

Republic of Korea General Paik Sun-yup

by Charles H. Briscoe

When General Paik Sun-yup came to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, 26-27 May 2010, it was an opportunity to interview the Republic of Korea's most decorated veteran of the Korean War, 1950-1954. Trained by the Japanese during World War II, Imperial Army Lieutenant (LT) Paik fought Communist guerrillas in Manchuria and Red Army elements in China. Returning home after the war, Paik joined the Constabulary in South Korea in 1946, two years before it evolved into the ROK Army. Colonel Paik's forward regiment of the 1st ROK Division was crushed at Kaesong during the North Korean invasion on 25-26 June 1950. Just four months later, on 19 October, the 1st ROK Division was the first UN element to enter P'yongyang, the capital of North Korea. COL Paik assisted Task Force INDIANHEAD accomplish its sensitive site exploitation mission. Fourteen months later, Major General (MG) Paik launched the largest anti-guerrilla operation of the war, the six-month long Operation RAT KILLER, to clear south central and southeastern Korea of insurgents. As one of the most experienced anti-guerrilla fighters in the Korean War, General Paik had regular contact with American *ad hoc* special operations forces.

Colonel (COL) Paik Sun-yup, 1st ROK Division commander, helped Major (MAJ) Jack T. Young, the Assistant G-2 (Intelligence), 2nd Infantry Division (ID) and Ivanhoe Security Force (ISF) commander, get the American-led South Korean elements of Task Force INDIANHEAD across the Taedong River on 19 October 1950. INDIANHEAD was to perform a sensitive site



COL Paik Sun-yup stands outside P'yongyang with the Taedong River bridges in the background.

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— General Paik Sun-yup

exploitation mission for Eighth U.S. Army (EUSA) in the North Korean capital.¹ COL Paik made room in his engineer assault boats to enable two ISF elements led by American Sergeant (SGT) Emmett V. Parker and Corporal (CPL) L. Carl Heesch to search for allied prisoners of war (POWs) and Russian advisors.² As a P'yongyang native, COL Paik was familiar with the Taedong River fording sites and pointed them out on a map. MAJ Young took this information and returned to TF INDIANHEAD, halted on the road by the 1st Cavalry Division commander, Major General (MG) Hobart R. Gay. The 1st Cavalry commander was waiting for his engineer boats and would not let TF

INDIANHEAD cross before his troops.³

Since the 1st ROK Division had hosted the 1st Cavalry when they arrived from Japan and had adjoining defensive sectors in the Pusan Perimeter, COL Paik knew MG Gay quite well and wanted to share the honor of capturing the Communist capital city on 20 October 1950. With 1st ROK units already in the capital on 19 October, COL Paik encountered light resistance as he pushed in from the north. The 1st Cavalry had to fight their way in from the south.⁴ Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Ralph L. Foster, G-2, 2nd ID and the TF INDIANHEAD commander, used the northern fords on the Taedong to lead his exploitation force into the city.⁵

After the 1st ROK Division secured the northern half of the city, COL Paik took a patrol through the North Korean government and municipal buildings and facilities and the Soviet military compound and living



The NKPA employed Soviet SU-76 self-propelled 76 mm artillery and T-34 medium tanks. The 1st ROK Division accounted for two SU-76s near Anju in late October 1950.

Red Army Chinese soldiers were readily identifiable to BG Paik Sun-yup because he had fought them in northern China during WWII.

areas. "I visited Premier Kim Il Sung's office with the portrait of Stalin on the wall. I sat behind his desk just like many of the Americans. Russian propaganda was all over the place. The P'yongyang prison was the worst. Its interior courtyard was filled with the bodies of recently killed prisoners. The smell was very bad," remembered General Paik. "Since we had no occupation duties I only spent the night in the capital. MG Frank W. "Shrimp" Milburn, the I Corps commander, awarded me the U.S. Silver Star for my role in capturing P'yongyang."⁶

Early in the morning of 21 October 1950, the 1st ROK Division moved to link-up with the 6th Medium Tank Battalion (MTB) in the vicinity of Sukch'on and at Sunch'on. There, the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team (ARCT) had parachute assaulted on 20 October 1950 to cut off fleeing North Korean officials and the 239th Regiment and to rescue American POWs being evacuated northward.⁷ After linking-up with the 6th MTB on 22 October, the 1st ROK Division followed C Company to Kunu-ri. They recovered forty escaped American POWs whom they evacuated to P'yongyang. On 23 October, now Brigadier General (BG) Paik attacked down the valley of the Ch'ongch'on to Anju, knocking out two T-34 tanks and two SU-76 self-propelled guns. Discovering the bridge across the Ch'ongch'on at Sinanju to be destroyed, Paik put his engineers to work on the last important river barrier south of the northern border. Three days later the ROK II Corps on BG Paik's right flank would receive a major Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) attack.⁸

Just short of Unsan on 25 October, the ROK 1st Division captured the first Chinese soldier taken prisoner by UN forces. He was shipped to P'yongyang for interrogation. Later in the day three more POWs that looked Chinese, spoke Chinese, and understood neither Korean nor Japanese joined him. BG Paik, attending a celebration in the Communist capital, had been privy to their interrogation. After returning to his command post at Yong-byon, north of Unsan, Paik went forward to examine the enemy dead. Having served with the Japanese Manchurian Army in



BG Paik Sun-yup (center) reviews dispositions with his American KMAG (Korea Military Advisory Group) advisor.

World War II, he was well acquainted with Chinese and estimated that there was a Chinese division of 10,000 troops—an all-Chinese force; not part of a mixed Chinese-North Korean element. BG Paik told MG Milburn that there were "many, many Chinese."⁹

At the EUSA forward headquarters ensconced in Kim Il Sung's palace in P'yongyang, the puzzling reports of Chinese troops received little credence until reverses north of the Ch'ongch'on worsened. Then, the EUSA commander, LTG Walton H. Walker, relieved the 1st Cavalry Division of its security mission in the capital and ordered it to pass through the ROK 1st Division and continue the attack to the Yalu River. By then, the ROK II Corps, engulfed by the Chinese, had pulled south, leaving the ROK 1st Division exposed in a salient far north of the UN attack line. The nearest I Corps unit was fifteen air miles to its west. The 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, got its battalions aligned defensively south to north, west of Unsan while the 1st ROK Division had been forced into similarly aligned positions on the east side of the city. By dusk on 1 November, the Chinese had locked the 15th Regiment of the ROK 1st Division in place and were on the north, west, and east sides of the U.S. 8th Cavalry Regiment.¹⁴

ROK Warrior Leader



This was the 1st ROK Division view of the North Korean checkpoint on the 38th Parallel at Kaesong before the invasion.



When his 12th Regiment was smashed at Kaesong and Yonan, COL Paik Sun-yup, the 1st ROK Division commander joined the 11th and 13th Regiments at Munsan-ni-Korangp'ori.



The Korean Constabulary, advised by 6th Infantry Division officers, began training with U.S. arms and equipment in early 1948, prior to becoming the Republic of Korea Army (ROKA).

Paik Sun-yup was born in Kangso-gun, South P'yongan, Korea, on 23 November 1920. Paik graduated from the missionary P'yongyang Normal School (where he learned English) and volunteered to attend the Mukden Military Academy of Manchukuo (Manchuria). As an officer of the Manchukuo Imperial Army during World War II, he served in the *Gando Special Force* (composed primarily of ethnic Koreans) fighting Communist guerrillas in eastern Manchuria and then Chinese Red Army forces in North China until the Russian military invaded. The Japanese Army first lieutenant decided to return to P'yongyang. After working a few months with the Korean Nationalist Movement, Paik was convinced that the Communists would dominate Russian-controlled North Korea. He headed south to Seoul in February 1946 to enlist in the newly formed American-sponsored Constabulary.¹⁰

WWII military experience warranted a First Lieutenant's commission and command of a 200-man company. He had to recruit, train, organize, and equip his company with Japanese military weapons. That accomplished, Paik was promoted to captain. The Constabulary initially had advisors from the U.S. Army's 6th Infantry Division performing postwar occupation duty. In August 1948, then

MAJ Paik, commanding a 500-man Constabulary battalion advised by the U.S. Korea Military Advisory Group (K MAG), became integrated into the Republic of Korea Army (ROKA) under United Nations supervision. A year later, LTC Paik commanded a ROK infantry regiment of 1,500 men, now armed with M1 Garand rifles, M2 carbines, M1918 Browning Automatic Rifles (BAR), M1919A2 light machineguns, 60 mm and 81 mm mortars, 2.36" antitank rocket launchers and 37 mm antitank guns left behind by American troops who began leaving Korea in late 1948. They had been trained in tactics and in the use and maintenance of the weapons and equipment by U.S. units before they left country. The ROKA received M3 105 mm howitzers with short barrels, but no tanks.¹¹

When the North Korean Peoples Army (NKPA) invaded the south on 25 June 1950, COL Paik Sun-yup commanded the ROK 1st Infantry Division. His division of 9,715 soldiers was in defensive positions along the border with the 6th, 7th, and 8th Infantry Divisions. The forward regiment of the 1st ROK Division, the 12th, was destroyed at Kaesong and Yonan on 25-26 June. Only two companies managed to break out and reached division headquarters in Seoul. By then, COL Paik had moved the 11th Regiment into defensive positions with the 13th Regiment at Munsan-ni-Korangp'ori to guard approaches to the Imjin River bridge. After three days, outflanked and threatened with being cut off in the Uijonbu Corridor, COL Paik withdrew his division towards the Han River.¹² Caught north of the river when the Han River bridge was prematurely blown up, COL Paik led his now 5,000-man ROK 1st Infantry Division across the river near Kimpo Airfield on 29 June 1950. He had to abandon his artillery, but brought out the small arms and most crew-served weapons. The 25 June 1950 ROK Army of 98,000 men had lost 44,000 soldiers in the first week of fighting (killed, captured, or missing). Only the 6th and 8th ROK Divisions escaped with their organization, weapons, equipment, and transport relatively intact. The ROK Army survived with only 30 percent of its individual weapons.¹³



MG Paik Sun-yup (L) was awarded the ROK Order of Merit by President Syngman Rhee on 5 November 1951.



Ginseng Hall at Kaesong was the site of the first Korean War Armistice negotiations.



The UN delegates to the first Armistice negotiations in Kaesong were (L to R) MG Henry I. Hodes, Deputy Chief of Staff, Eighth U.S. Army (EUSA), MG Laurence C. Craigie, Vice Commander, Far East Air Forces (FEAF), Vice Adm C. Turner Joy, Commander, Naval Forces, Far East (NFFE), MG Paik Sun-yup, Commander, ROK I Corps, and Rear Adm Arleigh A. Burke, Deputy Chief of Staff, NFFE.

At midnight when I Corps ordered the ROK 1st Division to withdraw, the 15th Regiment had ceased to exist as a combat force. They were to cross the Kuryong River at the ford and pull back along their main supply route (MSR) to Ipsok and Yongbyon.¹⁵ Unfortunately, the CCF had road blocks from the ford southward for several miles. It would be 4 November 1950 before the mauled ROK 1st Division, withdrawing under pressure, managed to cross the Ch'ongch'on River into sanctuary of the bridgehead.¹⁶ On 24 November 1950, now MG Paik led the reconstituted 1st ROK Division north towards Taech'on as the right flank attacking force of I Corps. The EUSA was still confident that the CCF had not intervened in force.¹⁷ That wishful thinking evaporated in less than twenty-four hours.

The major attack of the Chinese Second Phase Offensive smashed into the ROK II Corps during the night of 24-25 November. By noon on the 26th, that front had collapsed. The holding attacks against I Corps were focused on the ROK 1st Division which flanked the ROK II Corps divisions. The size and violence of the attacks did not deter the EUSA staff which just doubled the enemy strength to 101,000 troops opposing them. It was not until 2nd ID regiments became decisively engaged in the IX Corps sector that LTG Walker radioed his corps commanders to withdraw. MG Paik covered the pullback of the 24th and 25th IDs into the Ch'ongch'on bridgehead before the decision was made to abandon Kunu-ri on 29 November.¹⁸ By then, the stage had been set for the 2nd ID debacle south of Kunu-ri.

After LTG Kim, the ROK I Corps commander, was killed in a plane crash on 27 March 1951, MG Paik became the new commander in early April.¹⁹ General Matthew B. Ridgway had been impressed by Paik as a "young and able Korean combat commander," when he was EUSA commander. Thus, he recommended that MG Paik Sun-yup be named the ROK armed forces UN representative at the conference table for the initial negotiations with Communist Chinese and North Koreans at Kaesong on 10 July 1951.²⁰ Two weeks of very painstaking deliberations finally produced an agenda for the negotiations and MG Paik returned to his corps to join the UN effort to control key terrain along the southern border of the future demilitarized zone (DMZ).

MG Paik conducted the largest anti-guerrilla operation of the war, sardonically labeled RAT KILLER.²¹ The three-phase operation in southwestern Korea began on 2 December 1951 when Task Force Paik began shrinking a 163-mile perimeter around Chiri-san. Loudspeaker teams of the EUSA 1st Loudspeaker & Leaflet Company broadcast surrender appeals. "We were used all around the Chiri-san perimeter by ROKs," recalled Corporal (CPL) John A. Squicciarini from Brooklyn, NY. "And, our surrender broadcasts were very effective."²³ After twelve days 1,612 guerrillas had been killed and 1,842 captured. Then, the hunt was shifted north to Cholla Pukto Province into the mountains around Chonju. Seventeen days later, an estimated 4,000 had been killed and another 4,000 captured. Then, in a surprise move MG Paik returned to

Chiri-san to envelop the area in two concentric control rings. By the end of RAT KILLER in mid-March 1952, TF Paik had killed or captured 19,000 guerrillas and bandits.²⁴ This successful operation led to his promotion to Lieutenant General (LTG) and the ROKA transformation of I Corps into the new II Corps. In July 1952 LTG Paik was appointed to Army Chief of Staff the first time.²⁵

LTG Paik participated in all ten of the major campaigns of the Korean War and was the first four-star General in the ROK armed forces. After the Armistice he served as the First Field Army commander, another stint as the Army Chief of Staff, and finally as Chairman of the ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff before retirement in 1960 as the most highly decorated soldier in the the Army. In addition to a U.S. Silver Star for gallantry in action during the capture of P'yongyang, General Paik was awarded four Legion of Merit medals.²⁶

More national service followed. Retired General Paik was appointed Ambassador to the Republic of China on Taiwan in 1960, to France in 1961, and to Canada in 1965. As Minister of Transportation from 1969-1971, General Paik started the construction of the Seoul Metropolitan Subway, resolved the hijacking of a JAL (Japan Airlines) plane by Japanese Red Army terrorists at Kimpo Airport in 1970, and initiated the effort to build a national War Memorial at Yongsan.²⁷ ♣

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Endnotes

- 1 Retired Colonel Jack T. Young, unpublished "History of Ivanhoe Security Force," excerpts furnished by June Young, 4 April 2006, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as Young, "History of ISF"; Charles H. Briscoe, "The Ivanhoe Security Force in Korea, 1950," *Veritas*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 87.
- 2 Retired First Sergeant Emmett V. Parker, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 30 January 2006, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Retired Master Sergeant L. Carl Heesch, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 15 December 2005, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by names and dates.
- 3 Young, "History of ISF."
- 4 Retired ROK General Paik Sun-yup, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 27 May 2010, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date.
- 5 Young, "History of ISF."
- 6 Paik Sun-yup interview, 27 May 2010.
- 7 Paik Sun-yup interview, 27 May 2010; Roy E. Appleman, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu (June-November 1950)* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2000), 654.
- 8 Appleman, *South to the Naktong*, 664-665, 666, 672, 673.
- 9 Paik interview, 27 May 2010; Appleman, *South to the Naktong*, 675, 676, 677.
- 10 Paik interview, 27 May 2010; "Gando Special Force," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gando_Special_Force accessed 12 July 2010; "General Paik Sun-up," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paik_Sun-yup accessed 28 June 2010.
- 11 Paik interview, 27 May 2010; MAJ Robert K. Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea: KMAG in Peace and War*. Army Historical Series (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2000), 38, 42; Appleman, *South to the Naktong*, 13, 16.
- 12 Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 110; Appleman, *South to the Naktong*, 23, 24.
- 13 Appleman, *South to the Naktong*, 35; Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 134.



These guerrillas and bandits were among the 4,000 captured during Phase I of Operation RAT KILLER.



These are 1st RB&L Group leaflets airdropped to encourage civilian support during Operation RATKILLER.

- 14 Appleman, *South to the Naktong*, 679, 691.
- 15 Appleman, *South to the Naktong*, 693, 694, 695.
- 16 Appleman, *South to the Naktong*, 709.
- 17 Billy C. Mossman, *Ebb and Flow, November 1950-July 1951* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2000), 63, 65.
- 18 Mossman, *Ebb and Flow*, 71, 72, 79, 109.
- 19 Mossman, *Ebb and Flow*, 347n.
- 20 Walter G. Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front*, United States Army in the Korean War (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2005), 17, 17n, 23.
- 21 XVIII Airborne Corps. Public Affairs Office. "Biography for General Paik Sun-yup" dated 21 May 2010.
- 22 1st Radio Broadcasting and Leaflet Group leaflet #8376, "Extermination of Communist Bandits," 10 December 1952, and 1st RB&LG leaflet #8377, "Dissident Elements in South Korea," 13 December 1952, Robert L. Darcy Papers, Box 1, Folder 51 and Box 4, Folder 4 respectively, Manuscript Collection, U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.
- 23 John A. Squicciarini, 1st Loudspeaker & Leaflet Company, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 30 November 2004, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front*, 182.
- 24 Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front*, 182-183.
- 25 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paik_Sun-yup accessed 28 June 2010.
- 26 XVIII Airborne Corps. Public Affairs Office. "General Paik Sun-yup," 21 May 2010.
- 27 XVIII Abn Corps. PAO. "General Paik Sun-yup," 21 May 2010; "General Paik Sun-yup," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paik_Sun-yup accessed 28 June 2010.