



SOLDIER
LEADER
TRAINER

John H.
McGee

by Eugene G. Piasecki

In the early twentieth century, the United States Army was characterized by a lack of organizational and operational far-sightedness. This was especially true with respect to unconventional guerrilla, partisan, and irregular warfare. Mostly ignored as viable considerations in theater battle plans, it was not until the United States Army had suffered its initial defeats in the Pacific from the Japanese that American senior military leaders began to explore these methods as a way to continue the fight against an occupying enemy. The purpose of this article is to highlight Brigadier General (BG) John Hugh McGee's contributions to today's Special Operations Forces. The lessons he had learned before and during WWII to train American, Allied, and indigenous forces were validated and applied while conducting successful irregular warfare operations against Chinese and North Korean units in Korea from 1950 to 1951.

In July 1940, after nine years of U.S. Army infantry duty, Captain (CPT) John H. McGee reported for duty at Pettit Barracks on Mindanao in the Philippine Islands. Assigned to command Company C, 45th Infantry, Philippine Scouts (PS), the only Moro Company in the Scouts, CPT McGee realized that training of the indigenous soldiers using American doctrinal tactics, techniques, and procedures presented unique and distinct challenges and opportunities that he had never before

encountered. Because of his successes with the Moros, CPT McGee was selected to command the Zamboanga Training Center at Calarian on Mindanao in mid-August 1941.¹ It was here that McGee gained the experience of establishing and operating a training/reception center, and while that would prove beneficial later in Korea, his priority at Zamboanga was to train the Philippine Army.



**Colonel John Hugh McGee,
USMA 1931**

After the Japanese landed on Mindanao, McGee was sent from the training center to command a Philippine Army battalion defending Del Monte Airfield. This was followed by his further assignment as the executive officer and then regimental commander of the 101st Infantry, Philippine Army (PA) of the Davao Subsector from 8 December 1941 to 10 May 1942.² In obedience to BG William F. Sharp's orders to surrender, Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) McGee and his units became Japanese prisoners of war (POWs) on 10 May 1942.³ As McGee remembers, "To my knowledge, we had no plan for guerrilla warfare [on Mindanao]. Our tactical doctrine should have provided for transition from conventional warfare to guerrilla warfare ... In a rear area it would have been right to evade surrender, but as commander of a unit in contact with the enemy it seemed wrong."⁴ After internment at the Davao Penal Colony (DAPECOL) on Mindanao, McGee was transferred for shipment to Japan. He escaped captivity

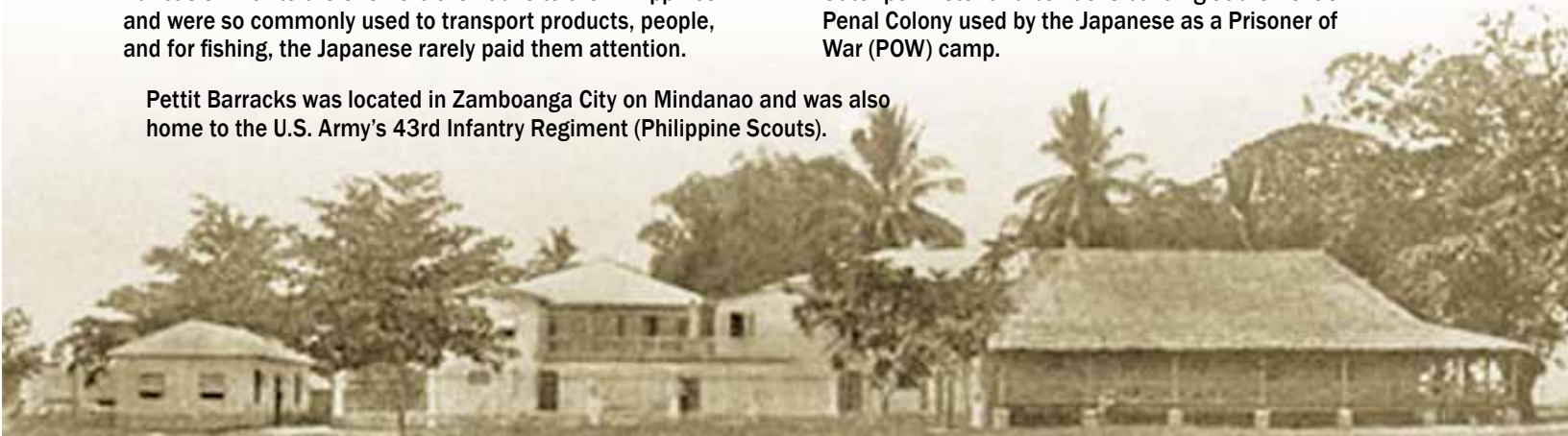


Bancas similar to the one here are native to the Philippines and were so commonly used to transport products, people, and for fishing, the Japanese rarely paid them attention.



Outer perimeter and barracks building at the Davao Penal Colony used by the Japanese as a Prisoner of War (POW) camp.

Pettit Barracks was located in Zamboanga City on Mindanao and was also home to the U.S. Army's 43rd Infantry Regiment (Philippine Scouts).



in June 1944 by jumping over the side of a ship.⁵ Rescued by a Filipino in a native *banca* he was taken to a guerrilla corps headquarters located in Mindanao's rugged interior. There, he contacted COL Wendell W. Fertig, commander of Mindanao's guerrilla forces and requested an assignment to Southern Zamboanga as a liaison officer between Fertig's organization and the liberating American forces.⁶

Rather than capitalize on McGee's experience, Fertig rejected his request for service and referred to McGee "as a former POW with ideas on how to win the war." In return, McGee was placed in command of eighty-one other former Japanese Prisoners of War (POWs) who were then evacuated from Mindanao by the American submarine, USS *Narwhal* (SS-167), on 29 September 1944.⁷ Arriving back in the United States, LTC McGee recuperated from his Philippine experiences while he attended the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. After graduation, he was reassigned to the Philippines to command the 169th Infantry Regiment, 43rd Infantry Division (ID) preparing for the invasion of Japan in August 1945. When the dropping of the Atomic Bombs canceled the invasion, the 43rd ID deployed to Japan for a brief period of occupation duty before returning to Camp Stoneman, California for inactivation on 26 October 1946. Capitalizing on his WWII experiences, the Army assigned LTC McGee to positions that utilized the skills he had acquired during WWII to benefit officers and soldiers. These included duty as a

Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) Instructor at the University of Illinois (1946-1949) and command of the 8th Infantry Regiment of the reactivated 4th Infantry Division (Training) at Fort Ord, California (1949-1950).⁸

After North Korea invaded South Korea on 25 June 1950, LTC McGee was ordered to the G-3, Miscellaneous Division, Eighth U. S. Army (EUSA) Headquarters in the Naktong Perimeter of South Korea.⁹ Reporting in July 1950, McGee was directed by COL William H. Bartlett, EUSA Chief of Operations, to prepare a concept plan that addressed conducting guerrilla operations in North Korea. Wasting no time, LTC McGee set to the task and based his study on the assumption that armed American and Korean evadees were in the enemy's rear area and could be recruited to form the nuclei of the guerrilla organization. Approved in concept, and with McGee named to organize the North Korean Guerrilla Organization, EUSA G-2 could not confirm that either Americans and/or Koreans were present in enough



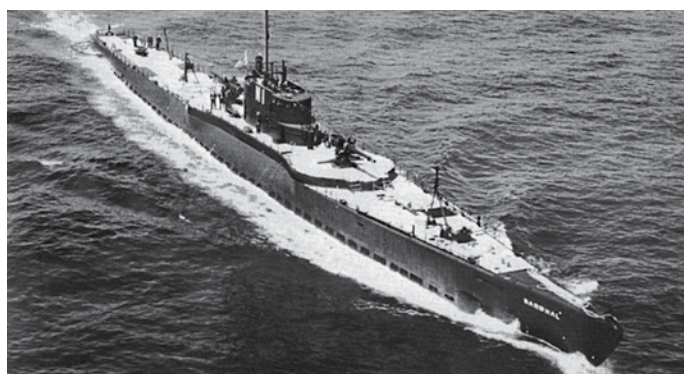
43rd Infantry Division SSI



169th Infantry Regiment DUI



4th Infantry Division SSI

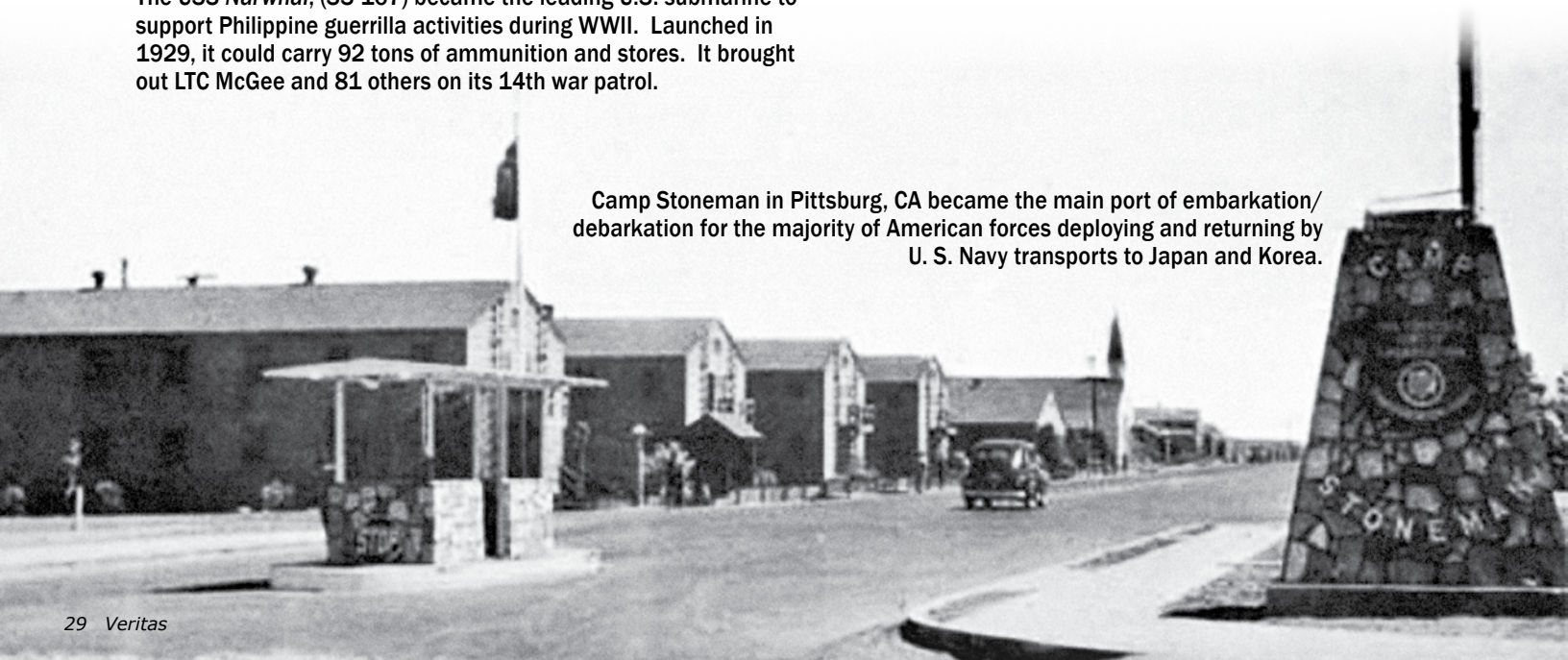


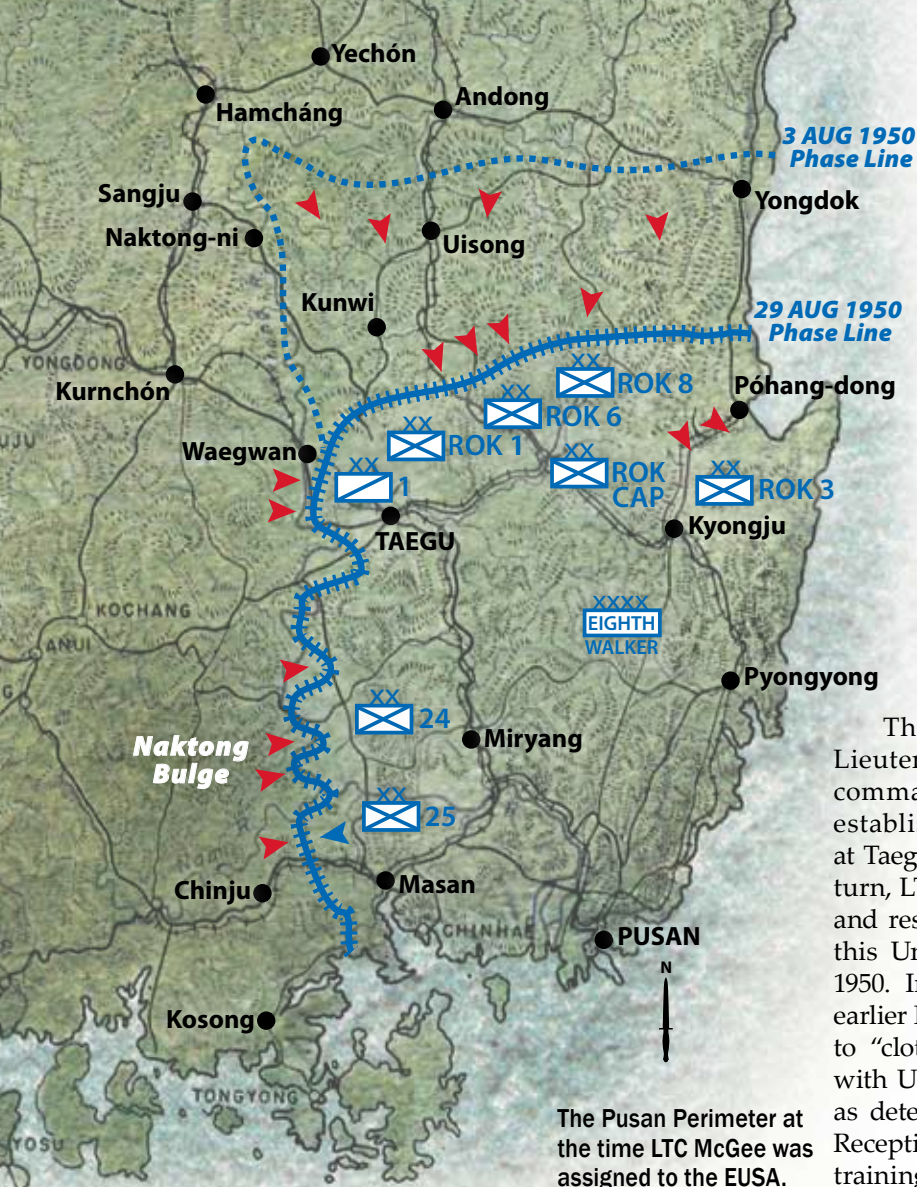
The USS *Narwhal*, (SS-167) became the leading U.S. submarine to support Philippine guerrilla activities during WWII. Launched in 1929, it could carry 92 tons of ammunition and stores. It brought out LTC McGee and 81 others on its 14th war patrol.



Colonel Wendell W. Fertig was the commander of Mindanao's guerrilla forces from 1942 through 1945. His WWII experience resulted in selection as one of initial staff officers assigned to the Office of the Chief of Psychological Warfare (OCPW).

Camp Stoneman in Pittsburg, CA became the main port of embarkation/debarkation for the majority of American forces deploying and returning by U. S. Navy transports to Japan and Korea.





The Pusan Perimeter at the time LTC McGee was assigned to the EUSA.



Sign indicating the location of the Far East Command (FEC) Replacement Detachment at Camp Drake, Japan.

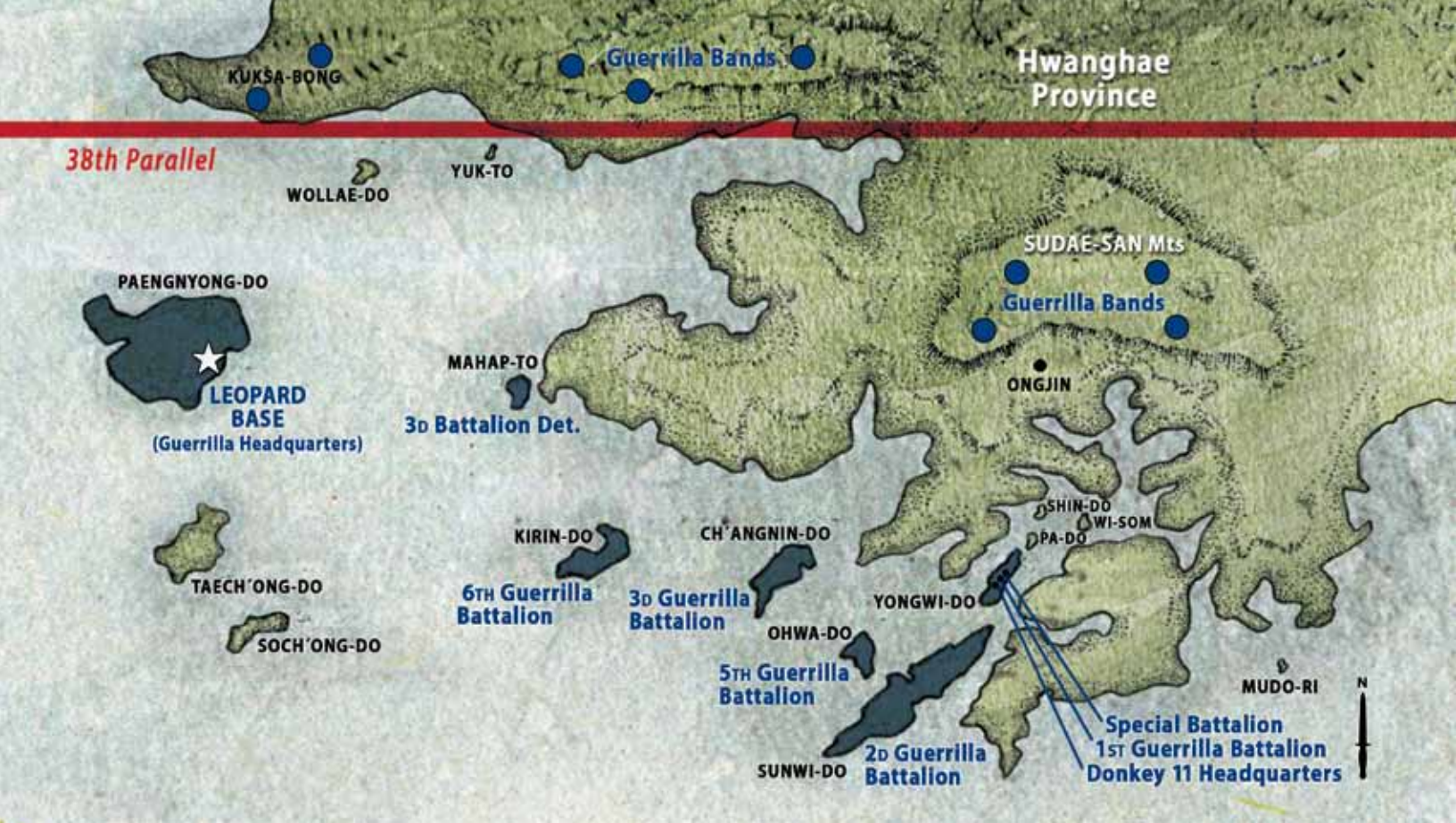
The success of the Ranger Training Center led Lieutenant General (LTG) Walton H. Walker, EUSA commander, to order the 2nd Logistical Command to establish a United Nations Reception Center (UNRC) at Taegu University as soon as EUSA moved from it. In turn, LTC McGee's efforts at Kijang did not go unnoticed and resulted in his selection to organize and command this United Nations Reception Center on 1 November 1950. In many ways this mirrored and capitalized on his earlier Philippines training experience. Given the mission to "clothe, equip, and provide familiarization training with U. S. Army weapons and equipment to UN troops as determined essential for operations in Korea by the Reception Center Commander," the UNRC also supplied training facilities, areas, and assistance when requested.¹² Except for the British and their Commonwealth Forces who trained at Sasebo, Japan, all other Free Nation Forces that supported the EUSA were prepared for combat in Korea at the UN Reception Center.¹³ In November 1950, when the Chinese entered the war and the situation changed in Korea so did McGee's assignment to the Reception Center.

Notified of increased North Korean resistance to the Chinese presence on the Hwanghae Peninsula in western North Korea, FEC authorized EUSA to organize and conduct guerrilla operations in Korea in January 1951. Once again, EUSA G-3 directed LTC McGee to submit recommendations "for the conduct of guerrilla operations in North Korea."¹⁴ Realizing that water transportation and supplying rice were two major components for achieving success, McGee's concept for developing the guerrilla organization was to accomplish the following three tasks:

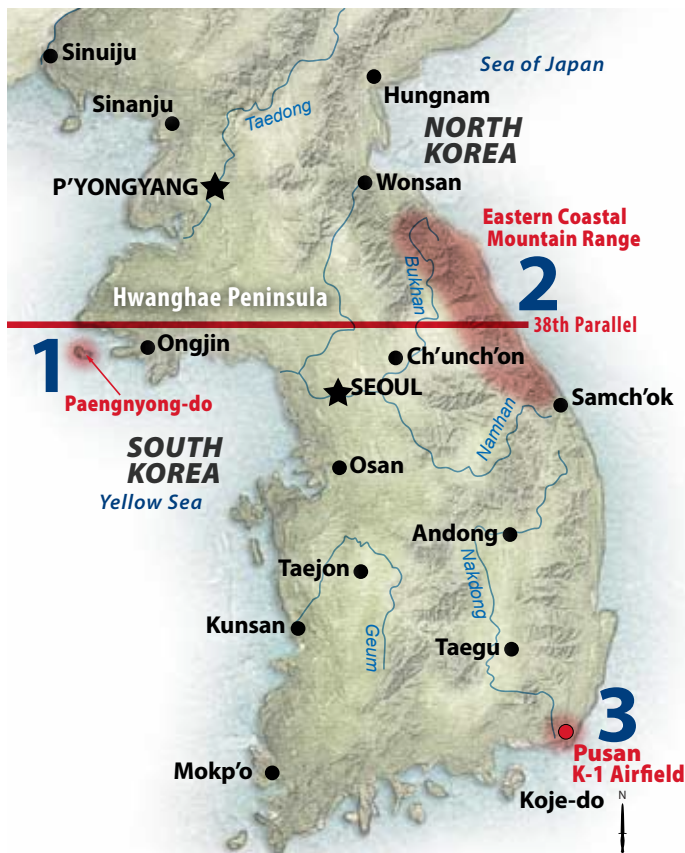
1. Western North Korea: Establish a major base on Paengnyong-do off the west tip of the Hwanghae Peninsula and just south of the 38th Parallel.
2. Eastern North Korea: Establish a mobile base in the coastal mountain range with Korean Rangers to provide base security.
3. Central North Korea: A small air-dropped unit, based at Pusan near the K-1 Airfield, would establish guerrilla nuclei and conduct sabotage and intelligence operations.

strength to create a guerrilla movement. This fact, coupled with the already existing shortages of personnel, weapons, and equipment in EUSA, led Far East Command (FEC) to decide to assume control of the guerrilla organization itself and to direct EUSA to discontinue its efforts.¹⁰

Shortly thereafter, the North Koreans broke through the Naktong Perimeter between Taegu and Pohang and formed the Pohang Pocket. In response, FEC began forming the 1st Raider Company (GHQ Raiders) while the Miscellaneous Division was directed to organize a separate 'commando type unit' to infiltrate the penetration and collect enemy information. Having screened Army volunteers in the Yokohama-Tokyo area for this type assignment before reporting to Korea, LTC McGee again went to the replacement depot at Camp Drake, Japan to recruit Ranger volunteers. McGee selected Second Lieutenant (2LT) Ralph Puckett Jr. to command the Eighth Army Ranger Company. Satisfied with 2LT Puckett's selection of officers and men, he returned to Korea to establish the Ranger Training Center at Kijang on 15 August 1950. Located approximately five miles north of Pusan, "Ranger Hill" was an ideal location to conduct the type of day and night training that paid dividends in combat.¹¹



Map of the Guerrilla Unit locations, April 1951.



Guerrilla Taskings:

1. Establish a mobile base on Paengnyong-do.
2. Establish a mobile base in coastal mountain range.
3. Establish guerrilla nuclei and conduct sabotage & intelligence operations.

The organization proposed to control this operation became known as the 8086th Army Unit (AU) and was located at EUSA Headquarters. Its mission was “to conduct the guerrilla activities of intelligence, attrition, and haven in the enemy’s rear and to provide maximum tactical support to EUSA during its coming advance to liberate North Korea.”¹⁵

Reassigned to the EUSA G-3, but under the direction of the Deputy G-3 who had now been given command responsibility for the 8086th AU, LTC McGee discovered that the war’s focus had definitely shifted from what it had been in July 1950. No longer was there a deliberate plan to liberate North Korea. The Armistice negotiations that began in June 1951 would eventually result in a cease-fire, and an agreement between the belligerents would signal the mutual withdrawal of combat forces from the 38th Parallel. Also included as part of these changes was a marked decline in the personnel and equipment required to support the North Korea Guerrilla Organization (8086th AU). In July 1951, LTC McGee’s Korea service ended when FEC’s advance party arrived at EUSA G-3 to regain control of guerrilla operations. The WWII veteran received orders to attend the Army War College at Carlisle, Pennsylvania.¹⁶

EPILOGUE

During the course of his military career, Brigadier General John Hugh McGee gained a wealth of combat and training experience. The lessons he learned from 1931 to 1961 have been shared either in his autobiography, *Rice and Salt* or the Ranger Association after his induction into the Ranger Hall

of Fame in 1995. Although Korea marked his last formal assignment with Special Operations Forces, the examples below apply just as much to today's special operators as they did when McGee first experienced them. 📌

Examples of Lessons Learned

A. One of the first principles Americans must learn in training foreign troops is that they establish themselves as the ones responsible for dispensing military supplies or funds to the foreign army.

B. An American advisor's leadership skills depend as much on his professional qualifications as it does on his ability to influence those in charge of providing the foreign army its resources.

C. Whenever possible, indigenous officers and noncommissioned officers should train and instruct their own troops.

D. The infantry trainer is like a football coach. He concentrates his first instructional effort on teaching and developing the individual soldier's basic combat proficiency.

E. Important combat fundamentals are: physical condition, obedience, and timely accurate individual and crew-served weapons proficiency.

F. When conducting jungle warfare the most important principle is to encircle the enemy when attacking, but to avoid being encircled when attacked.

G. Survival of guerrilla organizations depends heavily on indigenous support, isolated terrain, the availability of food, and the enemy's weaknesses.

H. Single guerrilla units are capable of combining with other guerrilla units to form battalion, regiment, division, corps, or army equivalents.

I. The civilian nature of partisan organizations lends itself more to defending and operating in its own locality than it does to combining with other units and conducting operations outside its home territory.

J. While awaiting the arrival of a liberating force, guerrilla and partisan operations are normally limited to collecting intelligence, methodically reducing enemy forces, and securing the locations from which the first two activities can be planned and conducted.¹⁷

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Endnotes

- 1 Brigadier General (Ret) John H. McGee, *Rice and Salt* (San Antonio, Texas: The Naylor Company, 1962), 22-23.
- 2 John H. McGee military service information. National Personnel Records Center, Military Personnel Records, 9700 Page Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri. Documents include Record of Assignments and selected award Citations from 1950 to 1961. The information covers McGee's service from the Philippine Islands to his retirement.
- 3 McGee, *Rice and Salt*, 61. BG William F. Sharp, commander of the Visayan-Mindanao Force, became subordinate to Lieutenant General Jonathan M. Wainwright on Corregidor after the War Department placed Wainwright in command of all the American and Philippine forces in the Philippine Archipelago. Sharp's orders to surrender came after Japanese Lieutenant General Masaharu Homma's demand for unconditional surrender and his threat to kill all U.S. and Filipino prisoners taken on Bataan and Corregidor unless all forces in the Philippines surrendered.
- 4 McGee, *Rice and Salt*, 59.
- 5 McGee, *Rice and Salt*, 144. Davao Penal Colony, often called Dapecol and later Japanese Prison Camp Number 2 was located on Mindanao near Davao City.
- 6 McGee, *Rice and Salt*, 184; John D. Lukacs, *Escape from Davao: The Forgotten Story of the Most Daring Prison Break of the Second World War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010) 255. By profession, Fertig was a mining engineer from Colorado who had been commissioned in the Army Corps of Engineers at the start of the war. Used to working with machines, Fertig had no military or leadership experience. Fertig assumed the rank of Brigadier General because he believed that none of the bandits, renegade guerrilla leaders or rank-and-file Filipinos would respect him if he could not make them believe that he was "The One" who could deliver "The Aid."
- 7 Wendell W. Fertig, Personal Diary (January-December 1943), Box 1, 81, Wendell W. Fertig Collection, The U. S. Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle Pennsylvania.; McGee, *Rice and Salt*, 184.; Lukacs, *Escape from Davao*, 255; As Lukacs indicates, Fertig harbored a deep resentment against any American that had surrendered, and because he himself had not, had contempt for anyone who did regardless of the circumstances. Believing that anyone who had spent time in a prison camp was damaged goods, Fertig, in his diary and in his own words, referred to those who had escaped from prison camp as 'stir crazy'.
- 8 John H. McGee military service information, National Personnel Records Center.
- 9 BG (ret) John H. McGee, letter to Major Shaun M. Darragh, 8 February 1985, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, 6. As McGee explained, "The Miscellaneous Division of the G-3 Section Eighth Army originally was a cover name for a G-3 commanded unit organized to conduct guerrilla warfare. It became more aptly suited to its title by the variety of missions assigned to it."
- 10 McGee letter to Darragh, 4.
- 11 McGee letter to Darragh, 6.
- 12 MAJ William F. Fox, *History of the Korean War, Inter-Allied Cooperation During Combat Operations, Volume III, part 2, section B, 10-11*. MS in OCMH: Letter Order, Headquarters, EUSAK to CG, 2nd Logistics Command, 8 October 1950, "Subject: Establishment of UNRC." Not more than 6,200 troops were expected to be in training at the center at any one time. The first unit to use the facility was the 1st Turkish Armed Forces Command on 18 October 1950.
- 13 McGee letter to Darragh, 6. This included the Turkish Brigade, the Thai Regiment, the Indian Ambulance Unit, the Dutch Battalion, the French Battalion, the Greek Infantry Battalion, the Ethiopian Battalion, the Belgian Battalion, the Luxembourg Battalion and the Colombian Battalion.
- 14 McGee letter to Darragh, 9.
- 15 McGee letter to Darragh, 10-11. The 8086th AU command group was comprised of a commander, an executive officer, an intelligence officer, operations officer, and a signal officer with the supply group located at Pusan.
- 16 McGee letter to Darragh, 20.
- 17 McGee, *Rice and Salt*, 24, 27, 30, 44, 170, 171.