

## The Evolution of US Army HUMINT: Intelligence Operations in the Korean War

John P. Finnegan

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The traumatic experience of the Korean conflict was a watershed in the evolution of Army intelligence. Within six months, the Army found itself facing two major intelligence disasters: it was caught unprepared by the initial North Korean invasion of June 1950 and by the massive Chinese intervention in November of that year. In response, the Army hastily improvised a clandestine human intelligence (HUMINT) organization, building on a small existing intelligence unit, the Korean Liaison Office (KLO). By the end of the Korean War, the Far East Command (FECOM) had fielded a large Army-controlled clandestine collection apparatus, closely linked with similarly large operations in the fields of partisan and psychological warfare. More important, the Army had begun to take steps to create a permanent and professional HUMINT service that could carry out positive intelligence collection operations.

### **Lack of Intelligence**

The sudden outbreak of the Korean war on 25 June 1950 came as a shock to US leaders. In hindsight, this is not surprising. Since the onset of the Cold War, the nation's intelligence assets had been targeted almost exclusively against the Soviet Union. In addition, intelligence responsibilities in the Far East were badly fragmented. General of the Army Douglas MacArthur's Far East Command (FECOM), the major theater headquarters in the area, no longer had any jurisdiction over the Korean peninsula: authority over the area had devolved to the Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG) after the last American occupation forces left in mid-1949. Because the KMAG had no positive collection capability, Korea was an intelligence vacuum.<sup>a1</sup>

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<sup>a</sup> For more on intelligence during this period, see Clayton Laurie, "A New President, a Better CIA, and an Old War," in *Studies in Intelligence* 54, No. 4 (December 2010) and CIA release of documents from the period in [www.cia.gov/library/publications/historical-collections-publications/index.html](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/historical-collections-publications/index.html).

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Willoughby, MacArthur's G-2, did maintain a residual intelligence organization in Korea, the KLO. The reports generated by this small office, however, received little attention in a preoccupied Tokyo. Similar reports submitted by an Air Force Office of Special Investigations (AFOSI) team that also remained in Korea were likewise disregarded. Intelligence emanating from the small CIA presence in Korea received an equally cool reception from FECOM. Intelligence that came the way of these elements was procured largely through liaison with Republic of Korea (ROK) sources. As such, it was deemed unreliable, and the information received was often conflicting. Intelligence officers back in Tokyo had heard "wolf" cried too often to believe that anything was actually going to happen. Lack of intelligence resources and hard data was paralleled by a lack of intelligence perception. Because the North Korean destabilization campaign against the South had failed, it was too easily assumed that the North would turn to political initiatives.<sup>2</sup>

The advance of T-34 tanks across the 38th parallel shattered the illusions of FECOM policymakers. The rapid collapse of ROK forces meant that only outside military help could prevent a communist takeover

At the direction of the president and acting under the authority of the UN, FECOM quickly moved to intervene. But it found that in the field of intelligence, as in almost everything else, five years of peacetime occupation duty had left American forces in Japan less than well equipped to meet an outside challenge.<sup>3</sup>

On paper, FECOM controlled substantial intelligence assets. Willoughby had more than 2,500 intelligence personnel at his disposal, but these elements were organized to support an army of occupation. The largest single intelligence component within FECOM was the 441st Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) Detachment, targeted against Japanese subversive elements. It reported to MacArthur in his capacity as Supreme Commander Allied Powers, not as head of FECOM. The four Army divisions in Japan had no organic CIC detachments.<sup>4</sup>

A large Military Intelligence Service Company of Japanese interpreters supported the 441st CIC Detachment, but there were only two Korean linguists at G-2's disposal. FECOM's Technical Intelligence Section had been discontinued in 1949. The PHOTINT capability of the command had shriveled. Cryptologic resources were equally lacking. The Army

Security Agency, Pacific (ASA-PAC) had two companies and two detachments in the Far East, but these were trained and equipped for fixed-site operations and could not easily be shifted to the field. ASA was not able to deploy a tactical unit in Korea until October, when a company was shipped from the United States.<sup>5</sup>

### ***A Need for HUMINT***

The adverse combat situation confronted by FECOM and the Eighth Army in Korea during the summer of 1950 created a critical need for hard intelligence. With other assets unavailable, this could only be provided by HUMINT. An organization was quickly built around the nucleus of the KLO, using personnel from the 441st CIC Detachment. To carry out its mission, the KLO hastily recruited Korean peasants, gave them sketchy training, and airdropped them behind enemy lines with instructions to return with intelligence reports. In addition, it set up Tactical Liaison Offices (TLOs) at division level to recruit Koreans as line-crossers to gather clandestine HUMINT.<sup>a</sup> Although it operated in support of Eighth Army and its tactical commanders, the whole structure remained firmly under Willoughby's control.<sup>6</sup>

Agent casualties were high, and the quality of intelligence produced unsatisfactory. But, in the early stages of the war, it

was all the UN forces had. Nonetheless, the KLO tried to improve the collection situation as early as August 1950. One basic problem was that both agent insertion techniques used by the KLO—parachute drops and line-crossing—were intrinsically hazardous, and even parachute agents had to exfiltrate through enemy lines to bring back their reports. The KLO came up with the idea of using small boats both to land its agents behind enemy lines and to retrieve them, thus bypassing the dangers of the fighting front. The cooperation of the ROK Navy was necessary for this effort, however, and this was difficult to obtain.<sup>a</sup> The whole idea was temporarily abandoned in September, when the needs of the forthcoming amphibious operation at Inchon absorbed all available shipping.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Of the early parachute agents, Marshall noted that “Frequently the Commanding General’s plane was used to carry these men into nowhere.” The TLO, as one officer put it, was basically a “glorified reconnaissance unit” designed to obtain order of battle information by using agents to conduct shallow penetration missions. To ensure it remained under GHQ FECOM control, the TLO was also assigned a notional strategic intelligence mission. Agents were a mixed bag whose numbers included high school-age children, women, the aged, and deserters from both the North and South Korean armies.

<sup>a</sup> Marshall grimly noted that in these operations, “Only the loss rate fulfilled expectations.” Returning agents ran the risk of being mistaken for enemy infiltrators and shot by troops from their own side.

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### ***Some Improvement***

By the time of the Inchon landing, the intelligence picture in FECOM was improving. The theater had received additional intelligence assets, and focus on the Korean problem at the national level was producing results. The rapid collapse of the North Korean Army appeared to make further efforts at establishing a permanent intelligence organization unnecessary. But the very success of UN forces exacted a price: intelligence elements repeatedly had to move to keep up with the pace of the advance, and this disorganized the intelligence structure and impaired its operational capabilities.

### ***The Chinese Threat***

The coming of November brought a new threat, the possibility of intervention by the People’s Republic of China. Chinese Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai had publicly announced that China would enter the war if US forces crossed the 38th parallel. Although the United States had decided to ignore this threat as a bluff, American intelligence was aware that 400,000 troops of China’s best formation, the Fourth Field Army, were being concentrated just across the Yalu River in

Manchuria. Some of these forces crossed over into Korea in October and early November. Sharp clashes with UN troops ensued, and Army intelligence discovered the Chinese presence by finding that US and ROK forces had taken Chinese prisoners.<sup>8</sup>

The meaning of all this remained enigmatic. The Chinese soon disengaged, and the Chinese prisoners of war, when interrogated, claimed they were members of “Special Military Units” which at first were assumed to be only token cadres from the Fourth Field Army. While Army intelligence realized the Chinese did have the military capability for a full-scale intervention, it doubted they would pursue such a course. If the Chinese had failed to intervene in August, when the Eighth Army was trapped in the Pusan perimeter and intervention could have been decisive, it seemed irrational for them to intervene when North Korea had been broken. It appeared more plausible to assume the Chinese presence in Korea was in the nature of a face-saving gesture.<sup>9</sup>

The hard fact was that FECOM again found itself reduced to speculation about enemy intentions because it still lacked the intelligence resources needed to resolve the

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problem. Manchuria was off-limits to photographic reconnaissance because of diplomatic considerations, limited aerial surveillance of Korea was unproductive, and other sophisticated collection mechanisms were targeted exclusively against the Korean problem and lacked the linguistic and technical capability to switch quickly.<sup>10</sup>

With his armies on the threshold of victory—the vanguards of the Eighth Army were across the Chongchon River in western Korea, those of X Corps nearing the Yalu in the East—MacArthur was in no mood to be deprived of triumph by the mere specter of a Chinese Army. He decided to subject the question of just what Chinese intentions might be to an acid test. On 24 November 1950, he ordered his widely dispersed forces to attack into the unknown.<sup>11</sup>

### ***KLO Handicaps***

The UN offensive ran head-on into 30 Chinese divisions that had secretly crossed over from Manchuria. The attack became a fighting retreat. The Eighth Army fell back from the Chongchon with heavy losses; X Corps began the difficult process of cutting its way back through the mountains to the port of Hungnam. By mid-December, as UN forces contin-

ued their retreat, the Chinese once more disengaged. Pursued by an overwhelming force, the Eighth Army found itself completely ignorant of how this force was disposed or where it might be attacking next.<sup>a12</sup>

At this critical juncture, FECOM turned once more to clandestine HUMINT to meet its pressing need for intelligence. But the KLO organization (now officially titled the Far East Command Liaison Group, Korea) was in no condition to meet the requirements. There were no agent assets in the areas in which the Chinese were advancing. The KLO did have the capability of inserting parachute agents in “blind drops,” using Air Force C-47s, but the AVIARY program, as it was called, operated under severe disabilities. The standard of agent training was low, and the KLO had no radios suitable for agent work and no agents trained in radio operation. In a desperate attempt to clarify the tactical situation, the KLO was reduced to dropping 12 two-man agent teams

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<sup>a</sup> Upon assuming command of the Eighth Army, Gen. Matthew B. Ridgway recalls that all he had in the way of intelligence about the enemy north of his lines was a map showing “A big red goose egg...with ‘174,000’ scrawled in the middle of it.” The situation did not quickly improve; in February 1951, Ridgway reported that, “We have a curtain beyond the range of our immediate combat intelligence activities which I find extremely difficult to pierce.”

equipped with smoke grenades north of UN lines to establish the location of the Chinese forces. Only a few teams ever managed to signal Air Force spotter planes, all with negative results.<sup>13</sup>

### ***The 442d CIC Detachment***

In these darkest days of the war, FECOM responded to the intelligence challenge by setting up a new unit to conduct an expanded program of clandestine HUMINT. The 442d CIC Detachment was activated on 20 December 1950 in Seoul with 50 assigned personnel to take over operational control of the KLO central office and the division level TLOs. On paper, the 442d was a normal CIC unit, organized under a standard cellular Table of Organization and Equipment (TOE 30-500) and commanded by a regular army officer, Col. C.A. Dickey. In reality, it was a highly unusual organization assigned a positive clandestine collection mission that went far beyond the CIC’s normal responsibilities.<sup>14</sup>

The 442d had a turbulent beginning. Two days after the unit was officially activated in Seoul, the deteriorating military situation forced it to establish a rear headquarters in the city of Taegu. The rest of the headquarters soon followed to escape the second Communist occupation of the South Korean capital. But the rapid revival of the Eighth Army’s fortunes

under its new commander, Gen. Matthew B. Ridgway, put an end to further UN retreats. Working from a secure base, the 442d was able to upgrade the FECOM clandestine HUMINT program between January 1951 and the first armistice negotiations in June, making significant accomplishments in the areas of agent insertion, communications, and training.<sup>15</sup>

Until early 1951, agents had been inserted by line-crossing and by parachute drop. At the TLO level, hundreds of Korean peasants were sent to gather limited information about enemy dispositions in front of the UN lines. The KLO had its own line-crossers; it also paradropped smaller numbers of Korean agents on long-range collection missions, using Air Force AVIARY C-47s controlled by Eighth Army's Special Activities Mission. Both techniques resulted in heavy losses of agents.<sup>a</sup> To remedy this situation, the 442d began to supplement its ground and parachute insertion methods by using

<sup>a</sup> Parachute operations were particularly costly: a former AVIARY operations officer estimated that only 20 percent of agents dispatched managed to make it back to UN lines. (However, he thought it possible that an unknown number of the agents who failed to return were stranded North Koreans who had used AVIARY as an airline ticket home.) Until agents could be furnished radios, these operations also involved long delays in procuring intelligence: because of the distances involved, paradropped agents commonly took two to three months to complete their missions.

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boats to land agents behind enemy lines, a course first suggested in the summer of 1950.<sup>16</sup>

### **SALAMANDER**

Confronted by an unacceptable loss rate among their line-crossers, the TLO teams of the 3d and 25th Infantry Divisions began transporting agents by small boats around the enemy's flank on the west coast of Korea. At the same time, the 442d CIC Detachment's headquarters element implemented a much larger program of amphibious espionage and was given the codename SALAMANDER. This involved the use of Korean-manned fishing boats to insert long-range agents deep within enemy territory. SALAMANDER operations were initially conducted from the numerous islands off the Korean west coast that were to the rear of the enemy's lines. These islands were rendered more or less secure from hostile attack by the UN naval blockade, and many were already in the hands of anti-Communist North Korean partisans.<sup>17</sup>

The first SALAMANDER operations were mounted from the island of Paengyong Do, just below the 38th parallel. They soon moved to a more advanced base at Cho Do, stra-

tegically located just five miles off the North Korean coast. The position gave the 442d's agents access to the whole west coast of Korea up to the Yalu River. To complement this west coast operation, the 442d later initiated plans to establish an east coast SALAMANDER base on the bleak and inhospitable island of Yodo. This move would provide intelligence coverage of another enemy flank, as well as allow agents to provide extensive lateral coverage of North Korean positions, because they could land on one coast and exfiltrate from the other. Because the native fishing boats used by the operation were both small and unseaworthy, the 442d quickly took steps to secure fast American craft.<sup>18</sup>

### **Better Communications**

Agent communications were also improved. Until the end of December 1950, radios had been unavailable, and the 442d's agent handlers were forced to wait until an agent actually returned to base before they could procure any intelligence. The situation gradually improved in 1951. Radio teams equipped with SCR-300 walkie-talkies were provided for both AVIARY and SALAMANDER operations.

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agents to furnish Army intelligence with information on a real-time basis. But this was not a panacea. Voice radio had its limitations; its short range meant that relays had to be used—SALAMANDER agents passed their messages through the Cho Do base—or that aircraft had to hover in the immediate area of the agent radio teams, risking compromise of the mission. An additional complication was that some of the Air Force crews who provided communications support to AVIARY operations were inexperienced because they flew the mission for an average of only two weeks. Many agent radio teams were lost. Continuous wave (CW) radios, with their longer range, would have helped, but agents had not yet been trained in Morse code.<sup>a19</sup>

On the other hand, at least agents were now provided with some minimal training. In March 1951, the 442d set up a training school at Pusan that provided 20 agents at a time with a basic two-week course of instruction. (The facility moved to Taegu in June.) After com-

went to the TLO teams and the 442d's central office. Unsurprisingly, American intelligence personnel rated the new breed of agents as "far superior" to their predecessors. For example, reports noted that the new agents "appear to be enthusiastic" and "have a basic idea of the mission."

Better training seems to have been partially offset by increased enemy security measures. Line-crossing continued to be a hazardous operation, and agent capture rates increased, although a surprisingly large number of detained agents were able to escape and make it back to UN lines. At any rate, the new recruitment and training program made it easier to obtain replacements.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Improved Capabilities***

The growing efficiency of FECOM's clandestine HUMINT operations was paralleled in other intelligence fields, as language and other problems were resolved. The overall improvement of intelligence capabilities took place during a period when the Eighth Army's fortunes were on the upswing. As early as mid-January 1951, UN forces had been able to mount a limited counterattack. In March, Seoul was recaptured. While MacArthur was relieved for insubordination in April and

replaced by General Ridgway, UN forces continued to push the enemy back across the 38th parallel. On 23 June 1951, the Soviet UN Ambassador announced that North Korea was now interested in peace talks, and Ridgway offered armistice negotiations to the enemy commander.<sup>21</sup>

Peace was not at hand, however. Although peace talks began and the UN forces halted their advance, there was no ceasefire. Negotiations dragged on for two years, accompanied by a static war of attrition in which hills changed hands from time to time in bloody skirmishes while the main battle-line remained stable. No longer forced to respond to the intelligence crises of the moment, FECOM began to build up an elaborate semipermanent clandestine HUMINT structure to meet the needs of a new kind of war.

### ***The Liaison Detachment***

The new effort was conducted under a revised organizational structure. The 442d CIC Detachment was inactivated on 26 July 1951, and its personnel and assets transferred to a new organization, the 8240th Army Unit. (In addition to its Korea-based assets, the 8240th consisted of a headquarters element in Tokyo and a logistic element in Sapporo, Japan.) The former KLO/TLO organization now became known as the Far East Command Liaison

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<sup>a</sup> Twenty UHF-VHF air-sea rescue sets had been acquired in mid-December but had arrived without operating manuals and proved to be of insufficient range to be useful. Once voice radios became available, airborne radio control support was provided by the C-46s of the 438th Troop Carrier Command staging out of Japan.

Detachment, Korea. The Liaison Detachment, commanded by Col. William I. Russell, had an authorized strength of 104. Because of a shortage of intelligence specialists, and the Army's decision to return gradually all CIC personnel to their normal assignments, it took some time to gather the necessary numbers. Colonel Russell started out with only the 50-odd people he had inherited from the 442d.<sup>22</sup>

The tight personnel situation led to a new development in agent training—agent nets—that were set up by the summer of 1951. These consisted of permanent agent organizations behind enemy lines, linked to headquarters by radio control and supplied and reinforced by SALAMANDER and AVIARY operations. These nets were now entrusted with training, thus allowing the school at Taegu to be shut down. Under the new arrangements, each net recruited its own agents (many from the large refugee camps on the island of Koje-do), put them through a two-week training course, and sent them to the frontline TLO teams for assignment in the field. Agents who successfully completed five line-crossing missions were given two weeks of additional training and then went into the SALAMANDER or AVIARY programs.

The new approach was not completely successful. In practice, only 25 percent of agents managed to complete as many

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as four line-crossing missions for the TLOs. Centralized training was revived in October, when three nets were consolidated and a new school set up in Seoul. Ultimately, a compromise between the two approaches was reached: the nets provided basic agent training and the school became responsible for advanced radio and parachute training.<sup>23</sup>

### ***New Sources of Agents***

In addition, the Liaison Detachment found new sources from which to procure agents. A Korean religious group with many adherents in the North, the Chando Kyo, was tapped to provide an agent network. Chinese POWs who rallied to the UN side were dispatched on order of battle missions. Finally, the Liaison Detachment acquired 124 agents formerly employed by the ROK Army's Headquarters Intelligence Division (HID). These agents had been operating from bases on the Korean east coast, both at Yodo, where there were already Liaison Detachment operatives, and on islands in Wonsan Harbor. Because the HID had run out of funds, the US Army picked up the tab and the people.<sup>24</sup>

The Liaison Detachment also further improved agent commu-

nications. By the summer of 1951, it was at last possible to set up a 10-week Morse code course for agents, which permitted the nets to use long-range CW radios. By September, an elaborate communications system was in place. A network of safehouses forward of UN lines received intelligence reports from agents via voice radio. The reports were then relayed back to the various TLOs by means of Morse code. The safe houses employed SSR-5-R CW radios; the TLOs were equipped with the standard Army AN/GRC-9's. Message traffic was then passed on by the TLOs to Liaison Detachment headquarters. The main SALAMANDER base at Cho Do communicated with headquarters and its west coast agents by similar means.<sup>25</sup>

By the fall of 1951, the Liaison Detachment began to reevaluate its procedures for inserting long-range penetration agents. The SALAMANDER operation, which used boats to land and retrieve agents, had been very successful. By contrast, the AVIARY program, which dropped parachute agents deep within enemy territory and then required them to make it back to UN lines on their own, produced less satisfactory results. Although AVIARY operations were intensively pursued—111

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ing a single month—the rate of return was discouragingly low. At one point in October, the Liaison Detachment contemplated reducing its airborne operations by 50 percent. Instead, it decided to adopt a new technique. Agents would be dropped in teams close behind enemy lines, wearing enemy uniforms and carrying small arms. In this way, they could impersonate enemy patrols and, if necessary, shoot their way back to UN lines. Use of this tactic, along with better screening of agents and more specific intelligence assignments, greatly reduced losses and gave AVIARY a renewed viability.<sup>26</sup>

### ***CCRAK and the Liaison Detachment***

The Army's clandestine HUMINT effort in Korea had now become part of a wider secret war, waged on an extensive but uncoordinated basis. In parallel with the Liaison Detachment's operations, the Eighth US Army was supporting a growing partisan effort on the Korean west coast that was based on the same islands that served as SALAMANDER bases. These islands also provided bases for various clandestine operations undertaken by the US Air Force, which used them to gather intelligence and to support the escape and eva-

was another player in the secret war.<sup>27</sup>

To better coordinate these fragmented efforts, a new theater-level structure was created on 10 December 1951, called the Combined Command for Reconnaissance Activities, Korea (CCRAK). CCRAK was an umbrella organization set up to impose centralized control on the secret activities of the armed services, the CIA, and the ROK allies. At the same time CCRAK was formed, the Army decided to place all its covert and clandestine efforts under a single headquarters. The Eighth Army's 8086th Army Unit, which had been running the partisan effort, was dissolved. The Liaison Detachment took over its functions and assets.<sup>28</sup>

The Liaison Detachment thus became a miniature Army version of the World War II OSS, with responsibilities for secret intelligence and special operations, the first time these two functions had been combined in a single Army organization. The arrangement had a certain logic to it. In accordance with existing doctrine, it moved control of partisan warfare from the field army to the theater level. The reorganization also provided the Liaison Detachment with a partisan force that could protect its island bases and provide it with supplemen-

tary intelligence reports. And the Liaison Detachment was finally in a position to prevent partisan operations from inadvertently jeopardizing intelligence activities.<sup>29</sup>

### ***More Manpower***

This increase in the Liaison Detachment's responsibilities brought with it an increase in personnel. By February 1952, the Detachment had 150 assigned or attached personnel on board; by the time a cease-fire was finally concluded in the summer of 1953, the Detachment had a strength of 450. (Even then, there were complaints that the Detachment still had too few intelligence personnel to fulfill mission requirements.) While Army strength in Korea remained stable from 1951 on, the proportion of resources devoted to intelligence and covert activities was much expanded. Because UN policy ruled out additional territorial gains on the battlefield, the secret war was the only combat arena in which efforts could be intensified.<sup>30</sup>

A good part of the growth permitted by this strength increase went into expanding the clandestine HUMINT effort. By 1953, a large, formidable organization had been fielded. The Liaison Detachment's Intelligence Division controlled five separate Intelligence Commands. Each had its own geographic area of responsibility



(although one command conducted operations on both coasts of Korea and across the frontlines), but the commands were also allowed to penetrate North Korea, Manchuria, and China proper to the extent their resources permitted. The five commands directed the activities of 17 separate agent nets, all with radio links to the appropriate command headquarters.

No fewer than 2,100 agents reported to the Liaison Detachment. Badger Net alone had 450 agents. Three hundred of these were in North Korea, either in permanent cells or as temporary inserts; the rest were at headquarters, in training, or in reserve.<sup>31</sup>

### ***Intelligence Production***

The nature of the game meant that the structure was not perfect. The necessity of setting up a clandestine organization in a denied area under wartime conditions had forced compromises both in administration and in the caliber of recruited agents. (In light of the fact that it was not until 1953 that TLO agents received the same pay as day laborers working for the Eighth Army, the latter deficiency is particularly unsurprising.) Some nets produced only inconclusive results, and no evidence exists that any were able to supply high-level intelligence on enemy plans.

Nevertheless, by the end of the war the Liaison Detach-

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ment had become the chief producer of HUMINT for the whole CCRAK organization, furnishing up to 1,000 intelligence reports a month, most graded by consumers as being of significant importance. This represented a five-fold increase over the detachment's output in 1951. The Liaison Detachment's contribution to CCRAK was as great as that of the Air Force's clandestine service, ROK Army G-2, and the CIA's collection element combined.<sup>32</sup>

### ***Paying a Price***

This elaborate clandestine HUMINT apparatus was not built without a certain price. The Korean agents bore most of the costs and risks, and their losses had been high, especially in the first stages of the effort. But Liaison Detachment personnel also met their deaths trying to insert agents. An Air Force C-46 went down over North Korea one night in February 1952, carrying three Detachment personnel, seven Air Force crewmen, and six Korean agents and an interpreter.

In April 1953, the ill-omened Fizzle Net, operating from Yodo on the east coast under the 4th Intelligence Command, ceased to exist when the American lieutenant serving as project

officer was ambushed and killed with his agent party in a landing attempt that went awry.<sup>33</sup>

### ***Partisan Warfare***

The expansion of the partisan operation that the Liaison Detachment had taken over from the Eighth Army at the end of 1951 was even more striking. The private army of guerrillas inherited by the Liaison Detachment originated in the various groups of anti-communist refugees from North Korea who had fled to the islands off the western coast of Korea in the winter of 1950-1951. The Eighth Army had taken these groups in hand in early 1951 and used them to form a partisan force. So-called donkey units of partisans were assembled around a hastily trained indigenous cadre and used as a raiding force against the mainland. The islands from which they operated were strategically located behind enemy lines and were protected from enemy attack by the UN naval blockade and ROK garrisons. Because the partisans required only a few American personnel as advisers, they represented an effective, inexpensive force multiplier for the Eighth Army.<sup>34</sup>

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key units on the Korean west coast had been grouped into two regiments named Leopard and Wolfpack. In addition, a company assigned the designation Kirkland had been organized on Yodo Island off the east coast of Korea. At this point, the increased activity and visibility of the partisans began to provoke a violent North Korean reaction. Some of the more vulnerable islands on the west coast came under enemy attack. This posed a threat to the partisans and to the SALAMANDER HUMINT operations of the Liaison Detachment. The end result was that the guerrillas had come under Liaison Detachment control.<sup>35</sup>

During the course of 1952, the Liaison Detachment expanded the initially small Kirkland force on Yodo to regimental strength. The Leopard and Wolfpack organizations on the west coast were also built up. Operating from their island safehavens and assisted by a sprinkling of American advisers and US logistic support, the partisans waged a lively little war of their own. That year, the partisans optimistically claimed to have inflicted 51,000 casualties on enemy forces. Partisan casualties, however, were not light: the partisans had to defend their own island bases in addition to mounting offen-

changed hands two or three times. More than 2,000 partisans became casualties in 1952, and more than half of these were killed or listed as missing in action.<sup>36</sup>

### **PAIR**

The Army viewed this kind of amphibious warfare as a success. In the Korean War's wider context, however, the partisans were more of a nuisance to the enemy than a real threat. They were never able to establish any bases on the mainland or conduct operations larger than raids. Moreover, landing operations were hampered by the harsh Korean winters and, on the west coast, by the enormous tidal fluctuations that regularly turned beaches into vast and impassable mudflats.

Meanwhile, even more ambitious schemes were under way. In April 1952, FECOM produced a Guerrilla Operations Outline, 1952. This proposed adding an airborne dimension to the existing partisan amphibious operations. FECOM decreed that "all commands will qualify paratroops." Accordingly, paratroop trainees were taken from the existing Leopard, Wolfpack, and Kirkland formations and grouped in a unit that officially became the 1st Partisan Airborne Infantry Regiment (PAIR) in November

1952. At the same time, the Leopard, Wolfpack, and Kirkland units were redesignated respectively as the 1st, 2d, and 3d Partisan Infantry Regiments.<sup>37</sup>

The first contingent of the 1st PAIR's new airborne troops was committed to action in early 1953. On the night of 23 January, a flight of three Air Force C-119s guided by a B-26 Pathfinder aircraft airdropped a special 97-man "Green Dragon" unit behind enemy lines to set up an operational base for guerrilla activities. The fate of this first (and, as it turned out, only) major employment of partisans in an airborne role was not a happy one. After a long delay, the party made radio contact with headquarters and reported taking heavy casualties. Reinforcements and supplies were promptly flown in to sustain the Green Dragon force. But when the final cease-fire was concluded in June 1953, the last radio message to reach the Liaison Division from Green Dragon was a curse. The operation had been compromised and was under enemy control.<sup>38</sup>

The whole episode became just another part of the generally melancholy story of airborne special operations during the Korean War. The 8240th Army Unit and its Air Force counterpart repeatedly launched behind-the-lines sabotage missions. Hundreds of Koreans floated down on night drops into the black hole of

North Korea and were never heard from again. In 1952, the 8240th had paratropped "Mustang Ranger" teams of partisans behind enemy lines on half-a-dozen occasions to attack enemy railroad lines. The teams varied in size from five to 20 men. They all met the same fate. After the "Green Dragon" operation had commenced, additional large sabotage teams drawn from the ranks of the 1st PAIR were sent in. None survived.<sup>39</sup>

In 1951 and 1952, the Far East Air Force had dropped some 200 sabotage agents of its own on 19 separate missions directed against North Korean facilities. The agents accomplished practically nothing, and only one party ever returned safely to UN lines. Despite these unpromising precedents, the Liaison Detachment's Guerilla Division had laid plans in the spring of 1953 to use the 1st PAIR's "Southwind" element in yet another attempt at mounting sabotage operations. It proposed to parachute in 48 two-man teams to blow up North Korean railroads. Perhaps fortunately for all concerned, the mission was never implemented.<sup>40</sup>

The failure of the Green Dragon operation did not become apparent until the fighting had ended. Thus, during the first part of 1953, the Liaison Detachment was encouraged to lay down plans for an ambitious and greatly expanded program of guerrilla

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warfare. In addition to building up the 1st PAIR, the Detachment expanded two of its original regiments to provide additional forces for seaborne raids and assaults. The over-strength 1st Partisan Infantry Regiment was split up, allowing the formation of a new 6th Partisan Infantry Regiment. In similar fashion, the 2d Partisan Infantry Regiment contributed personnel to form a new 5th Partisan Infantry Regiment. The regiment based on the Korean east coast, the 3d Partisan Infantry, was too small to break up in this way, but its members were given airborne training. (There was no 4th Partisan Infantry Regiment, because Koreans allegedly associated the number four with bad luck.)<sup>41</sup>

### ***A Small Army***

As a result of these preparations, the Liaison Detachment had fielded what amounted to its own Korean Army by the time of the July 1953 ceasefire. The six-regiment force had a strength of more than 17,000 troops. The small American cadre assigned to the partisans included 55 personnel from the Army's newly organized 10th Special Forces Group.

This guerrilla army possessed 300 trucks and trailers; was

equipped with its own freighters, crash boats, and fishing vessels; and consumed 7,500 tons of supplies a month. Rice accounted for the bulk of the supply allotment; each partisan was issued 100 pounds a month, some for personal consumption, the rest for barter. The partisans also had their own chaplains, band, and travelling entertainment troupe. The Liaison Detachment even published a house magazine for them, *The Parachute*.<sup>42</sup>

All this was something of a triumph for American-style organization. There were, however, some liabilities. Understandably, there was a certain rivalry between the American-controlled partisans and the regular ROK forces. Also, the partisan operation had swollen to such a size that some now questioned its effectiveness. While partisan raiders had served as a useful adjunct to UN forces, their value when used in large conventional units was open to dispute, especially because of the nature of their training and equipment.

The question was never fully resolved. A ceasefire occurred before the new partisan structure could be committed to battle, the guerrillas were forced to evacuate their island bases, which lay north of the Demilitarized Zone now demarcating

North and South Korea, and most of the partisan units were disbanded.<sup>a43</sup>

### ***Psywar Activity***

In 1953, the Detachment also expanded its responsibilities to include psychological warfare, or “psywar.” This might seem to be an odd area of involvement for what began as an intelligence organization, but there were precedents. The OSS had conducted psychological warfare operations in World War II, and Army doctrine closely linked covert operations and psychological warfare. By mid-1953, the Liaison Detachment

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<sup>a</sup> Evanhoe felt that exacerbating this rivalry was the “large influx of South Korean citizens into partisan ranks whose only reason for volunteering was to escape being drafted into the South Korean Army,” as well as the fact that “Many of those recruited were pimps, thieves, and other undesirables who were hiding from South Korean authorities and wanted to use duty with the partisans to escape.”

was providing classroom training to Koreans in psychological warfare and preparing propaganda leaflets for distribution in the enemy rear. In addition, it was using propaganda to sustain the morale of its own partisans.<sup>44</sup>

### ***Evaluation***

The KLO and its successor organizations, the 442d CIC Detachment and the Far East Command Liaison Detachment, Korea, occupy a unique place in the history of Army intelligence. The KLO started out as a small residual FECOM intelligence presence in Korea, increased in scope as a result of the North Korean invasion, and then was redesignated and further expanded during the darkest days of the war. Ultimately, it was redesignated once more and given responsibility for the whole Army covert and clandestine effort in Korea. Its particular pattern of organization,

however, would not provide an operational model for Army intelligence in the future. The Liaison Detachment’s structure was revamped almost as soon as the fighting in Korea ended.

Essentially, the Liaison Detachment was a creature of the Korean war. Its efforts produced a certain long-term impact: the Army was made aware of the potentialities for conducting positive human intelligence collection in peace as well as war. Moreover, certain Special Forces operations in Vietnam would later parallel, but not replicate, Liaison Detachment activities in Korea. Generally, however, the organization’s accomplishments and the lessons learned from them went down a historical memory hole and passed into oblivion along with other aspects of America’s “forgotten war” in Korea.<sup>45</sup>



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