

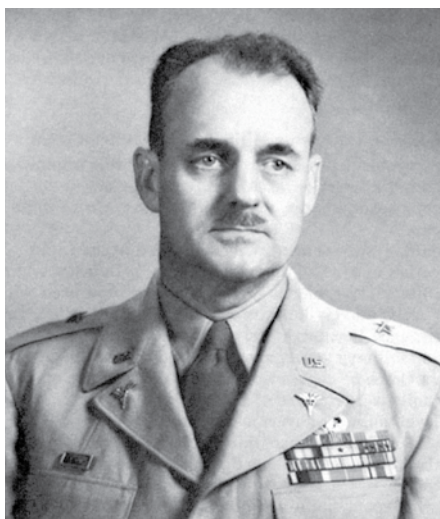
CIVIL AFFAIRS

A CIVIL AFFAIRS PIONEER: BRIGADIER GENERAL CRAWFORD F. SAMS, U.S. ARMY MEDICAL CORPS

by Troy J. Sacquety

A career U.S. Army officer, Brigadier General Crawford F. Sams gained prominence by helping to rebuild the Japanese health system after WWII and leading a secret mission during the Korean War. These events, however, occurred towards the end of his career. After graduating from East Saint Louis High School in St. Louis, MO, he enlisted and served briefly during World War I. After the war, he worked as a laboratory assistant and junior research chemist before enlisting in the California National Guard in 1922 as a Private. In 1925, he graduated from the University of California with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and received a commission as a Captain in the Field Artillery. Resigning after three years of service, he entered the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, MO. He graduated in 1929 as a Doctor of Medicine, and accepted a commission as a First Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Medical Corps. He served in the Medical Corps for the remainder of his U.S. Army career.¹

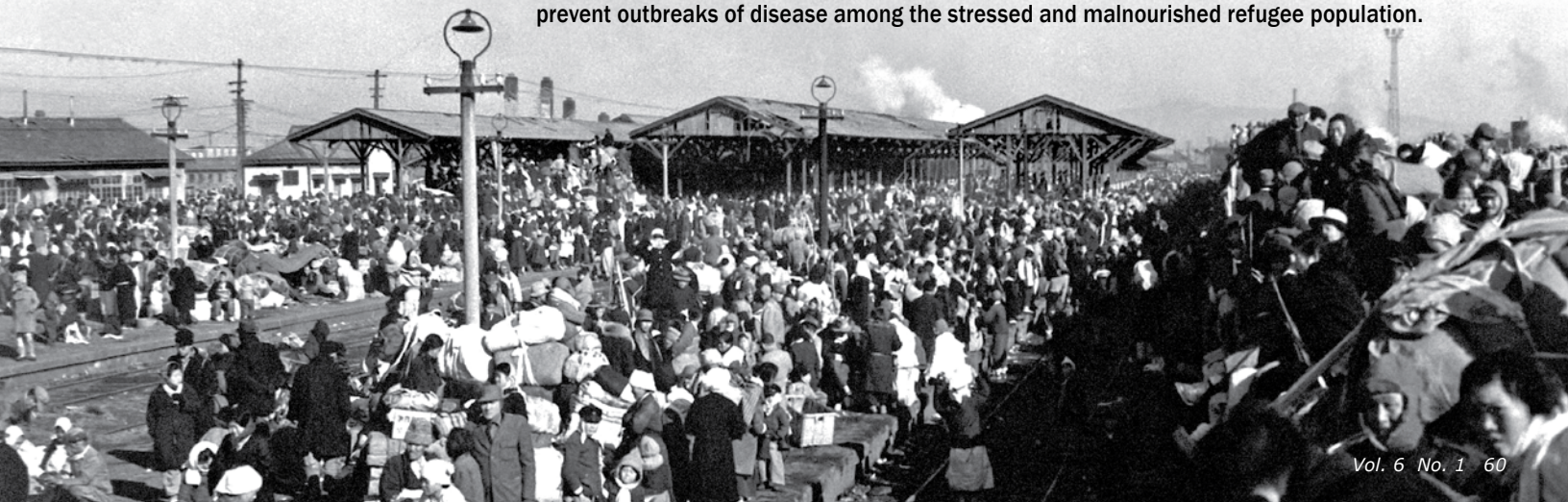
During WWII, Sams served in North Africa, Europe,



Before the Korean War, Brigadier General Crawford F. Sams was the Chief of the Public Health and Welfare Section, General Headquarters, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) in Japan. He fulfilled a similar role in the military government of South Korea.

and the Philippines, attaining the rank of Colonel (COL). In 1945, he transferred to Japan to serve as the Chief of the Public Health and Welfare Section, General Headquarters, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) in the military government of occupied Japan.² There, COL Sams immediately focused on preventing epidemics that threatened a malnourished Japanese population. He completely reformed the Japanese medical profession, established a country vaccine program, and greatly improved the calorie-poor diet. By professionalizing the Japanese medical system to modern standards while freeing the population from persistent endemic diseases and malnutrition, Sams engineered one of the most transformative medical revolutions ever undertaken in a country. The military doctor expanded these practices to South Korea and was promoted to Brigadier General (BG) in 1948. When war broke out in Korea, General (GEN) Douglas A. MacArthur made BG Sams the Chief, Health and

The surprise North Korean invasion of the south created a refugee problem of huge proportions. BG Sams was tasked to prevent outbreaks of disease among the stressed and malnourished refugee population.



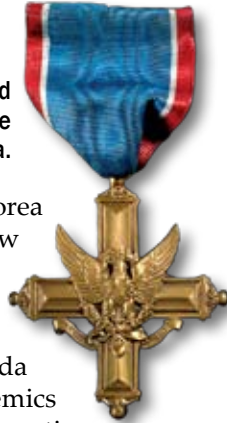


Refugees fleeing the North Korean advance in 1950 flooded into South Korean harbors. The sheer density of the population meant that an outbreak of virulent disease had the potential of creating an epidemic medical disaster.



BG Sams felt that if he could keep South Korean civilians healthy and the North Koreans could not, it would be evident to all that democracy was the better of the two governmental systems.

BG Sams received the Distinguished Service Cross for his clandestine mission into North Korea.



Welfare, United Nations Command, Korea as well. In this capacity, BG Sams drew upon his experiences in Japan to prevent smallpox, cholera, diphtheria, and typhus from raging through the refugee population. This success had propaganda value because the ability to control epidemics was a “test of Communist versus democratic abilities . . . if we could control these diseases . . . and the Communists could not, it would be a direct and telling blow to the Communist propaganda . . . because we could show that literally the chances of dying under the Communist banner were far greater,” recalled BG Sams.³ Then, because of Sams’ acute familiarity with epidemics, GEN MacArthur selected him to lead a secret mission into North Korea.

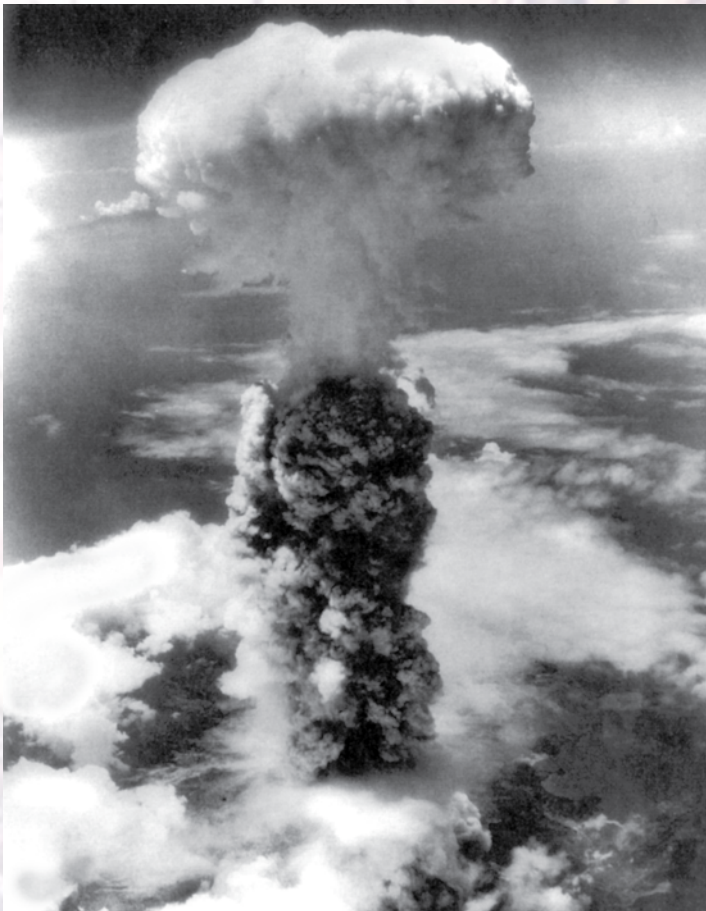
Rumors surfaced that the North Koreans were overcome with bubonic plague, the “black death.” This was potentially dangerous for the South. The fluidity of the battle lines meant that North Korean refugees could easily slip south and spread the illness among the military and civilian populations. Since it was a “very unstable vaccine” the prophylaxis was not routinely stored.⁴ The Allies needed confirmation to create sufficient vaccine. After several unsuccessful attempts, BG Sams and his two teammates managed to infiltrate North Korea by rubber raft. After meeting with friendly agents BG Sams determined that the epidemic wreaking havoc on North Korea was not bubonic plague, but hemorrhagic smallpox.⁵ With this vital medical intelligence, the Allies did not have to implement a new vaccination program. Better still, they discovered that the Communist forces ravaged by smallpox were more understrength



Refugees arriving from North Korea had little to their name and the South was in ruins.

than originally believed. After conducting this secret mission, General MacArthur awarded BG Sams with the Distinguished Service Cross for “extraordinary heroism in action against enemy aggressor forces in the Republic of Korea on 13 and 14 March 1951.” Although BG Sams knew that other infiltrating agents had previously been captured and had possibly disclosed the mission to the North Koreans, he persevered despite the potential trap. “General Sams nevertheless continued on his mission . . . General Sams’ party returned to the off-shore rendezvous with conclusive information of such significance as to effect the immediate conduct of the United Nations armed effort in Korea.”⁶ Following GEN MacArthur’s April 1951 relief in Korea, BG Sams, a close associate, returned to the United States after nearly ten years overseas.

BG Sams retired in July 1955 after thirty-three years in the U.S. Army. “To me the highlight of such a career has been . . . helping to rebuild a destroyed nation and to establish health and welfare programs which, on a nation-



Troy J. Sacquety earned an MA from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and his PhD in Military History from Texas A&M University. Prior to joining the USASOC History Office staff he worked several years for the Central Intelligence Agency. Current research interests include Army and Office of Strategic Services (OSS) special operations during World War II, and Special Operations units in Vietnam.

Endnotes

- 1 Crawford F. Sams, "Medic" *The Mission of an American Military Doctor in Occupied Japan and Wartorn Korea* (Armonk, NY: East Gate, 1998), xvii-xxi.
- 2 Sams, "Medic," xvii-xxi.
- 3 Sams, "Medic," 217.
- 4 Washington University School of Medicine Oral History Project, "Transcript: Crawford F. Sams, 1979," found on-line at <http://beckerehibits.wusl.edu/oral/transcripts/sams.html>, accessed 29 December 2009.
- 5 Sams, "Medic," 252.
- 6 "Crawford Sams," found online at <http://www.militarytimes.com/citations-medals-awards/recipient.php?recipientid=7146>, accessed 17 December 2009.
- 7 Sams, "Medic," 264.
- 8 "Crawford Sams," found online at <http://www.militarytimes.com/citations-medals-awards/recipient.php?recipientid=7146>, accessed 17 December 2009.

In the immediate post-WWII years BG Sams helped to establish The Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission under the Chief, Public Health and Welfare. The Commission researched the long-term effects of radiation on human populations and continued as a joint US/Japanese effort long after the occupation ceased.

wide basis, are among the most modern in the world today. In the course of doing so, I hope to have influenced the thinking of many peoples in the underdeveloped countries so that they can know that, literally their lives are worth saving and that this very essence of our concept of democracy is more desirable than the promises of the dictatorships of the welfare or socialist state, where the individual is nothing and the welfare of the state is of primary importance."⁷ Sams then embarked on a civilian career as a research physician with the University of California, San Francisco Medical Center studying the general effects of radiation on societies, and specifically on the human nervous system. After retiring in 1968, he pursued amateur genealogy.⁸ BG Crawford F. Sams died in 1994 and is buried at Arlington National Cemetery. ♣

Bubonic plague, also known as "Black Death," killed between thirty and sixty percent of Europe's population in the late 1300's. In order to provide time to develop vaccines if necessary, BG Sams was sent on a mission inside North Korea in 1951 to determine if a disease affecting enemy forces was possibly bubonic plague.