

“Katchi Kapshida!”

We go together: rewarding service on the far side of the world at MARFORK

by LtCol Matthew R. Crouch

Each year, roughly one-third of the Marine Corps engages with the assignments team at Manpower and Reserve Affairs to determine where their next set of orders will place them in service to the Nation and the Corps. This year those discussions will be informed by an increased focus on the Marine Corps’ role in the Indo-Pacific. Geopolitical competition with the People’s Republic of China (PRC) is shaping attitudes throughout government, and within the DOD, the Indo-Pacific is front and center. The Commandant, rightly recognizing the critical nature of our Service’s role in supporting that “Pivot to the Pacific,” is placing greater emphasis on individual service in the region and asking that Marines of all ranks and backgrounds consider a tour in the Indo-Pacific. Traditionally, the confluence of the needs of the Marine Corps, individual career milestones, and personal preferences have conspired with apprehensions about life overseas to make filling requirements in the Indo-Pacific theater (Japan and Korea) difficult.

This article seeks to dispel those apprehensions, clarify the personal and professional benefits of service in Korea in particular, and compel Marines to consider Marine Corps Forces Korea (MARFORK) as an assignment of choice this year in their solicitation for orders. In Korea, Marines serve daily with a professional and dedicated ally in a rewarding assignment, where each Marine’s actions are contributing to a critical aspect of national security, and work is relevant, educational, and rewarding. In addition, the sophisticated coalition and joint operational environment offers the individual Marine an unbounded opportunity for professional

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In Korea, Marines conduct routing exercises with the ROK Marine Corps. (Photo by LCpl Jorge Rosales.)

growth. Lastly, because of a palette of features, quality of life in Korea is high and filled with enriching life opportunities for leisure and travel. This potent trio of strategic relevance, professional development opportunities, and high quality of life make service on the far side of the world worth discussing with your monitor.

Strategic Relevance

“Katchi Kapshida,” a slogan heard throughout the coalition forces stationed in the Republic of Korea (ROK), means “We go together!” It speaks to

the iron bond between ROK and U.S. forces who continue to fight side-by-side in the ongoing war between the two Koreas (ROK and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea [DPRK]). After 70 years, the strategic, operational, and tactical conditions in the Indo-Pacific Theater and on the Korean Peninsula ensure that the ROK continues to play a strategic role on the world stage. Consequently, the environment remains tense, challenging, rife with complexity, and indicative of a unique opportunity for individual service in the Marine Corps. As we actively pursue competition with

the People's Republic of China, seek greater integration with our coalition partner and the U.S. Navy's fleets, and simultaneously place emphasis on III MEF as our main effort, service in MARFORK is becoming more interesting, engaging, and significant.

MARFORK acts as the service component to the sub-unified command, U.S. Forces Korea (USFK). It functions as a training synchronizer and coordinating agency for Marine Corps units that need access to the Korean Theater of Operations (KTO) to achieve training readiness goals, as well as the principal U.S. agent for the development of increased combat capabilities of the ROK Marine Corps, the world's second largest Marine Corps.¹

Formally, the mission statement reads:

MARFORK, as the Marine Corps Service Component to USFK and United Nations Command (UNC), commands all U.S. Marine Corps forces assigned to USFK and UNC, and advises USFK and UNC on the capabilities, support, and proper employment of Marine forces. MARFORK supports the introduction of U.S. Marine Corps forces onto the Korean Peninsula, coordinates operational sustainment for U.S. Marine Corps forces, and facilitates security cooperation with the ROK Marine Corps in order to set conditions for Marine forces to achieve joint and combined theater objectives.²

In layman's terms we seek to:

1. "Set the Force": Fulfill the obligations as a component to USFK/Combined Forces Command (CFC)/UNC while ensuring the stage is set for the introduction of Marine forces to the KTO.³
2. "Build the Alliance": Maintain and strengthen the relationship between ROKMC and the U.S. Marine Corps, actively pursuing the goal of improved lethality and interoperability of our forces.
3. "Develop the Combined Marine Component Command (CMCC)":⁴ This is the culmination of efforts and the synthesis of the work between the ROKMC and MARFORK applied in the coalition environment in concert with III MEF (Commander, III MEF

serves as the commander of CMCC during wartime) to ensure all Marine forces fight effectively as one.

Pursuant the mission, MARFORK remains postured for the potential of escalation from Armistice conditions to Wartime footing. In this vein, MARFORK serves as the agent assuring successful reception of Marine Corps forces on the Korean Peninsula during operations under the USFK/CFC/UNC umbrella. In cooperation with the FMF INDOPACOM, I and III MEFs, and others, MARFORK facilitates the planning and preparation of force flow on to the peninsula during contingency

lethality alongside U.S. Marine forces. KMEP serves to address ROKMC and U.S. Marine Corps interoperability for infantry in the mountain and winter environment act as the vehicle for bilateral aviation operations in the brand new ROKMC Marine Aircraft Group, and support the maturation of the ROKMC Targeting process through work with their Intelligence and Fires Divisions. This list is not nearly comprehensive.

Currently, the development of ROKMC capabilities and improved interoperability with U.S. Marine Corps forces are the driving forces of our efforts to "Develop CMCC." In addition to the

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or crisis. Additionally, MARFORK ensures that the requisite host nation support is in place, and those steps that provide for the bed down, sustainment, and onward movement of Marine forces in support of any operations in Korea are taken.

Enabling the above serves as a potent tool to further U.S. national strategy because in practice at the intersect of "Setting the Force," "Building the Alliance," and "Developing CMCC" sits the routine readiness training of U.S. and ROK Marine Corps units, helping Marine units hone their fighting edge. At the heart of that intersection is the seminal training program administered by MARFORK: the Korea Marine Exercise Program (KMEP). KMEP is the umbrella bilateral training initiative for all ROK and Marine Corps bilateral training in the KTO and a powerful tool to facilitate overall CMCC readiness.

By design, KMEP training includes skill sets across all the warfighting functions and serves as an opportunity for III MEF units to schedule Mission Essential Task training events on the Peninsula. Each session includes a bilateral component that provides opportunity for ROKMC units to increase their own

tactical-level efforts being made through the KMEP iterations, MARFORK staff has the privilege of serving as subject matter experts for the ROKMC HQ staff as they modernize and improve their Corps. Currently, MARFORK staff members are working with ROKMC HQ to develop advanced combat logistics capabilities, build enduring relationships with MARFORPAC for enterprise level subject matter expertise, introduce aviation capabilities into the ROKMC operating forces, develop a future aviation command and control (C2) capability, and much more.

As a member of the MARFORK staff, you will play a critical role in contributing to the above. Meaningful, interesting work with a great ally is the basic ingredients for job satisfaction and the foundation for an outstanding tour.

Professional Development Opportunities

Fulfilling each aspect of the MARFORK mission provides the staff work that is unique, demanding, and international in character. While Korea remains at war, the command structure and relationships of the forces in Korea retain significant complexity. The

senior U.S. military officer in Korea serves not only as the commander of USFK but also as the commander of the enduring UN mission, UNC, as well as the bi-lateral ROK/U.S. military force, the Combined Forces Command. As the Marine Corps' service component command in this intricate environment, MARFORK plays the critical role of providing service advocacy to USFK and, as a fully integrated part of the USFK team, maintains relationships with elements of the UNC and CFC staffs. This advocacy protects Marine Corps equities and informs joint and coalition planning across the entirety of the KTO.⁵

In execution, this means that the MARFORK staff works closely with joint and coalition staff in the development of operational plans that directly shape the situation on the Korean Peninsula. This effort has a diverse and decidedly international character as the daily work often has implications on the strategic relationship between the United States, the ROK, and the DPRK. Tasks for the individual staff officer can range from serving as the liaison to one of the other service components (learn about the joint world); to co-authoring the U.S. Marine Corps ROKMC policy for Joint Terminal Attack Controller (JTAC) production and employment (develop coalition experience).

The mission also presents opportunities to cross the country surveying the potential bed down sites for units destined to come to the KTO in the event of war with the DPRK.⁶ Staff members learn the complex requirements of force sustainment, develop as true subject matter experts in the needs of a battalion or a squadron, and sharpen their international trade craft through host-nation support coordination (learn logistics). These opportunities just scratch the surface of what professional development is to be had, as the staff in Korea deals with everything from Time Phased Force Deployment Data to rewriting the operational support plans for Korea.

One of the critical parts of the MARFORK mission is to provide assistance to U.S. Marine Corps units seeking access to the excellent training venues on the



U.S. and ROK Marines training near Pohang. (Photo by Sgt Isaac Ibarra.)

Korean Peninsula. While MARFORK does significant work on the operational level, there are opportunities to take a bite out of the tactical level in its role as a training facilitator. MARFORK seeks to provide concierge support to visiting units, assisting in everything from pre-deployment site surveys to ammunition requisitions. Staff use their host nation familiarity to ensure visiting units are able to access range space on the timelines they need and with the necessary resources to achieve their mission essential task list-based training objectives. From live fire and maneuver exercises at U.S. Army-owned training complexes to bi-lateral JTAC shoots at Yeonpyeong Island, MARFORK staff is serving as a critical enabler of III MEF unit training through direct coordination with 8th Army, 7th Air Force, and ROK Army and Air Force agencies on behalf of the visiting units.⁷ This effort ensures that critical training not possible at a unit's home station can be accomplished.

Every day MARFORK staff is "going together" with the USFK, UNC, and ROKMC by exchanging expertise and guidance to ensure hard learned lessons benefit fighting forces in their assigned roles and responsibilities throughout the region. "Developing the CMCC" and "Setting the Force" grants the individual Marine in Korea a chance to work at "Strengthening the Alliance"

by building friendships and professional acumen in themselves and in their ROK counterparts. These efforts require intelligence, maturity, wit, and initiative. The Marine that takes on the challenge of serving at MARFORK will be witness to truly exciting developments in themselves and across the USFK team. They will be gratified by the impact that they play in helping those developments build the success of the ROKMC, CMCC, and the entire U.S. effort in the KTO.

High Quality of Life

Korea, known as the "Land of the Morning Calm," is a hospitable country whose population is appreciative of American efforts to bolster its security. The high quality of life in Korea today is characterized by the modern developed features of the ROK, its rich cultural tradition, the ease of travel within the country and throughout the region, and significant investments by the U.S. and ROK governments into U.S. bases. These features in concert make a tour for any Marine or Marine family rich and enjoyable.

Roughly the size of New Jersey, Korea is a modern and bustling economic powerhouse. Currently the world's 12th largest economy,⁸ with just over 51 million citizens,⁹ it has an extensive rail system and other public transportation that

makes the entire country, from Seoul to Busan, affordably accessible while on liberty. Travel within the country presents opportunities for families or individuals to enjoy the benefits of modern cities, vibrant beaches, an extensive national parks system, historically significant sites (particularly to Marines), and exposure to the rich Korean food and culture.

Regional travel similarly offers a chance for once in a lifetime adventure. Korea's key location within Asia and the ease of access to Incheon International Airport make travel throughout Asia convenient and affordable. Even over a short 72-hour pass, one can travel to other countries for a quick vacation reset. South Korea presents convenient and affordable opportunities for travel to interesting places and exotic locales throughout the continent, it is common for service members to travel to places such as the Philippines, Vietnam, Singapore, and Australia—just to name a few. There is perhaps no other posting in the Marine Corps that affords such a diverse series of choices for adventurous tourism.

While being in a foreign country is not without its challenges, increasingly, the burdens on service members and families are being reduced as USFK policy continues to work toward a higher quality of life for all U.S. service members stationed in the ROK. In 2019, the USFK campaign plan introduced a fourth line of effort: "Make Korea the Assignment of Choice." In conjunction with this, the curfew on forces has been lifted and major investments have been made in facilities to improve quarters and life support services. Simultaneously, access to base amenities has been expanded through the relaxation of ration card, commissary, and exchange policies—all making life in Korea more akin to garrison living at home.

Camp Humphreys, the location where most Marines in Korea work on a daily basis, features two elementary schools (with a third under construction), a middle school, and a high school. The student body is rich with diversity and composed of children who can identify with your child's Marine brat experience (a first for our fam-

ily). Students who participate in high school sports have an opportunity to travel within Korea and across Asia in competition. In total, the time in Korea provides a student a wondrous and enriching experience with friends that can relate both to the challenges of overseas living as well as those of our chosen lifestyle.

For the present, with the ongoing efforts to improve life for the entire USFK team, each month brings about more improvements as deliberate efforts are completed to make Korea one of the more desirable assignments in the service. From new schools to massive athletic complexes, whether single or accompanied, Marines will find something to be thrilled by when they accept orders to "Go Together!" and join the MARFORK family.

Final Appeal

In the course of a career, the Marine Corps asks every Marine to step away from their MOS and out of the tactical unit; this phase of our careers is used to meet less glamorous needs of the Marine Corps and to broaden our abilities. These tours can sometimes feel less than worthwhile as the mundane aspects of staff work contrast poorly against the dynamic variety of the daily activity of the Fleet.

For any Marine (officers and staff non-commissioned officers in particular take note) seeking to expand their knowledge of the joint and coalition world, remain professionally relevant, and spend their obligatory staff tour doing work that is personally rewarding and career enhancing, an overseas assignment MARFORK is unique in the Marine Corps.

MARFORK offers the individual Marine a place to both step out of their comfort zone (always a chance to grow) but also improve themselves through joint and coalition partnership exchange. It offers an opportunity to serve and live in a rich culture with its own dynamic history and deep ties to the Marine Corps. It is a chance to develop professionally and to be relevant in meaningful ways seldom encountered outside of deploying directly into harm's way. Significantly, it also offers

unmatched opportunity to go through this experience with your family, providing them both incredible enrichment and access to a community that has a shared military culture and lifestyle.

MFK is a duty assignment ideal for individuals who seek a joint, coalition work-load that is nested in a truly full-spectrum geopolitical atmosphere. Its mission guarantees a tour with edifying opportunities. The garrison amenities, cultural exposure, and liberty venues provide Marines and families an unmatched opportunity to go together for adventure. If good pay, foreign travel, and congenial employment sounds interesting, then put Korea down as your assignment of choice!

Notes

1. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCWP 7-10 (Formerly MCWP 3-40.8), Marine Corps Competency*, (Washington, DC: 2018).
2. Capt John J. Parry, *What MARFORK Can Do For You: How Your Support for MARFORK Supports Your Readiness*, (unpublished).
3. Ibid.
4. CMCC is the functional Marine component to CFC, which directs both U.S. and Republic of Korea forces during crisis and contingency operations.
5. *What MARFORK Can Do For You*.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Information available at <https://www.investopedia.com>.
9. Information available at <https://www.worldometers.info>.

