

***THE KOREAN WAR 1950-53:  
A 50 YEAR RETROSPECTIVE***

***THE FORGOTTEN ARMY IN THE MISUNDERSTOOD WAR:  
THE HANGUK GUN IN THE KOREAN WAR 1946-53***

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The Korean War may be mislaid, stolen, forgotten, and misunderstood in North American and western Europe, but its memory still shapes political calculations in Beijing, Tokyo, Pyongyang, and Seoul. To Asians, the war and fifty years of aftershocks have once again demonstrated the unwillingness or incapacity of Westerners to come to grips with the political culture of Asia. Unlike Australia, which has learned the politics of the Malay Barrier, the United States remains in the intellectual and emotional sense an occasional tourist in Asian politics, albeit an elephantine visitor that stomps the life out of anyone who happens to cross its feckless path. The fiftieth anniversary of the Korean War provides an opportunity to think about the persistent ignorance of Americans about Asia, but such reflections are not our national style unless they are encouraged by the press's discovery of wartime atrocities. That is hardly the best way to ponder international relations.<sup>1</sup>

Any analysis of the Korean War should include some consideration of the Koreans themselves. Obviously their stake in its outcome represented a quantum leap beyond any other belligerent's costs and benefits, even the Chinese. The war may have been limited for all the other belligerents, but it was total for the Koreans. It is easy to see them simply as the unfortunate victims of a Cold War struggle waged through surrogates by the United States and the Soviet Union. Of course, both the global superpowers engaged their own forces against each other, too, although disproportionately so since the Chinese were willing to fight and die under the withering firepower of the United States, and the Russians were not. Such a view does neither of the Koreans justice since they represented two legitimate, if uncompromising revolutionary visions about the future of the Korean people, visions that still exist, embodied in the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.<sup>2</sup>

The human cost of the war—even allowing for the statistical uncertainties of government information agencies—was truly awful. In 1950 the population of the Republic of Korea numbered roughly twenty million, the population of North Korea about half that number. No one will ever know with any precision just what the war of 1950-53 cost the Korean people, but the estimates are catastrophic. The South Korean armed forces lost at least 187,712 personnel, and the fate of thousands more remains uncertain. Most of the MIAs probably died as slave laborers or as unwilling conscripts into the North Korean army. The civilian dead in South Korea may approach a million, victims of Communist massacres and servitude, dead of exposure and disease, and helpless targets of United Nations Command artillery and air strikes. Almost half the population of South Korea became refugees in 1950-51.

The North Koreans have extended the cult of *Juche* into their own history of the war. 'Self-reliance' is basically an exercise in self-deception and self-congratulation. The South Koreans estimate that the North Koreans suffered almost 300,000 combat-related deaths during the war. The North Koreans do not admit to any firm numbers of military fatalities, but they claim that two million North Koreans died from all causes, including alleged American germ warfare. The effect of the war upon the Korean economy and infrastructure also eludes precise calculation, but the estimates on the destruction of property and other kinds of wealth and assets for all of Korea falls in the 50-80 per cent range.

The sacrifice of the other belligerents is not comparable. The Chinese admit to fewer than 200,000 military dead, although western estimates triple this number. Although the war certainly retarded Chinese economic development and thinned the ranks of the People's Liberation Army, the Korean War was—in Chinese eyes—a costly victory, worth every life and *renminbi*. American losses, complicated by sloppy counting by the US Army, were not 54,000,

but 36,000 war-related dead in the Asian theatre of operations. The direct cost of the war to the United States falls in the \$20-\$30 billion range; the deaths and dollars represent about one-third of the American effort to defeat Japan in the Second World War. The other United Nations participants endured even less onerous losses in lives and treasure; the total of UN military deaths (not-US, not-ROK) is 3960. The financial contribution is even less awesome, even when adjusted for relative national wealth.<sup>3</sup>

The ordeal of the Korean people after their liberation from Japanese rule in 1945 until the armistice of the internationalised civil war in 1953 can be understood through the history of the origins and ordeals of the army of the Republic of Korea, the *Hanguk Gun* or, in American military-ese, the Republic of Korea Army or 'ROKA'. In the parlance of the 1950s South Korean soldiers were known as 'rocks' or in less-complimentary, racist terms. The history of the ROKA reveals a great deal about the origins, conduct, and consequences of the Korean War itself—as would a comprehensive history of the North Korean army or *In Min Gun* ('People's Army'). Putting the South Korean army back into the history of the Korean War helps place the Koreans in a critical turning point in their thirteen centuries of history as a people with a distinct culture, language, and heritage.

The history of any army requires some appreciation of the politics that influence its creation. The best place to start is with the resistance to Japanese annexation (1910) and the protest movement of March 1919. When the Japanese army and the colonial police smashed the Korean independence movement, the surviving Korean political leadership fled into exile where most of them remained until 1945. No single leader and no single party or independence faction emerged as the dominant force in exile politics; none established a Korean underground or partisan movement strong enough to either challenge the Japanese or eliminate its competitors within Korea or abroad.<sup>4</sup>

In the loose sense the March First Movement evolved as two competing revolutionary, nationalist political groupings. The first was the Korean Communist party (officially formed in 1918-1923), which in reality became several competitive parties. Korean Communists before 1945 formed major factions in China, Manchuria, Siberia, the Russian Maritime Province, and Japan with a small group of fugitives within Korea itself. The other part of the Independence Movement shared some goals with the Communists (eg, drive away the Japanese) but its leadership drew its inspiration from sources other than Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao Zedong. No less revolutionary in their goals for a new Korea, the radical nationalists drew their inspiration from the American and French revolutions, the economic development of Europe and the United States, and western theories of scientific management and modernisation. Their reformism stressed progressive education and European medicine, and they sought some modification of the Confucian value and family system.

It would, however, misrepresent their views to describe these reformers as democratic, liberal capitalists, although some of them understood and appreciated these concepts. The Korean radical nationalists (including Syngman Rhee) viewed politics as the province of an educated elite and economic development as a matter of command, not market, incentives. Westerners who knew Korean independence leaders recognised their commitment to some western learning and thought they were twentieth century westernised popular politicians. Foreigners no doubt could be fooled by Koreans who dressed as proper modern gentlemen, spoke some English, and attended a Christian church. Many of the radical nationalist leaders had, in fact, been educated abroad in England, Scotland, France, Germany, the United States, and Japan. American diplomats, especially those of the young, idealistic variety, found it hard to cope with leaders like Kim Ku and Syngman Rhee who could discuss the 'Rights of Man' with feeling and then go off to plot the assassination of a rival or the organisation of a riot to disrupt a competing party. Like other post-colonial independence movements, leadership gravitated to the boldest, charismatic, and least compromising leaders.

Establishing and organising a stable, expert, professional, and non-political army within such a political environment would have been a nearly impossible task. The difficulties were multiplied by two other factors. The first was the unbroken existence of the Japanese colonial police through the American military government and into the establishment of the First

Republic (15 August 1948) as the Korean National Police (*Chosun Kyongchalchong*). Even when stripped of its Japanese leaders, the Korean National Police (KNP) continued to act as a bastion of anti-radicalism, the protector of privilege and property, and the champion of Japanese treatment for labour organisers, mob protesters, tax evaders, economic criminals, and populist politicians.<sup>5</sup>

The KNP started with 8000 of its 20,000 original members. The KNP then became an employer of choice for anti-Communists who fled from North Korea in 1945-1946, many of whom were militant Christians and the backbone of rightist paramilitary groups like the Korean National Youth Association, the Racial Youth Association, and the Northwest Youth Association. The KNP and the rightist paramilitary associations enjoyed strong leadership from Cho Pyong-ok, Yi Pom-sok, and Chang T'aek-sang, two of whom held western doctorates and the other an influential graduate of a Chinese Nationalist military academy.

The Korean National Police had no intention of surrendering its monopoly of peacekeeping and national defence to any other official security force, especially one that might recruit members of dubious political orientation. The KNP also wanted no rival for American support in arms, instructors, and money, and it certainly did not want to share its system of extortion, which supplemented its meagre official pay. What it did want to share was its role as target for armed dissidents and rioters, who saw the police as an unwanted vestige of Japanese rule and a bulwark against freedoms that ran from democratic political organisation and voting to all forms of freelance crime and vengeful property destruction. The Korean policeman's lot was not a happy one.

The other factor is that the competition for the political mastery of all Korea began immediately upon the Japanese surrender in 1945. For less than four months the Koreans enjoyed some semblance of independent popular government exercised by 'People's Committees' or coalitions of local notables hastily organised to keep the peace in the wake of the Japanese surrender. Neither the American nor the Russian occupation regimes wanted the People's Committees to become the basis of a legitimate successor regime, and they both pressured the committees out of existence by establishing national military government systems, which depended on a combination of military presence and Korean cooperation. Nevertheless, the unstable nature of these coalition committees suggests they would not have survived the inevitable power struggles between the most powerful political movements in South Korea, the South Korean Labor (Communist) Party of Pak Hon-yong and the Korean Democratic Party of Kim Song-su and Kim Kyu-sik.

The polarisation of Korean politics in southern Korea and the Russianisation of politics in northern Korea (under the eager leadership of Kim Il-sung) represents the First Phase of a People's War, as preached by Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minn, and others. Although there was no conscious effort by Korean Communists to wage a protracted people's war, they did so. The period of revolutionary organisation and political agitation began in August, 1945 and lasted until March-April, 1948 when a wave of Communist-inspired strikes and uprisings plunged southern Korea into insurrectionary war. The Second Phase of terrorism and partisan warfare ended with the invasion of the Republic of Korea on 25 June 1950. The Third Phase is the conflict known as the Korean War, which ended with an armistice on 27 July 1953. The history of the South Korean army should be understood within these three phases of the Greater Korean War, 1945-53.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Organisation of the Korean Constabulary**

The sudden end of the Asia-Pacific war in August 1945 created an unexpected mission for the American armed forces in the western Pacific: disarm and repatriate over five million Japanese to the Home Islands before the outraged subject peoples—like the Chinese, Filipinos, and Koreans—extracted their own form of justice and endangered the peaceful occupation of Japan itself. Among the many terms the Japanese accepted was the liquidation of their overseas empire, which included Korea. With little planning and great urgency, large parts of the American ground forces on Okinawa and in the Philippines hurried to the Home Islands, Korea, and northern China. The US XXIV Corps (Lieutenant General John R Hodge)

of three infantry divisions sailed from Okinawa and landed at Inchon on 8 September 1945. The corps' mission was to repatriate all the Japanese south of the 38th Parallel (where Russian troops had already arrived) and to keep public order until the State Department could form some policy about a Korean regime for the entire country, which would have to be negotiated with the Soviet Union.

The structure of the American occupation forces and its supporting civil administration influenced the definition of public order and peacekeeping during the repatriation process. General Hodge held the post of Commanding General, US Army Forces in Korea and Commanding General, XXIV Corps. Hodge coordinated his activities with General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander Allied Powers, but MacArthur, his nominal senior commander, showed only occasional interest in Korean affairs. Hodge most often reported directly to the Army staff in Washington through the agencies at the War Department concerned with occupation policies. Coordination with the State Department came from the meetings of the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee and with the other services through the committees of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. As a subordinate agency under Hodge's command, the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) actually governed Korea through various executive agencies headed by US Army officers until 1947 when appointed Korean officials took charge, aided by American civilian and military advisors.

Public order fell under the responsibility of the Bureau of National Defense, created in November 1945, and renamed the Department of National Security in May 1946 after the Russian delegation to the US-USSR Joint Commission on Korea protested that 'national defense' implied that the United States wanted Korea divided into two separate states. The Military Governors (Major Generals Archibald V Arnold, Archer L Lerch, and William F Dean) and the Directors of National Defense and National Security assumed responsibility for organising any security agency, including the Korean National Police and maritime patrol forces. Brigadier General Lawrence E Schick, USA, the Provost Marshal, XXIV Corps, proposed the creation of a separate Korean peacekeeping organisation in October, 1945, and assumed the duties of Director of National Defense; in the next eighteen months four other officers held the post. General Schick quickly concluded that the Korean National Police (slowly building to a planned strength of 25,000) could not perform all the pressing security duties that faced it. Generals Arnold and Hodge agreed because both of them wanted to reduce the American military forces in direct contact with the Koreans.<sup>7</sup>

Although the repatriation of 450,000 Japanese from Korea went smoothly, the social turmoil within the southern occupation zone gave General Hodge and his subordinates anxious days and sleepless nights. Any violence involving American troops could jeopardise the ongoing negotiations with both the Russians and the Korean political elite clamouring for more participation in government and for eventual independence and unification. The Namwon Incident of November 1945 (named after a town in the southwestern province of Chollanam-do) dramatised the American dilemma. When local authorities arrested members of the Namwon People's Committee for not turning over some confiscated property, a mob formed outside a local KNP post to protest the arrest. The police and protestors clashed, and a policeman died. Several KNP companies rushed to the scene, but they, too, faced a rout until an American infantry battalion joined the fray, which included shooting and bayoneting. Two protestors died, and sixty other Koreans were wounded. The public outcry in Korea about American military brutality spurred the drafting of Plan *Bamboo*, a scheme to create a police reserve or constabulary, by Colonel Arthur S Champeny, Schick's successor as Director of National Defense. Schick himself in November, 1945 proposed a 45,000-man national defence force for Korea. The SWNNC and JCS liked Champeny's less dramatic *Bamboo* variant, a 25,000-man national constabulary, much better and approved it 9 January 1946.<sup>8</sup>

Post-liberation Korea required a great deal of peacekeeping, and almost everyone with political and economic ambitions sought to form a private army to secure his rights, perceived or anticipated. The People's Committees formed their own modest security services composed of former guerrillas, self-appointed militiamen, and Korean veterans of the Japanese armed forces. Veterans numbered 300,000 men among the two million-plus Korean expatriates who had returned to the American occupation zone. Other Korean groups

excluded from the People's Committees formed private armies. By the end of 1945 General Arnold's staff identified fourteen such armed groups, and they did not include the large guerrilla underground already created by the South Korean Labor Party. The largest single group was the National Preparatory Army, a group of Korean veterans of Japanese service, authorised by the Committee for the Preparation of Korean Independence, the political coalition led by Yo Un-hyong that had accepted the surrender of the Japanese colonial government on 15 August 1945. The primacy of this force, however, was immediately challenged by the military arm of the Korean Provisional Government (Kim Ku, president) in exile in Chungking, the Korean Restoration Army (the Hanguk Kwangbokkun or Kwangbok Army). The Kwangbok soldiers (perhaps 3000) formed the armed support for what the Americans called 'rightist' groups.

Anticipating Washington's approval of the Plan *Bamboo* force, General Schick changed the mission of the English Language School, established on 5 December 1945 to prepare interpreters for service with American military units. Located at the Methodist Theological Seminary in Seoul, the ELS had not yet started classes when Schick told his successor, Colonel Champeny, to make the school a screening course for officers for the Korean Constabulary. The curriculum would still include learning American military terms, but also drill, leadership, weapons, and minor tactics or roughly the same training plan of a US Army Second World War officers' candidate school. Initial screening of candidates began on 14 January 1946. A USAMGIK officer, Lieutenant Colonel John T Marshall, USA, and two other officers formed the directing staff. When classes began later that month, eighteen American lieutenants transferred in from the 40th Infantry Division, then in the process of returning to the United States. General Hodge assisted the recruiting process by announcing that his plan to outlaw private armies (published on 13 November 1945) would go into effect on 21 January 1946. Hodge and Champeny also directed Marshall to use two notable Korean soldiers (Colonel Yi Ung-jun, IJA, and Colonel Cho Kae-ok, Kwangbok Army) to screen the first sixty candidates for a commission in the Constabulary. The Americans hoped that the candidates could be drawn in three equal contingents (twenty each) from veterans of the regular Japanese army, the Japanese-sponsored multi-ethnic Manchukuo army, and the Kwangbok army.

Cho boycotted the screening interviews since the political factions represented in the Kwangbok army advocated non-cooperation with the Americans and their 'collaborationist' allies. Thus Colonel Yi, a member of the Korean royal family and a graduate of the Imperial Military Academy (1914), had a dominant role in the selection process. His only rival for influence was Won Yong-duk, a former medical officer in the Japanese army, a native of Seoul, a graduate of the Chosun Christian College-Severance Hospital medical program, and Colonel Marshall's English-language interpreter. As Cho and the Kwangbok veterans charged, the initial selections showed a bias to former officers of the Japanese armed forces; they also showed concern for English-language competence, level of education, physical fitness, military experience, appearance, and dedication to Korean independence. The officer with the first serial number (10,001) was Captain (IJA) Yi Hyong-kun, Colonel Yi's charming son-in-law, age twenty-six, an Imperial Military Academy graduate (1944), and fluent in English.

Of the 110 members of the First Class, twelve had graduated from the Imperial Military Academy, ten from the Manchukuo (Manchurian) Military Institute, seventy-two as hakpyong or military cadets from civilian colleges and universities throughout the Japanese empire, two from Chinese armies, and fourteen directly from the Japanese army. One candidate did not graduate, but Colonel Yi Ung-jun accepted a commission and became No 10,110. One other new officer did not actually attend the course. Three transferred from the KNP but passed the course. Of this group, seventy-five eventually became generals in the South Korean army. As a group, they were sympathetic to American military values and aligned themselves with the nationalist-progressive revolutionary cause. Their American associates regarded them as the most professional and apolitical group of officers with whom they had to deal.

As planned, the Korean officers and their American advisors (two lieutenants, one interpreter, and two enlisted men per team) left the English Language School (immediately retitled the Constabulary Officers Training School) after seven weeks of instruction and went to the eight posts in each provincial capital to form the first company of what eventually would be an entire Constabulary regiment for each province. (The Island of Cheju-do became the site of a ninth regiment later in 1946.) Each KC company started with a nucleus of enlisted men from a battalion formed in Seoul to train with and support the First Class.<sup>9</sup>

The early recruiting went very slowly. In April 1946 the entire Constabulary, dressed and armed with Japanese cast-offs, numbered only 2000 officers and men. Although Colonel Marshall and his staff intended to recruit additional officers and enlisted men carefully, the pace of recruiting reflected additional factors. One was the hostility of the Korean National Police, whose senior officers publicly asserted that the future Korean army officer corps would come from their ranks, not those of the collaborationist, politically-suspect Constabulary. Working conditions in the Constabulary had little appeal: food, barracks' conditions, and discipline fell somewhere between the harsh standards of the Japanese army and the treatment of Japanese POWs. In March, 1946, the Constabulary endured the first of several mutinies; the sergeants of the 1st Battalion (Seoul) assaulted and beat into insensibility their battalion commander (Captain and future Army Chief of Staff Chung Il-kwon) and his staff, who were rescued by American advisors. (The plan then in effect had American officers as regimental commanders with Korean commanders and American advisors with each battalion.) The mutineers escaped any disciplinary action except discharge since they had real grievances and very good political connections with Kim Ku's Korean Independence Party, a noncooperationist group of former members of the Korean Provisional Government. Chung Il-kwon and his officers went to distant battalions, Chung to the 4th Regiment in Chunchon.

The two most important stimulants to building the Constabulary were the Korean National Police and the South Korean Labor Party, locked in deadly but low-level terrorist actions by the autumn of 1946. Supported by the most determined nationalist revolutionaries and some American allies, the Korean National Police started a crackdown on socialist-democratic dissidents in the summer of 1946. Some of the suspects were implicated in coup plots, banditry, theft of American property, terrorism, labour agitation, and extortion. The same might be said of the KNP and the rightist paramilitary associations. Fugitives from the police could find safe haven in the Constabulary—and they did. An unknown number of enlisted recruits came into the Constabulary as Communist infiltrators. Although the second director of the Constabulary, Lieutenant Colonel Russell A Barros, wanted to have the KNP screen his recruits for political orientation, the Korean National Police refused to cooperate. Barros had learned Asian politics as a guerrilla leader in the Philippines, so he knew his force had become a home for harried leftists, but he had no alternative but to accept (at USAMGIK's insistence) all candidates who could pass the routine physical and intelligence requirements.

The issue became truly dangerous when Barros formed the Second Class (OTS) in September, 1946, just as political tension throughout Korea increased. Only thirty-five members of the Second Class had served as officers in any army; the remaining candidates came directly from civil life or from the Constabulary's enlisted ranks. Of the 196 officers eventually commissioned from an intake of 263, seventy-nine eventually became generals of the South Korean army. How many came from the ranks of the South Korean Labor Party or other leftist or rightist radical factions was not known then or now, but the sheer numbers of revolutionaries made the class unmanageable and aggressive, (the Korean officer serving as acting director of the OTS later claimed he survived several murder plots, one engineered by his most famous student, Park Chung-hee, the future general-president of the Republic of Korea, 1961-1979). The 387 graduates of the Third and Fourth Classes also showed little interest in serving in a professionalised national defence force. Graduating in 1948, some of their graduates continued the infiltration of dissidents into the Constabulary with cells of the South Korean Labor Party in almost every regiment and administrative office. Park Chung-hee headed a group of Communist officers at Constabulary headquarters and the Officer Training School. The formation of the Fifth Class (October, 1947) halted the appeal of the Constabulary as a sanctuary for fleeing dissidents; two-thirds of the 380 officers commissioned in the Fifth Class were northern Koreans, refugees from Communist

oppression, Christians, and members of the educated elite. They sought out the Communists in their midst for dismissal, a practice continued by the Sixth and Seventh Classes, the last ones chosen before the establishment of the Republic of Korea.<sup>10</sup>

The other factor that shaped the Constabulary was the Taegu or Autumn Harvest Rebellion of October, 1946, the most serious civil violence against USAMGIK and its Korean associates. The summer of 1946 had been just one more disaster in a series of economic disasters in the preceding decade. This one came from the weather, not Japanese exploitation. (During the Second World War Korean rice production doubled, but domestic consumption dropped by half from pre-1940 levels.) A shortage of rainfall, exacerbated by the lack of fertilizer, reduced the rice harvest and built anxiety about a winter famine. In addition, perhaps 10,000 Koreans perished in a cholera epidemic that summer, and the whole country endured quarantines, travel restrictions, and compulsory medical testing enforced by all the Korean security services. Alarmed by the deteriorating economic conditions, the Korean transportation unions called for wage raises under the threat of a general strike. Working from its surviving underground, the South Korean Labor Party recognised an opportunity to seize the vanguard position in a peasants and workers movement and to force the Americans to withdraw or at least seek a conciliatory policy toward the Left, perhaps even allowing reunification under a coalition government that the Communists could later subvert. The resulting uprising shook USAMGIK to the soles of its shiny jumpboots, hurried the withdrawal of American troops, and boosted the fortunes of the Korean Constabulary.

The transportation workers' strikes, strengthened by student protesters, brought the KNP and the demonstrators face to face in the streets. A series of police-protestor clashes then turned into urban guerrilla warfare throughout all four of Korea's southern provinces (the Chollas and the Kyongsangs) in October and November, 1946. Outraged at a combination of rice rationing, food confiscations, and higher prices, farm groups and ordinary people joined the marches, all met with force by the police with indifferent success. Small groups of urban guerrillas, many led by Communist cadres, assaulted tax offices, police stations, government offices, and the homes and businesses of local Koreans judged too sympathetic to the Japanese and the established social order. The police and rightist paramilitary groups retaliated.

On several occasions American infantry and military police had to fire into Korean crowds and kill protesters to stop attacks. Americans probably killed fewer than 20 of the 1000-plus Koreans who died in the uprising, but the experience convinced General Hodge that something must be done to prevent such incidents. The Constabulary had not been numerous enough (900 men in the four southern provinces) and ardent enough to put down the revolt. General Hodge, supported by MacArthur, urged Washington to approve a quick increase of the Constabulary to 50,000 officers and men and to plan for a force double that number, depending upon equipment and funding. The review process dragged on into 1947, but in the meantime, the Constabulary began to climb to double its 1946 strength. The general fear stirred by the Autumn Harvest Rebellion made recruiting much easier and more systematic in judging the recruits' politics. Nevertheless, more Communists entered the Constabulary enlisted ranks to escape the KNP and prepare for more uprisings.<sup>11</sup>

The Autumn Harvest Rebellion also made the United States less interested in pursuing negotiations with the Soviet Union to find a formula for reunifying Korea. By 1947 no radical-nationalist politician like Kim Ku or Syngman Rhee would consider any proposal that gave the Russians influence over southern Korea. The moderates of the Korean Democratic Party, favored by General Hodge, found themselves either the victims of assassinations or other forms of coercion or harried from influence by rightist associations. Cooperation with the USAMGIK became a sure road to political oblivion unless the position gave one an independent power base and financial support, such as an appointment in the Ministry of Justice and the Korean National Police. In desperation the United States went to the United Nations and won the General Assembly's approval for the establishment of a United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK), a nine-nation committee to explore the question of self-determination for all of Korea if possible and for southern Korea if the Soviets proved intransigent. In the meantime, the Department of the Army pressed President Harry S

Truman to liquidate the occupation of Korea, but the State Department slowed the process enough so that the half-strength US 6th Infantry and 7th Infantry Divisions remained in place through 1947. The departure of other American troops increased the requirement to guard both Japanese and American property held by USAFIK, a mission assumed by the Constabulary in return for more funding in early 1947. For every American soldier it could replace on sentry duty, the Constabulary received the equivalent of US\$6000 a year. In addition, it assumed custody of American weapons, equipment, clothing, and garrison property judged unsalvageable or too expensive to ship even to Japan. Training missions from the two American divisions still played a critical role for each of the nine provincial regiments. Whether the Korean Constabulary could survive without American sponsorship remained to be seen.

### **The Birth of the Korean Army and the War for South Korea, 1948-1950**

Despite repeated efforts to set up some process of unification, the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea made no progress in joining the two Koreas in the winter of 1947-48. Korean politicians had even less success, although Kim Ku and Kim Kyu-sik made at least a gesture toward negotiation. All they managed to do was strengthen the appeal of Syngman Rhee to the Americans and the Korean people. Pretending to be above politics and party, Rhee formed all sorts of alliances with important groups in the militant radical-nationalist camp: northern refugees, bellicose Christians, the Korean security forces, aspiring entrepreneurs, and the Korean bureaucrats in USAMGIK. Rhee pitted serving senior officers of the Korean National Police against those of the Constabulary, and he made promises to them and to officer-aspirants unwilling to serve under American supervision that he would favour them with office if he became president or prime minister. For a foreign policy, Rhee managed to rail against Japan, the Soviet Union, and the United States with almost equal vitriol. In the meantime, Kim Ku reverted to type, arranging the assassination of three leaders of the rival (and more liberal) Korean Democratic Party, one of them the respected Yo Unhyong (19 July 1947). In this volatile environment, UNTCOK, in February, 1948 announced that it would proceed with elections and an interim government that would produce a Republic of Korea in the south. It would be recognised as the legitimate government of all Korea, an open denial of the authority of any Russian-sponsored regime in northern Korea.

The principal advisors to the Korean Constabulary in 1947-48—Lieutenant Colonel Barros, Captain John P Reed, and Captain James H Hausman—knew that the Constabulary faced heavy odds in surviving open politicisation, subversion by the bellicose right and the Communists, demoralisation from poor support and training, and the factionalism within its own officer corps. In the face of all these perils, the Constabulary doubled in size to 50,000 with the likelihood that it would double again to 100,000 before the last American troops left Korea at the end of 1948. When the American troops departed and the occupation ended, the entire foundation of American support would evaporate unless Congress provided some alternative funding to the Department of the Army's Government Aid and Relief of Occupied Areas (GARIOA) funds. The American garrison would take away its instructors, weapons, training ammunition and supplies, garrison equipment and consumables, and surplus uniforms. The Military Government groups would go; the Counterintelligence Corps detachments would go; and all the administrative structure of the USAFIK would go. The Constabulary advisors—part of the Military Government—would depart, too, unless they were recreated as a different military group within the US diplomatic mission. There was also some question whether UNTCOK would allow any strengthening of the Constabulary during the election process, even though political violence would probably increase and overwhelm the Korean National Police as it had in 1946.<sup>12</sup>

The South Korean Labor Party, directed from a sanctuary in the Russian zone at Haeju, Hwanghae Province, not far across the 38th Parallel near the western coast, saw opportunity where the Americans and their Korean associates saw peril. The Autumn Harvest Rebellion of 1946 showed what possibilities still existed for a mass uprising by unhappy tenant farmers, romantic revolutionary students, militant workers, alienated members of the middle class, and every Korean who nursed anti-foreign hatreds. The United Nations could be attacked as an American front organisation and the United States as the tool of those unrequited Japanese

imperialists who wanted to reverse the results of the Second World War and throw back the Communist revolution in China. The southern Communists had substantial SKLP cells in five of the nine Constabulary regiments. Moreover, rightist groups, still conducting terrorist acts against the Korean leftists, seemed equally determined to subvert the Constabulary and gain full control of the Korean National Police. This threat provided a welcome distraction and uncertainty in the political equation, likely to paralyse USAMGIK decision-making. At the personal level, Pak Hon-yong no doubt received encouragement from Kim Il-sung, who already saw himself as the great liberator of all Korea with the southern Communists in the first (and expendable) line of battle.

Answering the call of the Korean labour movement, thousands of Koreans marched, chanted, and made speeches in a general strike that spread throughout southern Korea in February, 1948. The protest marches were accompanied by industrial sabotage, mob violence, and terrorist attacks on the police stations. The KNP struck back, and within five weeks the death toll had reached more than 300, the wounded three times that number, and the number of arrests around 1500. The general strike flamed out, but few thought the unrest had ended. In the meantime, the Constabulary increased the pace of its preparations for battle; its major program was the replacement of Japanese bolt-action Type 38 rifles with American M-1s. The transfers, however, meant that each regiment would have twice its normal number of weapons sometime in the spring of 1948, which might actually increase the likelihood of mutiny and the raising of guerrilla bands. The Communists had also stockpiled Japanese weapons and ammunition in southern Korea's mountains.

The Korean insurrection of 1948-50 flamed into open warfare on Cheju-do island in April 1948 and provided the first clear picture of the Constabulary's problems. Under pressure from rightist associations and uncertain of the loyalties of the KNP detachment on the island, Governor Pak Kyung-jun resigned to organise a liberal-democratic party on the island, always a notable centre of Korean radicalism. The USAMGIK governor, Major General William F Dean, sent Colonel Barros to the island as temporary governor, but the Rhee faction pressured Hodge to replace Barros with Yu Hae-jin, an associate of Yi Pom-sok. Barros remained on the island as US civil affairs chief and commander of a military government company, a CIC detachment, and a security platoon from the US 20th Infantry. Barros had good reason to report that the island would not stay peaceful. Governor Yu and the KNP started a round-up of all their political opponents, but they did not have the support of the 9th Constabulary Regiment, whose commander, Lieutenant Colonel Kim Ik-yol, had open leftist sympathies and was a friend of the island's leading revolutionary, school teacher Kim Tal-sam, a veteran of Japanese military service.<sup>13</sup>

On 3 April 1948 Kim Tal-sam's partisans, reinforced with KC deserters, made simultaneous and well-organised attacks on twenty-four Cheju-do police stations. The KNP, rightist paramilitary associations (empowered as auxiliary police), and parts of the 9th Regiment fought back. The campaign then moved into hunt-chase-and-ambush operations in the mountainous countryside without resolution but with mounting deaths, especially among the stunned villagers caught in the crossfire. The 9th Regiment proved so undependable that its remnants (with the exceptions of administrative personnel) left the island for retraining. It turned its pacification mission over to the new 11th Regiment, formed around cadres of the 5th Regiment (Pusan) and a unit dominated by militant anti-Communist refugees from northern Korea. The new regimental commander, Lieutenant Colonel Pak Chin-gyong, enjoyed the affection and trust of his advisors and troops and already had a reputation as one of the leaders of the Constabulary. A graduate of an elite civilian university in Japan, Pak spoke fluent English, treated his troops with true consideration, and preached civilian control of the military and the rights of Koreans to live free and prosper. Under Colonel Pak's command, the KNP-KC counter-guerrilla forces conducted proper cordon and search operations against the hardcore partisan leaders and fighters, assisted by US Army spotter planes, intelligence agents, and support troops. The partisans took to the rugged mountains, especially giant Halla-san, an extinct volcano surrounded by a howling wilderness. The insurrection started to flame out. On Cheju-do and on the mainland the May elections for a national assembly to draft a constitution proceeded with relative peace and honesty under UN supervision.

The first step in the creation of an independent Republic of Korea under United Nations and American patronage sent the dissident underground (right and left) into a flurry of organisational activity, but no general uprising. Again Cheju-do provided the spark for renewed violence. On the evening of 18 June 1948 two members of the stay-behind 9th Regiment headquarters staff shot their new commander to death under a plan designed by Lieutenant Mun Sang-gil. The investigation of Colonel Pak's murder finally revealed the depth of Communist infiltration in the Constabulary. Captains Hausman and Reed, the two most influential advisors at Constabulary headquarters, persuaded the Constabulary's first Korean commander, Brigadier General Song Ho-sung, to establish his own counterintelligence/counter subversion agency and put it under the command of Colonel Paik Sun-yup, a native of Pyongyang and a fine soldier as well as dedicated anti-Communist.

Assisted by the US Army 971st Counterintelligence Detachment, Paik started a thorough screening of the Constabulary officer corps for secret cells of subversives of any political colouration. The least dependable unit was identified as the 14th Regiment, stationed at the southern port city of Yosu. The regiment contained both an SKLP cell and a group of Kim Ku's terrorists. Under orders to sail for Cheju-do some officers and senior enlisted men of the SKLP cell staged a mutiny on 19 October. Most of the regiment and the local SKLP cadres then attacked the KNP and any government sympathisers. The rebellion soon spread to the city of Sunchon where more police, other public officials, and 'rightists' were massacred. The two lieutenants who led the mutiny were members of the suspect Third Class, eventually purged of sixty per cent of its members. Within a week the Yosu-Sunchon rebels had grown to almost 2000 armed members and had gained control of much of eastern Chollanam-do.<sup>14</sup>

The Yosu-Sunchon Revolt quickly developed into a three-front partisan war that threatened the existence of the Republic of Korea, created on 15 August 1948 under the presidency of Syngman Rhee. Under the inspirational leadership of Kim Tal-sam, the Cheju-do rebels conducted raids and resisted KC-KNP expeditions into the mountains. As government operations improved with the reinforcement of another KC regiment, Kim Tal-sam slipped off the island for North Korea, but left the guerrillas under the capable command of Kim Tae-chin.

The second front developed in the aftermath of the suppression of the Yosu-Sunchon revolt because Syngman Rhee and General Song Ho-sung (against the advice of their American advisors) ordered that the cities be retaken as quickly as possible. This decision allowed the most determined and well-trained rebels to fade into the Chiri mountains. Both Sunchon and Yosu became the targets of Constabulary firepower (mortars and machineguns) and indiscriminate killing while the rebels escaped with their weapons. The total casualties for the entire affair, which finally ended with the recapture of Yosu on 27 October, cost at least 4000 lives, innocents and belligerents alike. The surviving rebels—perhaps as many as 1000—rallied other dissidents to their ranks and spread out as guerrilla bands through the two Cholla and Kyongsang provinces, preying on small towns, the transportation system, truck convoys, and KNP and KC outposts.

The third front also started as a partisan war along the 38th Parallel. With the news of the uprising in the south, Pak Hon-yong and his cadre of southern Communists dispatched guerrilla columns to reinforce their embattled brethren with Kim Tal-sam providing the critical military leadership. As the Constabulary rallied to fight the infiltrating guerrilla columns, its counter-guerrilla patrols and raids crossed the border and soon engaged the North Korean border constabulary in pitched battles. By the spring of 1949 the South Korean security forces found themselves fighting a complex partisan war of uncertain duration and conclusion.

For the next six years the Communist guerrillas in the southern mountains posed a threat to public order and the free movement of civilian and military transportation in South Korea. For the first time the KNP and KC cooperated in the name of organisational survival—especially when the American advisors to Minister of Defense Sin Sung-mo persuaded President Rhee to invoke the constitutional provision for martial law in the guerrilla-infested areas of the Chollas and the Kyongsongs. This declaration placed the senior Constabulary officer in charge of all the regular and paramilitary security forces. With the police and their auxiliaries taking responsibility for positional defence and population control, the Constabulary task

forces (usually a brigade of two or more regiments) pursued the guerrillas throughout the mountains. Command of the Chiri-san Task Force rotated between experienced counter-guerrilla veterans of the Manchurian army—Kim Paik-il, Chung Il-kwon, Yu Jae-hung, and Paik Sun-yup. Won Yong-dok, using his influence with Rhee, went from doctor to line brigade commander and also directed a Chiri-san task force. Constant military pressure throughout 1949 wore down the Chiri-san guerrillas to less than 200 active fighters, and the Constabulary scored a major victory by killing Lieutenant Kim Chi-hae, the skilled and determined leader of the Yosu mutineers.

The counterinsurgency campaigns on Cheju-do and in the four southern provinces cannot be definitively evaluated in terms of casualties since the security forces exaggerated their successes, and the guerrillas left no reports. The rebel losses (which certainly included executed civilian sympathisers and true innocents) fell somewhere between 10,000 and 30,000 with the bulk of the casualties inflicted on Cheju-do. Independent American reports from KC advisors and CIC agents put the estimated enemy casualties at around 200 a week and friendly losses at twenty-five a week. What could be traced more accurately was the number of incidents a week, which went as high as thirty in the fall of 1948 but dropped to 10 by March, 1949, and shrank in geography to Chollanam-do.<sup>15</sup>

The Constabulary also enjoyed reasonable success against the cross-border guerrilla raiders, who did not enjoy public support in Kyonggi and Kangwon provinces and who did not enjoy the same degree of surprise as the southern guerrilla bands since their intelligence and support apparatus could not develop under KNP-KC pressure. Unknown numbers of infiltrators however, survived and faded into the population even if they could not establish a basecamp system or operate in groups larger than ten to forty. The guerrilla cross-border expeditions (which numbered six by Constabulary estimates) still required a major commitment of Constabulary forces along the major corridors into southern Korea: the Ongjin peninsula, the Kaesong-Munsan valley, the Tongduchon-Uijongbu corridor, the Chunchon-Pukhan-gang basin, and the main range of the Taebaek mountains east of the Hwachon Reservoir. When the Constabulary retaliated or pursued the guerrillas to the north, the South Korean soldiers engaged more heavily armed regulars of the North Korean Border Constabulary (*Bo An Dae*), employing Russian and Japanese heavy machineguns and mortars. By the end of 1949 the two Korean armies were fighting pitched battles against each other from prepared defensive positions, backed in the case of the North Koreans by heavy and effective artillery fire. Without comparable supporting arms, the South Koreans had to close with their enemy and depended upon 'special assault units' to destroy bunkers with satchel charges and, in one famous case, mortar shells strapped to the bodies of ten 11th Regiment sergeants, who are still revered in the ROK as 'the human bombs'. In the spring of 1949 when the North Korean border guards gave way to regulars of the *In Min Gun*, the intensity of the fighting increased to the point where South Korean army headquarters and the senior American advisors believed an invasion likely. The last American unit in Korea, the 5th Regimental Combat Team, did not leave the peninsula until June 1949, when the danger appeared past.<sup>16</sup>

The counterinsurgency campaign in southern Korea took place in a political environment that mortgaged the advantages of combat experience to confusion and demoralisation within the ranks of the South Korean armed forces. On the surface the Constabulary benefitted from the creation of the Republic of Korea since by National Assembly law it became the Army of the Republic of Korea (*Hanguk Gun*), now responsible primarily for defence against external attack and the sole claimant for American military assistance and advisors. The army also survived one last attempt to discredit it when the Korean National Police charged that most of its senior officers should be prosecuted for collaborationism with the Japanese under the terms of the new National Traitors Law. The American advisors, led by Brigadier General William L Roberts and Captain Hausman, convinced Rhee that the equally new *National Security Act* (December 1948) gave the army wide powers to police its own ranks as well as to control all pacification operations in areas designated by Rhee. Rhee agreed to let the army purge its own ranks and to do so with its own internal intelligence network. The army immediately started to process the imprisoned Yosu-Sunchon rebels; it tried and convicted 2817 prisoners with 410 receiving death sentences and 563 life imprisonment. Army agents directed by the G-2, Paik Sun-yup, then went to work screening every regiment for likely dissidents.<sup>17</sup>

Within a period of eighteen months, the South Korean army expanded its total strength toward 100,000 officers and men while it purged its ranks of suspected conspirators and mutineers. The expanded purge set off another set of mutinies. The first occurred in the 6th Regiment (Taegu) in November, 1948, followed by another in Pohang (February, 1949). The resulting wave of arrests and executions produced more evidence on the extent of Communist infiltration of the army, unmasking the cell in Seoul headed by Major Park Chung-hee, subsequently sentenced to death but spared when he agreed to recant and cooperate. The worst remaining unit was the 8th Regiment (Chunchon), commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Chae Nam-gun. Already suspected of SKLP collaboration for his inept performance in the Chiri-san campaign, Chae was relieved of his command and arrested. Sufficiently scared, Chae's two henchmen, Majors Kang Tae-mun and Pyo Mu-jong, staged a mass defection of their two battalions to North Korea. (Some of their soldiers were clearly committed Communists, but the majority were not, and thus became in effect prisoners, but two companies actually fought their way back across the border to freedom.) The May, 1949 Chunchon Affair represented the most dramatic case of disaffection, but, in fact, as many as 4000 soldiers may have deserted to North Korea in 1949-1950. In addition, two ROK navy gunboats sailed north in the hands of mutineers.<sup>18</sup>

The merciless triage of the ROK army waned in 1950 with 4000 officers and men detained or arrested, a process that ended the immediate careers of most of the suspects. Half of them went to an army detention camp on Yui-do (island) in the Han River in metropolitan Seoul for extended questioning and processing. Four hundred officers and men were then tried by court-martial and convicted of murder, mutiny, conspiracy and similar crimes and received prison terms, and another five hundred received death sentences, of which around 200 actually went to the stake at an army firing range at Susaek-dong, west of Seoul and today the site of the Korean National Defense University. Jim Hausman watched his friend Chae Nam-gun fall before a firing squad, and Lieutenant Mun Sang-gil and his two assassins died at the post as well. If the North Koreans might have estimated that the South Korean army was committing suicide, their enthusiasm is understandable. They also may have deluded themselves that the Koreans would fall apart like the Chinese Nationalist army in mass unit defections. They should have noticed that the First Class, the most professionalised and senior leaders of the ROKA, produced only five purged officers and seven eventual defectors.

Habitually suspicious of his senior officers and encouraged in his anti-military biases by his Austrian wife, Francesca, Syngman Rhee contributed to the turbulence by appointing new officers from outside the Constabulary at senior ranks, playing favourites within the First Class, and frequently shifting commanders to limit the development of cliques and disloyal units. He balanced appointments by source of military experience and political connections; two of his first four generals came from the Chinese Nationalist Army (Kim Hong-il and Song Ho-sung) and two from the Japanese Army (Chae Pyong-dok and Yi Ung-jun). Since Rhee played the same games with the Korean National Police, the army benefited from similar changes in the KNP leadership, but its own leadership suffered. The best the Americans could do was to protect officers from the Japanese and Manchurian armies and place them in important subordinate positions; this included Chung Il-kwon, Yu Jae-hung, Paik Sun-yup, Kim Paik-il, Kang Mun-bong, and Yi Hyong-gun. Rhee, however, preferred eccentrics like Kim Yong-duk, a former Japanese army 'pacification' expert who sported a Wilhelmine moustache and specialised in atrocities and graft.

During the partisan and border campaigns, the American military assistance effort also changed, some aspects for the better, others not. The Provisional Military Advisory Group-Korea of 1948 (241 personnel) became the Korean Military Advisory Group with an established Table of Organisation (191 officers, 304 enlisted men) and replaced the Military Government and the American tactical units as trainers for the ROKA. The group commander was Brigadier General William L Roberts, USA, an armour officer with a respectable Second World War record in Europe and a personal friend of Army Chief of Staff J Lawton Collins. The officers assigned to KMAG might have preferred troop assignments in Japan, but they were career regulars, some of them West Point graduates, veterans of the Second World War, MOS-qualified, and available in adequate numbers because of their overseas tour dates. Some actually volunteered since Korea offered active and challenging service for adventurous and unmarried junior officers. The KMAG advisors went to two general types of

assignments. Each Korean division was supposed to have thirteen officers and sixteen enlisted men as advisor-trainers, with an American lieutenant colonel as adviser to the division commander. The number of advisors allowed a team only down to the regimental level. The other group of advisors were assigned to the army headquarters and staff sections and to the new-born ROKA training system. Much training, however, had to be provided by American mobile training teams because neither the Americans nor the Koreans had the manpower or equipment to set up a separate training establishment.

The training of the South Korean army faced daunting problems. Probably the most worrisome was the counter-insurgency and counter-border raid campaigns, which kept almost all the tactical units in the field or in widely-separated posts. Language difficulties compounded the problems; virtually no American officers spoke Korean or Japanese, and only the senior officers of the Korean army spoke either Japanese or English, so even using *nisei* soldiers as interpreters had limitations. Since spoken and written Korean was a pre-modern language, technical terms were not easily translated and often appeared as phonetised English-Korean, a dialect so different that English words pronounced in Korean ('Konglish') sound like another foreign language. To compound the strains in Korean-American relations, the Korean officers and NCOs used Japanese methods of discipline, which meant swift and painful corporal punishment in many forms, banned in the US Army more than a hundred years before. Another persistent problem was the use of military labour and construction materials for money-making enterprises ('the welfare fund') to support the Korean officer corps, whose pay was abysmal.<sup>19</sup>

One limitation could be traced directly to American politics: the failure to provide money for military assistance, meaning the purchase of American arms and equipment. Despite the persistence of the State Department and the reluctant cooperation of the US Army, South Korea received no important material support between the termination of the occupation in the summer of 1948 and the spring of 1950. Demoralised by its failed logistical support of the Chinese Nationalist army, the Department of the Army did not want to give away more scarce equipment to the South Koreans. Since American war plans for a conflict with the Soviet Union excluded Korea, Generals Bradley and Collins opposed Secretary Acheson's pleas for more aid to Korea. Congress opposed military assistance for other reasons—mostly partisan and fiscal—until the Truman administration in February 1950 conceded that it would provide military aid to the Chinese Nationalists on Taiwan. In March, 1950 Congress voted Korea \$10.9 million under the provisions of the *Military Defense Assistance Act* (1948). Before June, 1950 the United States had provided South Korea \$279,470 in equipment from the \$71 million targeted for Asian nations. The economic development programme of the Economic Assistance Agency amounted to \$150 million in FY 1949 and FY 1950. Neither assistance program had much effect in Korea.<sup>20</sup>

The low level and character of military assistance to South Korea remained the primary responsibility of the Army leadership in Washington with Brigadier General Roberts a willing accomplice. The ROK equipment requests for FY 1951 were written in the Pentagon and transmitted to KMAC for negotiation; the South Korean military leadership and KMAC insisted that the army needed more artillery, a tactical air force of its own, and tanks and anti-armour mines. Army apologists (principally Bradley and Collins) later argued that the Defense and State Departments feared that Rhee and his generals wanted heavy weapons to 'march north', a bellicose goal oft-repeated in their public statements to the South Koreans. Neither Army nor State took such statements seriously, but they were useful in passing responsibility for lightly arming the South Koreans to the Rhee administration. In fact, the authorisations for ammunition, communications equipment, vehicles, and artillery were token assistance, even if useful in fighting border raids and guerrillas. Even though he was risk-adverse in Korean affairs, General MacArthur proved more helpful, providing training experiences for the Koreans in Japan and transferring 'excess' materiel to the South Korean army. The result was an evaluation of Korean military readiness from General Roberts (for the public record) that stressed ROK pluck and fighting spirit. Roberts called the ROKA 'the best little Army in Asia'.<sup>21</sup>

The assessments inside the Army were far more realistic. The ROK Army had only thirty of its sixty-seven infantry battalions manned, equipped, and trained for minimal counter-guerrilla and security duties. No ROKA unit had a real anti-armour capability beyond three weak battalions of 140 57mm anti-tank guns. The ROKA had only six untested battalions of field artillery, armed with the M3 or the lightweight version of the US Army's M101A1 105mm howitzer. Anti-tank shells were in short supply, an average of three per gun. The South Korean howitzers had half the range of their North Korean counterparts. Fire support coordination of any kind was an unknown skill in the ROK army, and the only aircraft in the ROK Air Force were twelve light spotter L-8 and L-4 aircraft and ten T-6 trainers. One squadron of the Cavalry Regiment, the Capital Division, manned M8 'Greyhound' scout cars, armed with a 37mm gun. Only twenty battalions had held full-scale field exercises; only four battalions were judged even 70 per cent combat effective in training and equipment readiness. South Korean regiments and divisions could be called administrative offices, but not operational organisations capable of fighting a real war. Although Roberts and MacArthur both advocated arming the South Korean army for combat with the North Korean army, their analysis received short-shrift in the Pentagon.<sup>22</sup>

### **The South Korean Army and the War Everyone Knows, 1950-53**

At 0400 on the morning of Sunday, 25 June 1950 (local Korean time), Premier Kim Il-sung set Operation PREEMPTIVE STRIKE in motion and ordered seven divisions, reinforced with task forces from the 105th Armored Brigade, to cross the 38th Parallel at six points and to create a unified Communist Korea. The three-phase plan assumed that the ROKA would be destroyed on the battlefield, routed in an exploitation campaign down the peninsula, and further fractured by defections and partisan warfare against its reserve units and support structure. Although they confidently reassured Stalin and Mao Zedong that the United States would not intervene, the North Korean political and military leaders believed that American air support would be neutralised by the summer monsoon and the lack of Korean airbases. They also planned to seize Pusan as quickly as possible and close the port to American ground forces or logistical assistance to the South Koreans. The North Koreans planned their victory celebration for 15 August 1950, the fifth anniversary of the liberation from Japan.<sup>23</sup>

Among the many unpleasant surprises of the Korean War for the Communists was the repeated resurrection of the South Korean army. Of the eight ROKA divisions deployed in June, 1950, only five were still in action three months after the war began. In the same period the strength of the army fell from 95,000 to perhaps 35,000 effectives. The losses among junior officers and experienced soldiers were especially high. To remain in the war the South Korean army conscripted refugees and threw them into battle without training; South Korean students left their university studies throughout Korea and Japan and formed volunteer battalions, all of which suffered catastrophic losses. Of the estimated 40,000 student-soldiers of 1950, some 14,000 died in battle. The combat battalions of the Korean National Police joined in the battle, and paramilitary groups formed in the mountains just like their Communist counterparts with whom (like in Second World War Yugoslavia) they clashed with untempered ferocity. Atrocities against prisoners civil and military by both sides stained the ground from Seoul to Taegu. Yet against all expectations, including those of Douglas MacArthur and his staff, the South Korean armed forces survived defeat after defeat and lived to fight again. When the war ended in 1953, the *Hanguk Gun* numbered almost 600,000 officers and men and manned all but three divisional sectors along the line of contact with the North Korean-Chinese expeditionary force. Had not that army seemed capable of continuing the war if necessary, the United States would not have signed the Armistice.<sup>24</sup>

Like the Continental Army of 1775-83, the ROKA suffered more than its share of battlefield defeats and command rivalries, but its troubles could be traced to defects in training, morale, and equipping that could be remedied—in time. The army's most obvious defect was its lack of firepower: one artillery battalion per division, no tanks, few antitank guns, and no anti-tank mines. Its infantry needed ample 75mm recoilless rifles and 3.5-inch rocket launchers to deal with armoured vehicles and bunkers. Its internal phone and radio communications capability was limited. It had virtually no logistical capability. Its rations were often inadequate. Its medical services were primitive. And its system of discipline remained tied to swift corporal

punishment and, in some cases of desertion and cowardice, field executions. South Korean formations larger than regiments had difficulty coordinating supporting fires and tactical manoeuvre. Korean staff work remained primitive throughout the war, and rivalries between individual generals and cliques of senior officers did not help, especially when Syngman Rhee encouraged such friction through rapid changes in assignments. And the army's rapid expansion and soaring casualties made unit cohesion and morale difficult to maintain.

The litany of disasters that plagued the South Korean army would depress even the most incurable optimist among the American generals of the US 8th Army. The defence of Seoul and the withdrawal to Taegu ruined the 2nd, 5th, and 7th Divisions, and the 1st Division (Paik Sun-yup) remained in the field only by absorbing the remnants of the other divisions. In the First Chinese Offensive (October-November 1950) the 1st Division again took heavy losses, and the 6th, 7th, and 8th Divisions disintegrated. The same three divisions (ROK II Corps) received more rough handling in late November, and the elite 1st Division collapsed in the face of the Chinese Third Offensive (January 1951). At this point in the war ROKA commanders down to company level had the power to shoot deserters, defectors, and cowards on sight. In the Chinese Fourth Offensive (February 1951) the ROK 3rd, 5th, and 8th Divisions reeled back in retreat, a performance repeated in April and May 1951 by the ROK 3rd, 5th, 6th, 7th and 9th Divisions in the Chinese Fifth Offensive. Even at the end of the war, the South Korean army took the brunt of Chinese attacks. In the Kumsong Offensive of July, 1953 the Chinese roughly handled four ROK divisions and rolled back the front lines in eastern Korea by forty miles. Rhee's generals remained uncertain to the very end of the war whether they would receive medals and promotions or be purged and disgraced. About the best they could hope for was protection provided by their KMAG advisors and exile to the US Army school system abroad.

The trials of the South Korean army are similar to those of any new army in war. Untried armies throughout the twentieth century have always found it difficult to fight withdrawals and to coordinate air and artillery support, if they have any. There are ample operational examples from the French, Russian, Commonwealth, and American forces in the Second World War. Common South Korean practice was to fight in place until overwhelmed or out of ammunition, then flee in small parties wherever the terrain allowed, but not on the roads, which were almost always blocked by Chinese ambushers. The Koreans would not fight for the last truck or artillery piece or road junction, which angered the Americans, who thought they should. The Koreans fought well in the mountains, but not in corridors, which tended to jam with vehicles and support units who raced out of danger in a crisis. Only the ROK 1st Division received American augmentation: two artillery battalions and a tank battalion. The Chinese initially thought it was an American division. The Chinese also learned that ROK divisions could not bring much indirect fire to bear on a swift night attack and thus targeted ROK divisions for their initial penetrations. The Chinese actually thought Korean infantry fought with more stubbornness than American GIs (Marines excluded) and proved harder to catch when they took to the mountains.<sup>25</sup>

From General MacArthur's earliest view of the ROK Army in defeat just south of the Han River, American officers almost always misestimated their allies. It remains debatable whether MacArthur's characterisation of the ROK Army as 'entirely incapable of counteraction' was accurate or whether the general wanted to mislead the JCS or whether he just could not grasp an operational situation. In any event, the ROK army rallied in front of Taegu; its first dramatic contribution to eventual victory came at the Battle of Tabu-dong where Paik's 1st Division stood with the US 27th Infantry and drove back an armored attack down the Naktong corridor or the 'Bowling Alley'. Not so well known are the battles fought along the eastern coast, especially the struggles for Yongdok and Pohang that exhausted the North Korean 2nd and 5th Divisions. Until the Chinese intervention, the 1st, 3rd, 6th, and Capital Divisions showed admirable elan and foot speed in chasing the NKPA north. In the spring of 1951 the 1st Division stopped a Chinese army west of Seoul at Susaek-dong, and the resurrected 6th Division fought another Chinese army to a draw at the Battle of Yongmun-san. The most famous ROKA divisional action occurred in the Battle of White Horse Mountain (Paekmasan) in which the 9th Division launched nine attacks and defended against twenty-eight Chinese attacks in a week-long battle in which the ROKA lost 3500 soldiers and the Chinese more than 10,000. (The 9th Division has been the White Horse Division ever since.) By war's end

the South Korean army had authentic heroes in all the ranks and boasted a group of experienced division commanders accepted by their American counterparts as capable battlefield commanders: Paik Sun-yup, Paik In-yup, Min Ki-sik, Song Yo-chan, Yu Jae-hung, Kim Chong-o, Kang Mun-bong, and Choi Yong-hui. Despite its erratic performance and persistent leadership problems, the ROK army never quite folded, despite predictions in Pyongyang and Washington that it was terminally ill.

Part of the credit for the South Korean army's survival goes to the American officers and enlisted men of the Korean Military Advisory Group. The two officers most responsible for KMAG's effectiveness were Lieutenant General James A Van Fleet, USA, 8th Army commander from April 1951 until his retirement in January, 1953, and his protege, Brigadier General Cornelius E Ryan, USA, an overage infantry officer with a proven talent for training raw troops in the United States and Greece. At its peak wartime strength in 1953 KMAG numbered almost 1900 officers and men, about half the estimated manning requirements for a Korean army of seventeen divisions or 500,000 personnel. (The United States provided 3500 officers and men to advise and train a South Vietnamese army slightly smaller than the ROKA.)

Van Fleet and Ryan had no illusions about the herculean task of improving the South Korean army. One chief of KMAG (not Ryan) told an American corps commander 'that it is impossible to underestimate a ROK division'.<sup>26</sup> American advisors despaired that ROK generals would ever fight their divisions as divisions, not as a collection of battalions. Van Fleet, however, knew that only rapid improvement of the ROKA offered any increase in the effectiveness of his coalition force after 1951. He gave Ryan a much better cadre of advisors, American officers who had commanded regiments and battalions in Korea and then finished their tour in KMAG. He instituted a retraining program for ROK divisions placed in corps reserve. He placed a high priority on developing a full South Korean army training establishment and sent larger groups of officers to US Army schools in the United States, especially the Artillery School at Fort Sill. Van Fleet closed the 'artillery gap' of the ROK army by forming corps artillery groups of US and ROK battalions and keeping them in supporting roles even if their parent divisions went into reserve. South Korean divisions that properly used and protected the artillery groups received the 'Van Fleet day-of-fire' or five times the amount of shells normally allotted to American firing battalions. Van Fleet knew that almost any money invested in the ROK army was well spent; in 1952 the monthly cost of keeping one US soldier in the field was \$3129.31, a Korean soldier \$193.87.<sup>27</sup>

The Americans also faced the determined efforts of President Syngman Rhee to make the army the instrument of his political ambition. In 1950-51 Rhee had used his expanded executive powers to change and reorganise the police and paramilitary agencies, removing their leaders, placing them under the temporary operational control of the army, and restricting their independent funding and recruiting. Rhee then turned on his own generals in 1952 when some of them failed to endorse his campaign to revise the constitution in a way that would ensure his re-election by popular vote, not a risky vote of the hostile National Assembly. One chief of staff, General Yi Chong-chan, fled to Van Fleet's compound after he refused to impose a martial law regime on Pusan and its environs, and another former chief of staff, Chung Il-kwon, had to be bundled off to America for currency exchange irregularities. Van Fleet also protested the development of special internal security commands outside of his operational control, like General Won Yong-dok's Provost Martial Command and General Kim Chang-yong's Counterintelligence Command. Although he admired Rhee in many ways, Van Fleet clashed with him repeatedly over issues crucial to the welfare and morale of the army. Van Fleet also approved of American planning (Operation EVERREADY) to replace Rhee if he became an obstacle to a negotiated settlement of the war in 1952-53.<sup>28</sup>

In December, 1952 President-elect Dwight D Eisenhower made a hurried and largely cosmetic trip to Korea in order to honour a dramatic campaign pledge he had made the previous October: 'I shall go to Korea!' Although Eisenhower and his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, later argued that their deft diplomacy and muted nuclear threats brought the war to a close in July, 1953, Eisenhower's real concern was whether the South Korean army could hold in 1953 and eventually defend the Republic of Korea with a minimum of American

military assistance. He admitted to Secretary of Defense Robert A Lovett before his trip that he really had no new ideas about how to end the war. 'I am quite sure that you and my old friends (at the Pentagon) know that I am not pretending that I will find answers that they have overlooked'.<sup>29</sup> Eisenhower went, looked, and reflected that the United States had no option but to throw its financial resources behind the continued expansion and improvement of the South Korean army. On 27 July 1953 the United States—despite Syngman Rhee's continued opposition—signed the Armistice because it now believed that the much-maligned *Hanguk Gun* deserved a level of confidence that it had bought with its own blood.

### Endnotes

The author thanks Lieutenant Colonel Kim Jiyul, US Army, and Major General Lim Sun-ha, ROKA (Ret), for their assistance with this essay and absolves them of all responsibility for errors in either English or Korean.

1. The best introductions to Korean history and Korea's relations with the United States are Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: WW Norton, 1997), and Andrew C Nahm, *Korea: Tradition and Transformation: A History of the Korean People* (Seoul: Hollym, 1988). The most extensive introductions to Korean War literature may be found in Paul M Edwards, comp, *The Korean War: An Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1998) and Lester H Brune, ed, *The Korean War: Handbook of the Literature and Research* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1996). My own fifth and most recent assessment of the literature will appear in the *Journal of Strategic Studies* in 2001.
2. See, for example, Kim Chum-kon, *The Korean War, 1950-1953* (Seoul: Kwangmyong, 1980), and Joungwon A Kim, *Divided Korea: The Politics of Development, 1945-1972* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1975).
3. My own assessment of the casualties and damage of the war are in the entry 'Casualties' in Spencer Tucker, ed, *The Encyclopedia of the Korean War*, 3 vols (Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC Clio, 2000), 1:98-101, and is based on the official statistics released by the belligerent governments, carefully used in cross-comparison.
4. A good introduction to Korean politics is Gregory Henderson, *Korea: The Politics of the Vortex* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1968); see also, Far East Section, RIA Branch, OSS, 'Korea', reports and analysis, 1944-1945, William Donovan Papers.
5. Colonel Kenneth C Strother, USA (Ret), 'The Occupation of Korea, September-December 1945', 1984, a memoir by the Acting C/S XXIV Corps, Kenneth C Strother Papers, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania (hereinafter USAMHI); John C Caldwell, *The Korea Story* (Chicago: Regency, 1932), a memoir by a missionary's son serving in the military government; USAMGIK, 'Organization of National Police of Korea', December, 1945, USAFIK Historical Files, RG 332, National Archives and Records Administration (hereinafter NARA).
6. Whatever its eccentricities, the best place to study Korean early national politics is Bruce Cumings', *The Origins of the Korean War*, vol I, *Liberation and the Establishment of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981) and vol II, *The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).
7. Headquarters, US Army Forces in Korea, 'History of the Occupation of Korea', Part 1, 1945-1947, copy in the 8th Army historical files, Yongsan, Seoul, ROK. See also Robert K Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea: KMAG in Peace and War* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, rev edn, 1988), 3-33; National Economic Board, USAFIK/USAMGIK, 'Interim Reports', 1947, RG10, MacArthur Papers, MacArthur Memorial and Library.
8. The Korean account is Ministry of National Defense, *Haebang kaw Kon-gun* (Seoul: MOD, 1967) translated in part for me by Colonel Hun Nam-sung and Major Park Il-song. See also Lee Young-woo, 'The United States and the Formation of the Republic of Korea Army, 1945-1950', PhD dissertation, Duke University, 1984. I have relied also on Huh Nam-sung, 'The Quest for a Bulwark of Anti-Communism: The Formation of the Republic of Korea Officer Corps and Its Political Socialization, 1945-1950', PhD dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1987, supplemented by my own interviews (1996-2000) with Generals Paik Sunyup, Kang Yong-hoon, Lim Sun-ha, and Kim Ung-soo, all members of the first group of Constabulary officers. I also conducted interviews with the late Lieutenant Colonel James H Hausman in 1995 and used transcripts of other interviews with Hausman by John Toland, now housed in the Franklin D Roosevelt Library. Colonel Hausman and his family also gave me complete access to his papers, 1945-50, which are now located in the Korea Institute, Harvard University. My account is 'Captain James H Hausman and the Formation of the Korean Army, 1945-1950', *Armed Forces and Society* 23 (Summer, 1997): 503-39. I have also profited from correspondence and documents provided by Colonel Harold Fischgrund, USA (Ret), Hausman's executive assistant at Constabulary Headquarters.
9. James H Hausman, 'The Korean Constabulary', mss, 1950 (?), Hausman Papers.
10. Huh, 'The Quest for a Bulwark of Anti-Communism'.

11. 'The Quasi-Revolt of October, 1946', in History of USAFIK, 1950, and AC/S G-2, 6th Infantry Division, 'Kyongsang Communist Uprising of October, 1946', 1 December 1946, File 720.009-2, 8th Army Historical Files; AC/S, G-2, 6th Infantry Division, 'Cholla-South Communist Uprising of November, 1946', 31 December 1946, File 720-009.2, previously cited.
12. 'History of the Military Government, 1947-1948', file 720.009, 8th Army Historical Files, previously cited.
13. My own reconstruction of the narrative history of the events of 1948 and the activity of the Korean Constabulary is based on the KMAG Weekly Reports, June-December 1948, copies on file in the archives of The Korea Institute of Military History (hereinafter KIMH), War Memorial, Ministry of National Defense, Seoul, ROK, as well as 'The Police and National Events, 1947-1948', Vol II, Part 3, USAFIK, 'History of the Occupation of Korea'. For Cheju-do, the key report is Col RH Brown, USAMGIK, 'Report of Activities on Cheju-do Island, 22 May-30 June 1948', July 1948, in Rothwell H Brown Papers, USAMHI. Colonel Brown, commander of the US 20th Infantry, conducted a thorough and impartial investigation of the uprising for USAMGIK. The most detailed history using Korean sources is John Merrill, 'The Cheju-do Rebellion', *Journal of Korean Studies* 2 (1980): 139-97.
14. G-2, Headquarters, XXIV Corps, 'History of Rebellion of the Korean Constabulary at Yosu and Taegu, Korea', 10 November 1948, File 091.411, Historical Files USAFIK, RG 332, NARA; Hausman oral history, Toland Papers, Roosevelt Library; Colonel JW Finley, USA (Ret), 'Experiences in Korea during the August 1947-December 1948 Period', 1995, and letters to the author, July-October 1995. For a good history, see John Merrill, *Korea: The Peninsular Origins of the War* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989).
15. Captain James H Hausman, 'History of Rebellion, 14th Constabulary Regt', November 1948, Hausman Papers; interview with General Paik Sun-yup, 1996; 971st CIC Det, 'Annual Progress Report, 1948', December 1948, Unit Historical File and Occupied Area Reports, 1948-1954, RG 407, NARA.
16. G-2, XXIV Corps, Period Intelligence Reports (PIR), April-December 1949, copies, archives, KIMH.
17. Paik interview; PIRs 1093-95, March 1949; Hausman oral history.
18. Paik and Hausman interviews; PIRs 1110-15, May 1949; CG USAFIK to Dept Army (CSGID) 4 February 1949, USAFIK Messages sent 1949-50, RG 9, MacArthur Papers, MacArthur Memorial and Library.
19. Hdq. KMAG, Historical Reports, 1949-50.
20. See State Dean Acheson to Charles Ross, 20 January 1950, Presidential Secretary Files, Truman Papers; 'US Aid to Korea since Close of World War II', 26 June 1950, Korean War Files, Dean C Acheson Papers, Harry S Truman Library. See also Sawyer, *KMAG in War and Peace*, 96-104.
21. Oral history, Mr Niles Bond, December 28, 1973, Truman Library, and interview with author, 2 March 2000. Mr Bond was the State Department member. MDAP Team. The Roberts quote is in a *Time* magazine interview, 5 June 1950.
22. KMAG, Semi-Annual Report, 15 June 1950, KIMH; Alfred H Hausrauth, 'Problems in the Development of a Local National Army: Based on Experience with the Republic of Korea Army', August 1956, ORO T-336, Operations Research Office, Johns Hopkins University, USAMHI, 27-29; Office of the Historian, Hdqs, ROKAF, 'The Republic of Korea Air Force during the 25 June War', 1999, trans- by John C Sullivan, Hdqs., PACAF, 2000.
23. War History Department, KIMH, *The Korean War*, 3 vols (Seoul: MOD, 1998-99), an annotated and translated revision of the *Hanguk Chonchaengsa*, 9 vols (Seoul: MOD, 1967-70).
24. An excellent summary may be found in John Kie-chiang Oh, 'The Forgotten ROK Soldiers of the Korean War', Society of Military History Conference, April 2000. Also, Park Il-song, 'Student Volunteers during the Korean War', 1999, study for author.
25. Peng Dehuai report as quoted in Zhang Shu Gang, *Mao's Military Romanticism: China and the Korean War, 1950-1953* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 106-107.
26. Major General Clovis Byers to Lieutenant General Robert L Eichelberger, 5 September 1951, Clovis Byers Papers, Hoover Institution of Peace, Revolution and War.
27. Lieutenant General J Van Fleet to General JLCollins, 24 May and 13 June 1951, Van Fleet Papers, Marshall Library; Office, Chief, KMAG, *Advisor's Handbook* (March 1951, rev ed). Lieutenant General JB Blount, USA (Ret), 'Thoughts on KMAG and General Ryan, Chief, KMAG, 1952-1954', tape for author, 1997.
28. General Yi Chong-chan to Lieutenant General James Van Fleet, 25 May 1952; General RG Stilwell, oral memoir (1979), 99-105, Senior Officers Oral History Project, USAMHI; Van Fleet journals, May-August 1952, Van Fleet Papers.
29. Dwight D Eisenhower to Secretary of Defense Robert A Lovett, 8 November 1953, in Louis Galambos, ed, *The Papers of Dwight D Eisenhower*, 17 vols (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 13:976-77.