



For Immediate Release
By: Capt. Amy B. Slinker, 134th Public Affairs Detachment

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Alaska Guardsmen Train Alongside U.S. Marines, Mongolian Armed Forces

Military units share battalion level expertise during command post exercise in Mongolia

FIVE HILLS TRAINING AREA, Mongolia—More than 50 service members from the Alaska Army National Guard, U.S. Marines and Mongolian Armed Forces sharpened their command and operations skills while strengthening U.N. military-to-military relationships during a command post exercise at Five Hills Training Area, Mongolia this week.

The command post exercise was part of Khaan Quest 2009, a multinational peacekeeping operations training exercise running from Aug. 3-25. Other activities during the exercise include a U.N. peacekeeping seminar, a field training exercise, a humanitarian civic activity and a medical readiness training exercise. In addition to U.S. and Mongolian military units, participants and observers from other countries in the Pacific region are involved in the exercise.

The Alaska National Guard's annual involvement in the exercise is driven by the National Guard Bureau's State Partnership Program, which pairs the Alaska Guard with Mongolian forces. This was the first time the U.S. Marines' 1st Tank Battalion participated in Khaan Quest, according to commander Lt. Col. Tom Gordon.

"It's been a remarkable experience and a great opportunity for the Marine Corps to deploy and visit a country that most Americans will never have the opportunity to see," Gordon said. "We've built partnerships with our Mongolian counterparts and friendships that I'm sure will endure."

Training in battalion staff level operations during the command post exercise supports the Mongolian defense reform program's goal to establish and globally deploy battalion assets in peacekeeping operations in accordance with NATO standards. As the Mongolian and U.S. participants worked together side-by-side, they developed cohesive battalion-level mission plans.

Col. Ontsgoibayar Lkhamgii, commander of the 150th Peace Security Battalion, said the training was beneficial as his unit transitions to the NATO style of unit operations.

“This is just a taste of how a battalion staff functions,” Lkhamgii said. “We look forward to using the troop leading procedures we’ve learned and applying this expertise in future training.”

Alaska National Guardsman Lt. Col. Simon Brown, an operations officer from 38th Troop Command based at Ft. Richardson, served as one of the U.S. battalion commanders in the exercise. Brown explained that while the U.S. participants offered insight on battalion staff planning and operations, their Mongolian counterparts shared expertise in peacekeeping operations.

“It’s been an exchange of ideas. We’ve trained the Mongolians on the military decision-making process, and shown them how to analyze a mission and then direct an operations order,” Brown said.

Scenarios were based on U.N. peace support missions such as convoy operations, cordon and search operations, and establishing checkpoints and food distribution sites. U.S. and Mongolian battalion staff officers and non-commissioned officers would respond to scenarios by developing and writing mission operations orders. They would then send those orders to integrated ground troops who would execute the mission using a virtual simulation program.

Contractors from the San Diego-based company, Cubic Applications, coordinated simulation support, scenario design and small network infrastructure to support the exercise. The controllers operated the simulation program, Virtual Battlefield Simulation II, which would appear on laptops the ground troops would operate in rooms separated from the command cells.

William Vallandingham works for Cubic Applications contracted through the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force in Okinawa, Japan. He was the lead designer of the command post exercise.

“The virtual simulation program provides a cinematic view of operations,” Vallandingham said. “The story unfolds on screen so participants are responsive and engaged.”

Mongolian Armed Forces 1st Lt. Gansukh Erkhembayar had used a virtual simulation program in previous training and was excited about the opportunity to once again train in a virtual environment.

“All soldiers should use this program before a mission,” said Erkhembayar. “It is very good training.”

While the focus of the command post exercise is operational training, fostering relationships at all ranks is the underlying theme of the exercise.

Capt. Travis Carlson, 1st Tank Battalion, 1st Marine Division said that besides training together, the participants spend their free time getting to know each other and sharing experiences at evening cultural events at the training area. Carlson’s counterpart was Mongolian Armed Forces 1st Lt. Munkh-Od Binderya. Together they served as logistics officers in the battalion staff.

“We’ll see these guys again. The world that we’re in today, I wouldn’t be surprised if I bumped in to him [Binderya] somewhere through a joint partnership in another country,” Carlson said. “This makes it easier to work together somewhere else.”

Khaan Quest 2009 will continue at the Five Hills Training Area, Tavan Tolgoi, and the city of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. The purpose of Khaan Quest is to increase interoperability and planning expertise among participating nations, and to further develop the Mongolian Armed Forces’ training center at the Five Hills Training Area.

Media can track the exercise and download photos, stories and video using the exercise website at <http://www1.apan-info.net/khaanquest>.

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Photo Cutlines:

CPX1:

Alaska Army National Guard Master Sgt. Andrew Kennedy, left, and Mongolian Armed Forces 1st Lt. Ulambayar Togtokh track a food relief convoy during the command post exercise at Khaan Quest 2009 at Five Hills Training Area, Mongolia. Kennedy is an operations sergeant at Joint Forces Headquarters based at Ft. Richardson. The command post exercise provided battalion level staff training in peacekeeping operations.

Photo by Capt. Amy B. Slinker, 134th Public Affairs Detachment

CPX2:

Mongolian Armed Forces 1st Lt. Gansukh Erkhembayar, left, and Alaska Army National Guard Sgt. Rosa Ralls maneuver vehicles conducting convoy operations within a virtual simulation program. They sit alongside other U.S. and Mongolian service members participating in a command post exercise during Khaan Quest 2009 at Five Hills Training Area, Mongolia. Ralls is a supply sergeant at the 207th Regional Training Institute at Ft. Richardson.

Photo by Capt. Amy B. Slinker, 134th Public Affairs Detachment

CPX3:

U.S. Marines 1st Lt. Sean Kaiser and Mongolian Armed Forces 1st Lt. Bat-Amgalan Zorigt discuss communications procedures for unit tracking during the command post exercise at Khaan Quest 2009 at Five Hills Training Area, Mongolia. The command post exercise gave participants battalion level training while fostering multinational relationships. Kaiser is a communications officer with the 1st Tank Battalion, 1st Marine Division based at Twentynine Palms, Calif.

Photo by Capt. Amy B. Slinker, 134th Public Affairs Detachment

CPX4:

Mongolian Armed Forces Capt. Enkhbold Rentsen, left, and Alaska Army National Guardsmen Capt. Tony Mortrud and Sgt. 1st Class Scott Wesierski discuss operations during a command post exercise at Khaan Quest 2009 at Five Hills Training Area. Mortrud is member of 38th Troop Command based at Ft. Richardson and Wesierski is an instructor with the 207th Regional Training Institute at Ft. Richardson.

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