the ROK Army had no way of knowing how many potential leaders, if any, were part

of any one increment sent to the training centers. Some groups of men had no individuals capable of being developed into good noncommissioned officers in the time available and under conditions then existing. How important this was soon became obvious from the repeated reiterations of American commanders on the need for Korean leaders.

Training a Major Problem

The training was the second place where the system broke down. Even before the training centers were established, each US division received an initial increment of 250 untrained Koreans. Some units were able to give these KATUSA troops two or three weeks of training; but others were forced to commit them to combat at once. The units able to train their Koreans before combat generally found that they soon were able to give a creditable performance. The units which had no time to train the new men naturally found them unfit—"they didn't so much as know how to load a rifle."

It should not have been surprising when the original 250 KATUSA troops received by the 2d Division and committed immediately with a battalion of the 9th Infantry were overrun during the night of 31 August 1950. The division reported "many desertions and stragglers," a report which must be judged against the further admission that "straggling was not confined to the ROK personnel." The second KATUSA increment to the 2d Division—500 soldiers who had received 84 hours of training before their arrival—"had excellent morale and have done good work as combat riflemen." "ROK personnel with this division are doing well," came the report. Yet two weeks later the division bleakly stated, without comment, that KATUSA troops had abandoned their positions during an enemy attack.

Experience elsewhere was similar. The 1st Cavalry Division reported the KATUSA's "susceptible to training," yet

observed that when they were in a fire fight they expended ammunition "rapidly with little or no results." It was difficult to get them to move forward to make contact with the enemy. "This situation may improve with time and experience" was a hopeful note; but 10 days later the division reported that KATUSA troops had left their positions on several occasions, thereby "jeopardizing the . . . remaining American troops."

No matter how the US divisions integrated their KATUSA troops into the ranks, the deficiencies of procurement and of training were apparent. The 2d Division, which fed its KATUSA troops into the existing units, estimated KATUSA combat effectiveness after a week or so of experience (in early September) as between 25 and 75 percent that of American troops. The division artillery, which used Koreans as wiremen and interior guards, estimated their effectiveness at 80 percent; the military police company rated them 90 percent effective. Ten days later these estimates declined to an over-all figure of 50 percent, and by mid-October they were down to 10 percent.

Buddy System Helped

The 25th Division not only paired a KATUSA soldier with an American "buddy" in the infantry companies to facilitate the passing on of military know-how, but also formed several platoons and one entire company of Koreans as an experiment. After about two weeks the division estimated its KATUSA personnel as having a combat effectiveness of 25 percent that of American troops. Ten days later the division found that Koreans in the buddy system were 50 percent effective; those organized into separate platoons and squads under American non-commissioned officers were 35 percent effective. KATUSA troops in various sections of the lettered artillery batteries were 25 percent effective; those with the reconnaissance company 60 percent. By

mid-October, after all the KATUSA troops had been integrated into the existing squads, the division estimated 60 percent effectiveness in the reconnaissance company, an efficiency of 48 percent in one regiment, and between 20 and 35 in the other units.

The 24th Division used its Koreans as riflemen in the infantry squads, as litter bearers in the medical companies, and as security troops for artillery positions. Estimated combat effectiveness as infantrymen increased from 10 percent in early September to 45 percent by the following month; for the other elements an average of 30 percent. The division reported better than average success when each Korean worked with two American buddies.

The 1st Cavalry Division took its KATUSA soldiers into the infantry squads as riflemen, assistant machinegunners, communications linemen, and ammunition bearers; into the artillery gun squads as linemen and security guards for line crews; and into the reconnaissance company as riflemen, scouts, and observers. Combat effectiveness during the month of September was judged as 50 percent.

Two Controlling Factors

The relatively low performance ratings for KATUSA personnel were the result, basically, of two factors. First, they could not have adequate training. They did not know how to use their weapons. They were unschooled in team tactics. They had not been trained in modern field sanitation practices. They had not had enough training in military discipline and sometimes were difficult to control. (Since offenders had to be turned over to the Korean Army, US units could not administer corrective measures rapidly enough for effective remedy.) In short, 10 days of indoctrination in a training center could not produce soldiers no matter how thorough the program.

Second, there was a vast language and cultural separation between Koreans and

Americans. There never were enough English-speaking Koreans or Korean-speaking US personnel to achieve sound understanding and integration and to permit true coordination and control of all troops in combat. Besides placing an additional burden on all combat leaders, the language barrier made it impossible to train Koreans in the technical aspects of weapons and gunnery.

The cultural difference, although more subtle, was no less a problem. The Korean draftee could not be expected to grasp the American concept of everyday living. Understandably, he was bewildered by a new world not only of attitudes and habits but of strange people and machines. The problem of adjustment for a man suddenly thrown into the complex pattern of living in a highly organized modern army in combat could not be solved in so short a period of time.

There was no time for Americans to develop with Koreans the personal relationships necessary for the proper performance of an infantry squad—that echelon where a man's life depends to a large extent on the action of his companions. Where his life was at stake the trained soldier on the line could not be tolerant of any mistake, failure, or undependability, even though the cause might be inexperience or lack of understanding.

Some Performed Well

As a result of the lack of training, the language barrier, and the difference in cultural background the Koreans were unable to perform skilled technical jobs. They did not know or understand supply discipline. Many could not perform well in independent positions such as outposts and listening posts and on guard duty, yet they were quite effective with artillery and service units. Artillerymen used them in the higher numbered positions in the gun squads, where commands could be relayed by arm and hand signals, and as security guards. Ordnance units found them to be

careful welders and good mechanics. Signal units discovered them useful as guards and wiremen.

The KATUSA soldiers obviously tried to be of service in a situation as difficult for them as for the US troops they sought to help. But during the initial and early periods of the experiment—the critical time, when combat troops were needed desperately—their lack of training often tended to make them as much a burden as a help. Their appearance brought joy to US soldiers in depleted units, but the mere presence of more men in uniform was not enough.

Two months after the start of the program, after about 15,000 Koreans had reached US units, the KATUSA experiment was curtailed. In the latter part of October 1950, Eighth US Army headquarters permitted the American divisions to return to the Korean Army those KATUSA soldiers not yet up to standard. The divisions immediately reduced their KATUSA strengths by several thousand; 6,000 Koreans were brought back from Japan. These troops, who had practical training while with American units, formed the cadres of new Korean Army units.

Soon afterward, as American replacement troops became available in increasing numbers, the divisions were allowed to reduce their KATUSA soldiers from the original basis of 100 per company to 25. No additional KATUSA assignments were made to US combat troops, but service units and rear area installations, where KATUSA soldiers performed well, continued to receive limited numbers of them until April 1951.

Those who remained with the US combat elements for several months eventually were sufficiently trained by combat to be an asset to their organizations. They proved invaluable in handling refugees, in securing information from civilians, and in establishing identities of orientals during night operations. If a natural selec-

tivity toward the survival of the fittest prevailed, those KATUSA troops still with US units in 1951 were competent, seasoned soldiers. Unfortunately, when a Korean was evacuated from his US unit for medical or other reasons, he was lost to the command, for he returned to duty through Korean Army replacement channels to a Korean unit. The fact that US troops clamored for a change in this arrangement proved that a good soldier always is appreciated by other soldiers.

Experience Made Soldiers

A year after the program began only a few KATUSA soldiers were left. In the words of a division commander, these troops by then were *highly trained, well-disciplined, and skilled combat soldiers serving for the most part with infantry companies. They are of the utmost value as fighting soldiers, interpreters, and in contacts with Korean civilians.* By then, the original impetus for the program was long since gone. The need had been met by different means.

Although the KATUSA program *did* provide essential assistance to depleted US forces, as an emergency measure to provide *combat effective* soldiers *immediately* it failed. The rapidity of the integration program, the lack of training and the consequent absence of military skills among the KATUSA members, and the profound language and cultural differences made the KATUSA solution fall short of the immediate goal. But this was due to no inherent Korean deficiency. No nationality group so different from Americans could have performed with greater effectiveness. Only after several months of association did better understanding, partial grasp by each group of the other's language and customs, and military training bring about real integration.

Those KATUSA soldiers who survived and who demonstrated an ability to adapt to a new situation and absorb a rigorous training on the battlefield made the transi-

tion. Unfortunately, they were only a handful when compared with the number fed into the program.

Lesson for the Future

In this age of speed when armed conflict may develop literally overnight, when the weapons of war can produce chaos in a matter of seconds, and when trained foot soldiers on the ground well may be the only agency capable of restoring some semblance of order, there is a lesson in the KATUSA experience.

The lesson points to the need for a continued Military Assistance Advisory Group program throughout the free world, a

MAAG program of military cooperation devoted to preparing combat troops for instant readiness to meet the challenge of emergency. Implicit in the MAAG effort should be the intent to create a body of linguists among our own troops and among our allies for the administrative echelons as well as for the combat level—troops not only linguistically effective but also combat ready. If, as seems likely, war in the future will open with a violent and devastating shock, the capacity to regain combat effectiveness at once may well determine the outcome of the conflict. *Trained* troops provide the best guarantee of an outcome favorable to the free world.

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The printing of this new material as compared with previous years has imposed a critical load upon the facilities of the Army Field Printing Plant at Leavenworth, which supports the MILITARY REVIEW in addition to the instructional requirements of the United States Army Command and General Staff College.

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