

COVER:

Japan Military Review

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Special Feature: Camp Zama, I Corps Forward HQ

The Large-scale Tank Warfare of the Gulf War--7000 Tanks face-off! The Largest & Last Armor conflict in History
"Cease Fire"--The Republican Guards that Survived

Exclusive Interview!

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Japan Military Review

Camp Zama, U.S. Army I Corps Forward Headquarters
January 2010 issue

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Exclusive Interview: U.S. Army, I Corps Forward Commanding General, MG Wiercinski

What type of organization is the I Corps Forward that was established on Camp Zama? The Commanding General, MG Wiercinski stresses that “1 CoF already has that great relationship, already established”. We had the opportunity to ask him about the purpose and meaning of placing the I Corps FWD in Japan and also about the functions of the organization.

Interviewer: Taisei Ugaki, Article by: Nobuo Saiki

The topic of the I Corps Forward coming to Camp Zama has been brought up many times in the *Japan Military Review*. In the past, many sensational rumors circulated such as: the entire I Corps Headquarters will be coming to Japan including its Commanding General, a LTG and his 500 Soldiers; and also rumors such as: a Northeastern Asia Command will be established with a 4-star General commanding the organization.

But in reality, what actually came was the I Corps Forward, an unfamiliar organization. The Commanding General is also the USARJ CG and the I Corps DCG. The subordinate units under its command are few. And as far as the general public is concerned, the mission of this new organization is still an “unknown”.

This time we were able to get special access to the facilities in Camp Zama to interview the I Corps Forward Commanding General, MG Wiercinski. The interviewer was Mr. Taisei Ugaki, a military commentator; the event coordination and photography was conducted by our editorial staff; and the article was written by Nobuo Saiki. The interviewer spoke in Japanese; the U.S. Army personnel spoke in English; and an interpreter provided by the camp interpreted from English-to-Japanese and vice versa. This article was written based on the transcript of the original recordings made during the interview and edited for clarity.

The Purpose of the I Corps Forward Headquarters

Ugaki: Thank you for allowing us this opportunity today. First, let me speak a little about our magazine. Although there are many military magazines in circulation, we are the only magazine with over 40 years of experience in printing comprehensive military articles about the current military situation and defense topics of the Self Defense Force, U.S. Military, China, and European Forces etc. We are in a very unique position among our competitors.

Our reader base includes: Researchers and people involved in Academia, Employees of the MOD, Self-Defense Force members, readers interested in international affairs, and also during the past decade, we have been getting readers from the general public who have become interested in these types of topics.

So let's get started. Can you explain the purpose of establishing the I Corps Forward in Japan?

Wiercinski: In the U.S. Army, the I Corps Forward is an organization with a very unique function.

It is a forward command and control unit that is capable of commanding and controlling any unit from the U.S. Forces. It was created as a part of the overall transformation of the U.S. military. Although our unit is small, it has a lot of capabilities. Part of it is because of the advances in technology and also because of our capable Soldiers.

Japan is extremely unique because it is the first place that such a specialized unit is being deployed. In our lessons learned over the past few years, we have discovered that our biggest challenge lies in the initial phase of an operation, whether a natural or man-made disaster. The initial command and control and situational awareness are the two biggest hurdles that we face.

If we have effective resources on the ground and we have effective command and control to maximize those resources, there will be no problems. But if we have the wrong resources or if the people on the ground do not have the capabilities to utilize such resources, it will develop into a problem.

With our small-scale command and control unit which will be already on the ground and placed in a strategic location, we will be able to will operate on a daily basis and

understand the local security situation, the local geography, and the people. If we can build a mutual relationship then problems won't happen. We can do this because we are deployed forward. We are in a position to makes things work.

Photo:

"Now, no matter what happens, 1CoF are here, this state", says MG Wiercinski. Mr. Taisei Ugaki is on the right.

Ugaki: The I Corps Headquarters is located at Fort Lewis, Washington. What are the differences in role and function between the I Corps Headquarters and the I Corps Forward Headquarters? Please be specific as possible.

Wiercinski: The U.S. Military has four Corps. The I Corps is in Washington, the III Corps is in Texas, the 18th Airborne Corps is in North Carolina, and the V Corps is in Germany. These four Corps can be deployed to conduct large-scale military operations in a large-scale conflict. These Corps have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan through the rotation. On the

other hand, the I Corps and the I Corps Forward are similar in name only. There is no direct command and control relationship between the two.

One of the strengths of the I Corps Forward is that it can work with any other type of units and integrate them immediately into the operation. All the preparation will have been completed by the time the reinforcing units arrive. For example in the Yama Sakura exercise, the I Corps Forward will be the first to deploy to Hokkaido and will establish the initial command and control center. Currently the III Corps is preparing for deployment and the 18th Airborne Corps has just redeployed from Iraq/Afghanistan. So the only command organization nearby that is available for deployment is USARPAC. As a result, the I Corps Forward will coordinate with the USARPAC Commanding General to conduct this operation. The I Corps Forward is designed to work well with anybody.

Ugaki: So does that mean in a contingency, even if PACOM does not deploy the entire I Corps as its Army unit, there is a high possibility that a part of I Corps will be deploying to Japan and supporting the U.S. effort? Or will the I Corps Main Body deploy from Washington if necessary?

Wiercinski: The I Corps is currently deployed in Iraq so it is not possible for them to come...

The U.S. Forces are not bound to any particular region. Our forces deploy in rotations around the world. One of the key strengths of the I Corps Forward is that it can conduct operations with any unit that is deployed to this region.

Photo:

At the entrance of the Headquarters, there is a motif of a torii gate on the wall. The unit patch is on the carpet.

If something was to happen in Japan now, then I Corps will not be available to defend mainland Japan. But the I Corps Forward can still conduct operations with other Corps, other JTFs and other branches of service. Even if the I Corps is deployed in another region based on its rotation, there is not a moment in which we cannot fulfill our obligations here. Of course, we may still conduct operations with the I Corps depending on the rotation at the time but the point is that it doesn't have to be the I Corps.

Wearing Multiple Hats

Ugaki: I understand very clearly now. So the I Corps Forward is able to command a wide spectrum of units. Although you may not be able to give specifics, can you explain to us in your words, the command and control capabilities of this Forward Headquarters?

Wiercinski: In my daily duties, I have several different missions as a 2-star general.

First, I serve as the Commanding General of the U.S. Army Japan. I am the Commanding General for all the U.S. Army forces from Hokkaido to Okinawa. I am also

the Commanding General of the I Corps Forward. This is separate organization from USARJ. I am also the Army Component Commander that is subordinate to Lt. Gen. Wright's U.S. Forces Japan. I am also in charge of all the U.S. military facilities in Japan. I wear a lot of hats.

However, if the I Corps Forward is deployed, I will be the commanding general for that unit so the USARJ Deputy Commander will fill in as the Commander of USARJ. Even in the U.S. Army, it is uncommon that we are assigned so many duties. Normally, we have separate staff sections: One set of staff for USFJ and another set of staff for I Corps Forward.

Ugaki: I understand that you have a very complex and difficult duty to fulfill. Next, I will like to ask you about your relationship with the Japan Ground Self Defense Force. Can you elaborate on the role of I Corps Forward and the units under its command in the defense of Japan? How do you see the relations between you and the Self Defense Force develop over time?

Wiercinski: The wonderful thing is that the people here (the Army Personnel and JSDF personnel in Camp Zama) have established an extremely good relationship. Every time I go on TDY to an exercise, I am able to see in person the strong bonds that are developing at the individual-level between the U.S. Army and the GSO and also with the five regional armies and the central readiness force. It is these personal bonds that are critical in a real-world operation and it is one of the reasons why I believe that we will have a superior force.

For example, we are working very hard with the Northern Army Commanding General, LTG Takeshi Sakai in preparation of the upcoming Yama Sakura 57. And at the same time we are already having discussions with the Western Army Commanding General, LTG Kazuhito Mochida regarding Yama Sakura 59. We are now conducting the exercise Orient Shield with the Middle Army. And just two weeks ago we held talks with the Central Readiness Force about their transition to Camp Zama.

Photo:

MG Wiercinski briefing in front of the Map at the Briefing Room

These types of engagements involve two or more people and have ongoing discussions on a daily basis.

If there is a natural disaster in Japan, and we aren't here, the U.S. forces that will be deployed to Japan will need to start their operations by building relations. That will make it difficult for the U.S. forces to quickly deal with the disaster. The I Corps Forward has already established these strong relations with Japan.

And to answer your original question: We have very good relations with the Japan Ground Self Defense Force.

Ugaki: Here is a question that I am often asked: Our neighbor, North Korea, has many different types of ballistic missiles and is actively conducting research and development. The number of missiles is also growing as they continue to manufacture them. And they regularly conduct missile experiments. So in a realistic sense, missile defense is the real defense of Japan that we need to work on right now. So what kind of missile defense capabilities does the U.S. Army Forward have?

Wiercinski: I cannot give you the specifics on how we are going to defend Japan because it is classified. But I can tell you that the I Corps Forward, JASDF, JMSDF, 7th Fleet, USAF, and the U.S. Army already operates as a joint force. Each force works tightly together like my two hands interlocked. That's how we maximize our capabilities.

Photo:

There is a real Torii Gate at the Helipad of Camp Zama.

One thing I can say is when North Korea fired a missile over Japanese territory in April of this year, I believe that it was the cherry blossom season, approximately 30,000 local residents were in Camp Zama for our cherry blossom festival. But our I Corps Forward personnel were working during the whole time.

Ugaki: I understand. I believe that this will be the last question: If there are any new facilities that you are planning to build or any new equipment that you will bring for the I Corps Forward, can you tell what they are?

Wiercinski: I Corps Forward already has the latest equipment. We have the Army Battle Command System. This system is a joint, digital system. It incorporates a very capable communications system. It is actually two different systems. One is the fixed system which will be placed in the command center. The other is a portable system which allows us to deploy anywhere and still give us the ability to command and control.

And you may already know that we are building a Battle Simulation Center at the Sagami Depot. I would like to show you when it is complete. This center allows you to train in a variety of scenarios within the virtual world. So we won't be using actual vehicles or personnel to do this exercise. We will conduct exercises virtually within the simulation system.

Ugaki: When will this center be complete?

Wiercinski: It is scheduled for September of next year (2010). We have already completed the foundation. We just need to complete the building and set up the equipment. Let's change rooms. Let me explain using a map.

With the recommendation by the MG, we moved to the briefing room and continued the interview.

In the briefing room, there was a wall that is covered by a world map. Atypical of American maps, the United States was not at the center but rather the Pacific Ocean was at the center of the map with Japan to the left and U.S. to the right, much like a Japanese map. Apparently this was the idea of MG. "I Corps FWD is based in Japan so this makes sense. We are not in Washington DC nor are we in Prague, Czechoslovakia. We are in Tokyo", he said.

No Matter What Happens, We Will Be Here

Wiercinski: (Points to Japan) The I Corps Forward is here. (Points towards Washington state) This is the I Corps. (Points at Texas) This is III Corps. (Points at North Carolina) This is the 18th Airborne Corps and... (Points at Germany) This is the V Corps. And the most important, (Points at Hawai'i) this is the USARPAC Headquarters. (Points at South Korea) USFK, and finally (Points at Alaska) U.S. Forces in Alaska.

Also, the units stationed in South Korea will not deploy to anywhere else and they will stay in South Korea. The USARPAC Headquarters in Hawai'i will be able to utilize all of the U.S. Forces in the Pacific.

Photo:

Behind specially designed doors and walls lies the Command Center. Inside the gray and black interior, many computer and screens fill the room creating a mechanical atmosphere.

Before 9/11, the I Corps (pointing to Japan) was focused on this area and the I Corps Forward did not exist back then. However, after 9/11 the area of activity has expanded and the I Corps is now (moves a sticky note) here. The 18th Airborne Corps is (moves a sticky note) here. And (keeps placing sticky notes) this unit is currently preparing for deployment. This unit will not move. So there are no units in the critical areas around Japan. That is why we placed the I Corps Forward right here.

No matter what happens, we will be right here. We will continue to function without problem. If something was to happen, for example an earthquake, and other units may be already deployed to another mission or maybe even physically too far, but we will be able to provide support with short notice.

Photo:

The I Corps FWD Conference Room within the Command Center provides a very warm atmosphere. Each person has their own computer built into the conference table.

We will also deploy to support the Mariana Islands if a typhoon is to strike there. We can go anywhere else whether it is Hokkaido, Okinawa, Inland Miyagi, or even Niigata. Isn't it easier when I explain it using the map?

Ugaki: Yes, it makes it easier to visualize. In a previous issue of the Japan Military Review, I wrote an article about the military organization and the areas of responsibilities of the entire U.S. Forces. Because of that article, many people have asked me questions about the U.S. military. However, because of the U.S. Forces global commitment and constantly changing nature, it was always a real challenge. But your explanation, although limited to only the Army portion, was very easy straightforward and easy to understand. I am very thankful.

Wiercinski: I happy to make things clear. I get confused myself sometimes.

The U.S. Forces is going through a transformation right now. The U.S. Forces realized that depending on the type of operation, we do not need to use a large-scale force. In Japan, we have the I Corps Forward. In the event such as an earthquake, the I Corps Forward needs to think about what type of units that it will need to request for this mission. We don't need infantry. Don't need tanks. Don't need artillery. What we really need is logistics, signal, medics, and engineers. We need to understand our functions and requirements before we ask for support from the rear. When the troops arrive we will command and control the troops on the ground.

Ugaki: Indeed, I understand.

Wiercinski: In the upcoming Yama Sakura exercise, the I Corps Forward will participate for the first time and we will use this concept to conduct the exercise. The I Corps Forward will be the first to deploy to Hokkaido. Next, USARPAC's CCP which is in Hawai'i will deploy to Japan. Then in the scenario, the two units will combine into one and the CCP will take over the command and control role. It will be nice if you can visit the Yama Sakura exercise.

After the exercise ends, the CCP will return to Hawai'i and the I Corps Forward will return to Camp Zama. In two months, we would be collecting the lessons learned from YS and providing that as feedback to the units. After that we will fly to Thailand (moves sticky note on the map) and participate in another exercise, the Cobra Gold. It will be a very short exercise. After we are done there, we will return to Japan and Hawai'i. So even if an operation is conducted elsewhere in the world, there will still be a command and control function in or nearby Japan. The reason we conduct these types of exercises is to constantly improve on our capabilities.

Also, in November of this year, we are opening our camp for the first time. It is a major event. We will display our equipment so please come and see. It won't be just radars and the U.S. Military. The JGSDF will be displaying their equipment too. I am hoping it will turn out to be a great day. They will also be selling pizzas too.

(The Camp Zama Army Awareness Day was held on November 14, 2009, Saturday from 0900-1700. Both the U.S. Military and the JSDF participated and displayed military vehicles, equipment, military hand-to-hand combat techniques etc.)

Editorial Staff: Thank you for the easy-to-understand explanations.

Wiercinski: Thank you for coming. I hope you can come again.

Editorial Staff: Thank you very much.

The interview with the MG ended there but our staff was granted permission to visit the command center after the interview. The command center was on the other side of a high-security door. Although there were a few limitations, we were allowed to take photographs within the facility. I am not allowed cannot disclose the size of the command center, but it did not look like what I had previously imagined. The room was filled with computer monitors and there were large-screen displays on the walls. The room reminded me of a stock or commodity exchange room where the prices are monitored.

Deeper into the command center, there was a conference room. The room was decorated with a slight Japanese touch. Even in this room, there is a large-screen display on the wall. Every seat is hooked up to a computer terminal. Naturally, you can conduct real-time VTC with other command centers around the world. I am very impressed of this global capability of the U.S. military. (But of course, this might not be anything special for many modern, multi-national corporations.) However, being from the analog generation, the editorial staff and I felt like we were in a Hollywood science fiction movie.

I would really like to say my deepest thanks to MG Wiercinski, USFJ, Camp Zama PAO, and others who have helped make this article a reality. (INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY TAISEI UGAKI. TRANSCRIPT BY NOBUO SAIKI. PHOTO BY YOSHINOBU OKUBO.)