



A COMBAT FIRST

Army SF Soldiers in Korea, 1953-1955

By Kenneth Finlayson

The Korean War is noteworthy in Army history for the first use of Army Special Forces (SF) soldiers in a combat theater. In 1953, ninety-nine graduates from the first two Special Forces Qualification Course classes deployed to Korea as individual replacements. Working alongside their conventional Army counterparts, they performed a variety of missions associated with the training and employment of guerrilla forces. Two, Second Lieutenant (2LT) Ivan M. Castro and Captain (CPT) Douglas W. Payne, paid the ultimate price for their service and were the first SF soldiers to die in combat. Some of the SF men remained in Korea until 1955, nearly two years after the signing of the Armistice. This article documents the experience of the SF soldiers who trained, advised, and ultimately demobilized the guerrillas.¹

The Korean War (1950-1953) ended in a negotiated ceasefire with the armies of North Korea and Communist China opposing the forces of South Korea, the United States and the United Nations coalition along the 38th Parallel. The first year of fast-paced, fluid, ground combat up and down the Korean peninsula was followed by a gradual stalemate as the armies of both sides hardened their defensive positions and jockeyed for control of key terrain along the Main Line of Resistance (MLR).² While the conventional war ground to a halt, unconventional warfare (UW) operations continued on both coasts.

Far East Command (FEC) began to develop an UW capability in early 1951 by taking advantage of the large numbers of anti-Communist North Korean guerrillas on the northwest islands of Korea. This led to the formation of the Attrition Section, Miscellaneous Division, G-3, Eighth U.S. Army (EUSA) on 15 January 1951.³ The guerrilla unit went through a dizzying series of name changes and command relationships; from the Attrition Section, EUSA G-3, to the Miscellaneous Group, 8086th Army Unit (AU), EUSA on 5 May 1951; then to the Guerrilla Section under the FEC/Liaison Group (FEC/LG) (in Tokyo) and the FEC/Liaison Detachment,

Korea (FEC/LD[K]) (in Taegu). On 10 December 1951 the section was renamed the 8240th Army Unit, FEC G-2. Ultimately it came under the operational control of the Combined Command for Reconnaissance Activities, Korea (CCRAK), 8242nd AU on 27 September 1952.⁴ Throughout these many permutations, the focus remained on the guerrillas.

On 15 January 1953, another unit was formed, the Recovery Command, 8007th AU. The 8007th also used guerrillas to collect information related to UN prisoners of war and gather general combat intelligence. Like the guerrilla command, the Recovery Command fell under the staff supervision of the FEC G-2. In September, 1953 it became the 8112th Army Unit.⁵ Most of these changes reflected attempts to create a theater-level command to direct UW operations, but had little effect on the basic mission of the guerrillas and the American advisors who trained, supplied and employed them. As the war progressed, the requirements for support grew.

The mission of the guerrilla command, as defined in the Table of Distribution was twofold. The first was: "to develop and direct partisan warfare by training in sabotage indigenous groups and individuals both within Allied lines and behind enemy lines," and second; "to supply partisan groups and agents operating behind enemy lines by means of water and air transportation."⁶ To accomplish these missions, in early 1952 the guerrilla command divided into two elements for operations and support.

Ultimately, three sub-commands controlled guerrilla operations; initially LEOPARD BASE and later WOLFPACK on the West Coast, and Task Force (TF) KIRKLAND on the East Coast. The support element, BAKER Section, was initially located at the EUSA Ranger Training School at Kijang near Pusan, and used C-46s and C-47s to support airborne training and to conduct aerial resupply and agent insertions. BAKER Section later moved to K-16 Airfield outside Seoul, after the capital was retaken a second time.⁷



The anti-Communist guerrillas occupying the islands off the coast of Korea provided a valuable source of manpower to the UN forces. American Special Forces advisors helped to train the guerrillas in the late stages of the war.



The Headquarters of the 8240th AU in Seoul. The administration and logistical support to the American advisors emanated from this unit of the guerrilla command.



Far East Command SSI



Eighth United States Army SSI



Origins of the term 'Donkeys'

The origins of the term 'Donkey' for identifying West Coast guerrilla units are unclear, but its use began early at WILLIAM ABLE Base. One probable origination is related to COL McGee's first speech to the guerrilla leaders on Paengnyong-do. In that meeting he advised them to not be rash, but instead "behave like the mule which [when entangled in wire] stubbornly, patiently awaits the arrival of outside help." His interpreter substituted the more familiar 'donkey' for mule, and the name apparently stuck. Another possible origin was put forward by an early Donkey leader who stated "the generator of the [AN/GRC-9] radio looked like a Korean donkey or ass. When you crank the generator... you have to ride on the generator which looks like a rider on the back of a donkey." Regardless of how the term originated, individual guerrilla units began referring to themselves after McGee's visit as 'Donkeys.' Units became identified as a numbered 'Donkey' (example: 'Donkey 6').

"Darragh Letter," 13; "UN Partisan Forces," 93-94; see also Kenneth Finlayson, "Wolfpacks and Donkeys: Special Forces Soldiers in the Korean War," *Veritas* 3, No. 3 (2007), 32-40.

On the west coast, LEOPARD BASE, originally called WILLIAM ABLE BASE, was located on Paengnyong-do.⁸ Formed in February 1951, it supported roughly twelve thousand men organized into fifteen units referred to as numbered Donkeys. The LEOPARD area of operations was generally above the 38th Parallel to the west of the Ongjin Peninsula, reaching as far north as Taehwa-do near the mouth of the Yalu River that formed the Chinese-North Korean border.⁹ Eight Donkeys were located on Cho-do and the remaining seven on other islands. An advisor to Donkey 1, Sergeant (SGT) Alex R. Lizardo's experience was typical.

Enlisting in July 1951, Alex Lizardo attended Infantry Basic Training at Fort Ord, California and Airborne School at Fort Benning, Georgia. Promoted to Sergeant (SGT) within eleven months of enlisting, he was sent to the FEC/LD (K). Arriving in June 1952, SGT Lizardo

remained there for the next six months. After returning to Camp Drake, Japan for additional training, he was assigned to LEOPARD in November 1952 to be an advisor to Donkey 1.¹⁰

"Donkey 1 was out on Kirin-do. We Americans did not usually accompany the raiding parties on-shore," recounted SGT Lizardo. "I was not a school-trained Special Forces guy, but I was later awarded the SF Tab [and Combat Infantryman's Badge] for my time in 8240."¹¹ His assignment to LEOPARD coincided with the height of guerrilla activity. LEOPARD had been operational a year when the third guerrilla element, WOLFPACK, was organized (January 1952).

WOLFPACK, composed of eight sub-units designated WOLFPACK 1 thru 8, totaled 3,800 partisans.¹² The headquarters was on the large island of Kangwha-do west of Seoul. WOLFPACK 1 performed base security on

“Our mission was to harass and interdict the rear areas. We conducted raids and ambushes and laid mines along the MSR [Main Supply Routes].”

— MAJ Richard M. Ripley

Kangwha-do. The other units were located on adjacent islands south of the 38th Parallel.

WOLFPACK conducted operations behind enemy lines in the southern portion of the Ongjin Peninsula.¹³ Armor Major (MAJ) Richard M. Ripley commanded WOLFPACK in the spring of 1952. “Our mission was to harass and interdict the rear areas. We conducted raids and ambushes and laid mines along the MSR [Main Supply Routes].”¹⁴ As the war stalemated, LEOPARD and WOLFPACK grew with the arrival of more anti-Communist North Korean refugees.

By late 1952, the guerrilla units on the West Coast were actively raiding the North Korean mainland to harass the enemy and disrupt traffic along the MSR.¹⁵ LEOPARD reported a strength of 7,002 guerrillas and WOLFPACK, 7,015.¹⁶ A compilation of the two unit operational reports for the week of 15-21 November 1952 reflected 63 raids and 25 patrols against the North Korean coast, claiming an estimated 1,382 enemy casualties.¹⁷ The increasingly robust partisan forces (and their many dependents), were difficult to control, supply, and feed. The situation dictated a reorganization in order to streamline operations.

In 1953, Guerrilla Command labeled their sub-elements the United Nations Partisan Forces in Korea (UNPFK), but retained the headquarters names LEOPARD and WOLFPACK.¹⁸ The separate Donkeys and Wolfpack sub-elements were reorganized into five infantry regiments and one airborne infantry regiment. The non-airborne units were called the Partisan Infantry Regiments (PIR) 1st, 2nd, 5th and 6th. TF KIRKLAND, conducting operations on the East Coast, became the 3rd PIR. The airborne regiment became the 1st Partisan Airborne Infantry Regiment (PAIR). The regiments retained their

original North Korean leaders and referred to themselves as Wolfpacks and Donkeys. American advisors worked at the regimental level and below or served as UNPFK staff. It was during this period of reorganization that the request for Special Forces soldiers to serve in Korea was initiated by Brigadier General (BG) Robert A. McClure.

From the beginning of the war, McClure, the Army Chief of the Office of Psychological Warfare (OCPW), closely followed the UW activities in Korea. He was dissatisfied with the guerrilla operations, calling them “minor in consequence and sporadic in nature.”¹⁹ The Psywar general was actively working to develop a special operations capability in the Army.

Within the OCPW, McClure created a Special Operations Division, staffed with veterans of World War II UW units. On his staff was Colonel (COL) Aaron Bank (the Office of Strategic Services), COL Melvin R. Blair (Merrill’s Marauders), and COL Wendell Fertig and Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Russell W. Volckmann (Philippine guerrilla leaders). After nearly a year of staff work, on 27 March 1952 the Army approved the establishment of a Psychological Warfare Center at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.²⁰

The Center organization included a Special Forces Department responsible for the training of the new ‘Special Forces’ soldiers. Shortly after the founding of the Center, in June 1952, COL Aaron Bank stood up the 10th Special Forces Group (SFG). As trained Special Forces troops became available, BG McClure repeatedly urged the Far East Command to request them, sending messages in November 1952 and again in January 1953.²¹

FEC finally asked that fifty-five officers and nine enlisted men from the 10th SFG be levied for Korea. COL Fillmore

A guerrilla formation. Both LEOPARD BASE and WOLFPACK organizations were supplied and equipped by the U.S. The level of support depended on the unit strength, a number that often varied widely from one day to the next.



In 1953 the LEOPARD and WOLFPACK units were reorganized into Partisan Infantry Regiments. American advisors worked with the guerrilla chain-of-command at the regiment down to the guerrilla companies.



Organization of Partisan Operating-Level Units

April 1953



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— 1LT Charles W. Norton

K. Mearns, head of the Special Forces Department, visited Korea in early 1953 to see the guerrilla operations firsthand.²² Soon after his visit, the first contingent of SF troops arrived in theater. Ultimately, ninety-nine Special Forces men, (seventy-seven officers and twenty-two enlisted soldiers) deployed from Fort Bragg in five groups between February and September 1953.²³

After graduating from Class #2 of the Special Forces Qualification Course, newly-promoted Infantry First Lieutenant (1LT) Charles W. ‘Charley’ Norton reported to Camp Stoneman, CA, enroute to Korea. As part of the fourth cycle, 1LT Norton flew to Camp Drake, Japan by Air Force C-54 *Skymaster*. There the new SF arrivals received additional training before going to Korea.

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tides and their effect on operations,” Norton recalled.²⁴ Not everyone in the class was Special Forces. “There were Military Intelligence guys who were going to run agents into North Korea. We had maybe thirty guys in the class.”²⁵ 1LT Rueben L. Mooradian’s impression of that preparatory training was of “two ridiculous weeks of intelligence training and a mission planning exercise to capture a North Korean general.”²⁶ After completing the course, the Special Forces soldiers were sent to the guerrilla command headquarters in Seoul where each received orders.

1LT Norton was assigned to LTC Paul Sapieha’s 2nd PIR on Kanghwa-do. “My first job was as the S-3 [operations officer], which I held for about six weeks. [Second Lieutenant (2LT)] Joe Johnson came out with me. He was the S-4 [supply officer]. His job was to keep track of rice.”²⁷ The 2nd PIR had three battalions; the 1st and 2nd

conducting operations and the 3rd battalion providing base security and training new recruits. The guerrillas received marksmanship and demolitions training from the American advisors. After his brief stint as S-3, 1LT Norton moved across the island to advise the WOLFPACK 1 commander. By the time the Special Forces soldiers arrived, the guerrilla command had a well-developed supply system and good medical support.

During World War II, Master Sergeant (MSG/E-7) Robert W. Downey was a medic in the artillery. He was assigned to the 1st PIR in March 1952. "We received our medical supplies through the FEC supply system. We had Dr. Claman [1LT Maurice A. Claman, a surgeon] who covered all the islands on a two-to-four week circuit. Our MEDEVAC capability was good, [light fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters] out of Inch'on Airport back to the 121st Evac Hospital on the mainland."²⁸ MSG Downey's duties included medical training for the guerrillas and taking care of the dependents on the island.

"I tried to conduct classes on basic first aid for those selected to act as medics," said Downey. "More time was devoted to treating the family members present. We saw

lots for colds, skin rashes, and infections. There were so many family members around and they constantly needed medical treatment."²⁹ For the SF advisors, keeping the guerrillas equipped, trained, and fed was their first priority.

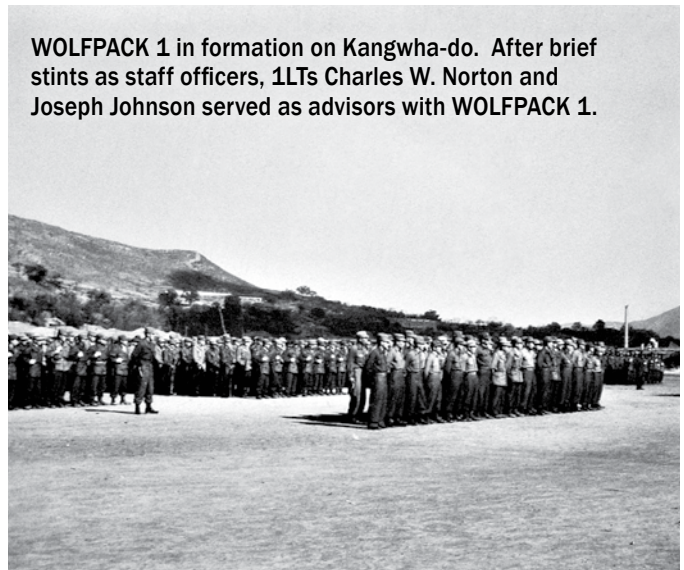
1LT Myron J. Layton, another graduate of the second Special Forces Qualification Class, underwent training at Camp Drake, before being assigned to the 6th PIR on Yong-yu-do. "Our job was to keep the training schedule moving, going from one company to another. Raids and ambushes were the main subjects," said Layton. In addition to training, the Americans were responsible for the resupply of the units on the widely scattered islands. "The LSTs [Landing Ship, Tank] would bring the supplies, 100-pound bags of rice, and we would hump it off the beach. There were C-rations for us," recalled Layton.³⁰ In addition to rice, uniforms, equipment, and ammunition were given to the guerrillas.

The equipment issued was not always first-rate. "We received uniforms for issue from the hospital. Many had bullet holes in them," said Layton. "We'd get size twelve boots for guys with size six feet. Most of them wore tennis shoes."³¹

Ninety-nine Special Forces soldiers deployed to Korea from the 10th Special Forces Group. COL Aaron Bank, commander of the 10th SFG (2nd from left) and COL Charles H. Karlstadt, Commandant of the Psywar Center and School (4th from left) observe 10th SF Group training.



WOLFPACK 1 in formation on Kangwha-do. After brief stints as staff officers, 1LTs Charles W. Norton and Joseph Johnson served as advisors with WOLFPACK 1.



Supply room on Kangwha-do. A solid, windowless building was a prerequisite for the storage of supplies to prevent the entrance of rats and the exit of supplies.



A young guerrilla with an M-1 Garand rifle. Boots were not the only equipment that was often too big for the user.



Supplies reached the guerrilla units by sea. The stone causeways were the landing areas where the supplies were off-loaded into U.S. Army trucks.



1LT Reuben L. Mooradian received two weeks of training at the Far East Command Intelligence School before joining the 1st Partisan Infantry Regiment on Yo-do.

The lack of quality equipment did not significantly affect UW operations. At this late stage of the war (mid-summer 1953), the interest in fighting was rapidly waning. The Special Forces soldiers focused on training the PIRs. The large guerrilla presence on the islands figured prominently in the Armistice negotiations. The presence of anti-Communist elements on islands off their coastline particularly rankled the North Koreans. Post-Armistice control of these islands was a contentious issue. Consequently, the U.S and South Korea continued to keep a military presence on the off-shore islands during the discussions.



1LT Myron J. Layton (L) and 1LT Murl Tullis were graduates of Special Forces Class #2. Assigned to the 6th PIR in April 1953, Layton found his primary mission was "to keep the training schedule moving" as the war wound down.

The Special Forces personnel in the first three rotations experienced a higher operational tempo and a greater threat from the Communist forces. Two Special Forces soldiers in the early cycles became casualties during operations in 1953. Infantry 2LT Joseph M. Castro with WOLFPACK 8 was killed on 17 May 1953 while crossing a rice paddy dike during a daylight operation on the mainland. Infantry CPT Douglas W. Payne died on 21 July 1953 when his base on Sui-do was attacked and overrun by North Korean forces. These were the first two Special Forces soldiers to die in combat and the only fatalities among the SF deployed from Fort Bragg. After their deaths, guerrilla command directed American advisors to "use judgment and caution" if accompanying their guerrilla elements during operations on the mainland.³²



2LT Joseph M. Castro was killed while on operations with WOLFPACK 8. He was the first Special Forces soldier killed in combat.

Those SF who came in the final two levies from Fort Bragg experienced the war's drawdown. The guerrillas were not interested in being the last casualties of the war. In the months before the signing of the Armistice on 27 July 1953, the number of raids on the mainland declined dramatically. While working with the guerrilla units on the islands was the primary SF mission, not all the Special Forces soldiers ended up as advisors.

A number of the SF soldiers were assigned to the guerrilla command Tactical Liaison Office (TLO). Small U.S. Army intelligence teams inserted North Korean and Chinese defectors and some South Koreans on foot through the frontline infantry divisions to collect battlefield intelligence about the enemy in front of the UN units. The experiences of the Special Forces soldiers

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— 1LT Earl L. Thieme

performing TLO duties were explained in *Veritas* Vol. 8 No. 2.³³ A few SF troops were assigned to the 8007th AU, whose varied missions included the recovery of downed UN pilots, the gathering of information on UN POWs, and the collection of general battlefield intelligence.

1LT Earl L. Thieme was part of the third group of SF soldiers levied for Korea in March 1953. Trained in the 10th SFG at Fort Bragg, Thieme recalls that “there was very little done to prepare to go; no special training, no advance briefings. Once we were on orders, we got some leave and then reported to Camp Stoneman.”³⁴ When 1LT Thieme got to Camp Drake, Japan, he discovered that he was being assigned to the 8007th AU Recovery Command. Their mission was to gather information on Prisoner-of-War camps in North Korea where Americans might be held. Four other Special Forces soldiers, CPT Francis W. Dawson, 1LT Warren E. Parker, 1LT Sam C. Sarkesian, and 1LT Leo F. Siefert also served with Thieme in the 8007th. “The FEC G-2 gave us the mission. He told us it was Top Secret and to get over there ASAP,” said Thieme.³⁵ At the 8007th headquarters in Seoul, the men got their assignments. The unit conducted agent insertions on both coasts to find and verify Communist POW camps in North Korea.

1LT Sam Sarkesian commanded the 8007th AU Recovery Command Team #1. He was sent to Cho-do (West Coast)

with a sergeant and two enlisted men.³⁶ His mission was two-fold: to establish escape and evasion nets for downed U.S. and UN pilots, and to gather intelligence on camp locations. Confiscated Korean *junks* were used to insert agents on the mainland. They were to return to a pre-arranged point after a specific number of days for pick-up. After recovery, the information they gathered would be collected and processed. Most of Sarkesian’s agents failed to return for extraction.³⁷ His area of operations changed after the Armistice, when all friendly troops were evacuated to new sites south of the 38th Parallel.

1LT Reuben Mooradian had to move his guerrillas from Yo-do south to Yuk-do. There he assisted with the training of 1st PIR until leaving for the 77th SFG at Fort Bragg in July 1954.³⁸ As the guerrillas left the South Korean islands, they were replaced by ROK Marine and Army units.

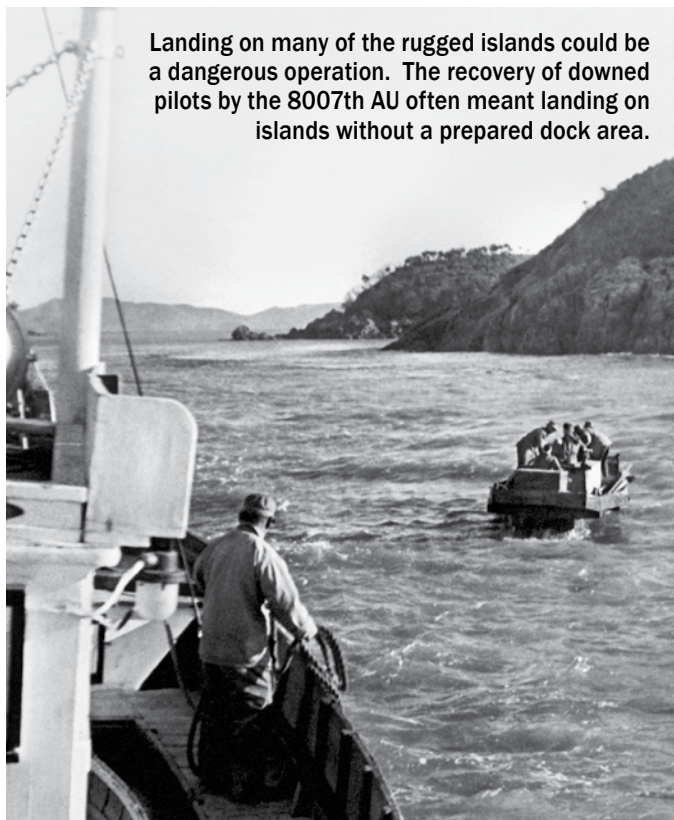
With the signing of the Armistice, 1LT Sarkesian moved his unit south from Cho-do to Paengnyŏng-do. From there he continued to insert agents until leaving Korea in March, 1954. “We learned a lot of lessons, but we did not accomplish very much. Unfortunately, the lessons learned were not put into any official documents,” Sarkesian said. “We expended a lot of energy for little result. I wish we had better briefings and training before we went. There was a total lack of coordination.”³⁹ Similar missions were run on the East Coast by other elements of the 8007th.

1LT Warren E. Parker commanded a detachment on the East Coast at Sokch’o-ri. His mission was to gather battlefield intelligence. He coordinated with the Navy to escort his motorized *junks* during insertions and extractions.⁴⁰ Parker’s detachment did not train the personnel being inserted. The agents were dropped off shortly before they left on their mission. The 8007th provided security, some supplies, and transported the agents to their insertion point. Some material supplied to the agents was quite valuable.

1LT Earl Thieme remembered several trips to Tokyo to collect gold and wristwatches for the agents going on missions.⁴¹ Thieme was assigned through two unit designation changes; 8007th to 8112th on 24 September 1953 and then 8112th to 8157th on 5 January 1955.⁴² Although airdropping agents behind the lines was discontinued after the Armistice, the ground and sea insertions continued until 1955. The majority of the Special Forces personnel continued working with the guerrillas.

By summer 1953, the Armistice negotiations were almost done. The ranks of North Korean partisans, some of whom had been on the islands since 1950, had been greatly reduced by losses and desertions. Many of the newcomers were South Korean. “The leadership was still people who came out of the north,” noted 1LT Charley Norton, “but the replacements were made up of

Landing on many of the rugged islands could be a dangerous operation. The recovery of downed pilots by the 8007th AU often meant landing on islands without a prepared dock area.





8007th personnel, left to right, 1LT Sam C. Sarkesian, 1LT Warren E. Parker, CPT Francis W. Dawson, 2LT Earl L. Thieme and 1LT Leo F. Siefert at Camp Drake, Japan. The men are graduates of Class #3 of the Special Forces Course.



8112th AU Recovery Command Patch

1LT Sam C. Sarkesian, commander of Detachment #1, 8112th. He was responsible for the establishment of escape and evasion networks and the rescue of downed airmen.

guys from Seoul and Inch'on who were dodging the ROK Army [draft]. The partisans were a lot better deal."⁴³ MAJ Richard M. Ripley recalled that, "things were locked in as far as the war went. The guerrillas knew the country was going to be divided in the end, so it was tough to ask them to sacrifice too much."⁴⁴ Still, unauthorized raids on the mainland continued after the Armistice, because a handful of Americans could not prevent them.

"When we got there, there wasn't much of the war left," noted 1LT Charley Norton. "The Koreans could sense it was winding down. Still, we continued to run operations against the mainland. Usually about ninety partisans would go. This number was dictated by the number that could fit on a fishing [sailing] *junk*. Usually thirty per *junk*, with one motor *junk* pulling three fishing *junks*. We gave the fisherman rice to use their boats."⁴⁵ The raids were against the North Korean Army and Border Constabulary units manning the coast. The advisory mission after the Armistice entailed demobilizing the armed guerrillas, a delicate, complex and sensitive mission.

With the cessation of hostilities, the South Korean government faced the dilemma of assimilating large, well-armed, American-trained guerrilla units composed primarily of North Koreans as well as displaced civilians. The South Korean solution was to assimilate the guerrillas units into the ROKA, an action that involved relocation. 1LT Charley Norton recalled, "The transition was a very messy thing. The ROKs needed to get control, but it took from July 1953 to April 1954 to process the partisans for the transition. They did not replace the U.S. forces [advisors] so we stayed with the partisans, keeping them supplied and trained until the spring of 1954."⁴⁶ Some of the guerrilla leaders were given commissions in the ROK Army, which helped maintain order within the units during demobilization and movement off the islands. It was a lengthy and painstaking process that tested the mettle of the American advisors.

2LT Maurice H. Price, a Regular Army officer who later served in Special Forces, was assigned in September 1953 as a company advisor in the 2nd PIR on Kyo dong-do. Specifics about the demobilization process were lacking. "Initially, all we had were rumors [about demobilization]," Price said. "Every day one of the NCOs would go to Kangwha-do [2nd PIR headquarters] but there was nothing official at first."⁴⁷ The two principal tasks involved getting an accurate headcount for each guerrilla unit and collecting crew-served weapons, pyrotechnics and ammunition before leaving the islands. Neither was easy.

"The distribution of rice was the rationale for the weekly headcounts. It was clear that we were getting inflated numbers," Price recalled. "Early one morning, one of my NCOs went out with an interpreter while we were holding formation in my company. From a hilltop they watched as one hundred guerillas double-timed across the island after our formation ended to join the other company before we went over to count them."⁴⁸ Accounting for weapons and ammunition proved just as difficult.

"The island [Kyo dong-do] once had gold mines and there were small caves all over the place to hide weapons and pyro," Price remembered. "It took a while to find the stuff and collect it. We had ordnance [weapons maintenance] teams come out and the storyline was that they were there to inspect the machineguns and mortars. In reality, we were getting it under our control."⁴⁹ For Price, the advisor role was a mixed blessing. "The training was valuable, but the isolation could be tough," he said. "Demobilizing the guerrillas was a brutal business. At times you had to be a bald-faced liar."⁵⁰ The preparation began in January 1954 and picked up speed until March.

1LT Norton along with Wolfpack 1, (some five hundred guerrillas and families), and the 2nd PIR (eight hundred plus dependents) were shipped by LST to Cheju-do, the primary reception and processing point for partisans

transitioning into the ROK Army.⁵¹ 2LT Maurice Price likewise accompanied his guerrillas south.

“The movement was done in one day from Kangwhado. It was a contract deal; the [WWII-era] Navy LST had a Japanese crew. Charley Norton and I were the only Caucasians on the boat,” Price remembered. “When we arrived, the ROK Army and Navy were waiting for us. The Good Samaritan stuff ended at that point. Most of the guerrillas were strip-searched when they came ashore.”⁵² After this mission, 2LT Price finished up his tour as a rifle company executive officer with the 2nd Infantry (Indianhead) Division. He left Korea for Fort Bragg, where he was assigned to the 77th SFG. His experience as



Towing a sailing junk. Often one motorized junk would tow three sailing junks on an operation.

2LT Earl L. Thieme (foreground) and an unidentified enlisted man check their map during a reconnaissance north of Seoul in the winter of 1954. The coming of the Armistice did not end the Special Forces presence in Korea. Some of the soldiers remained until 1955.



a guerrilla advisor contributed to his later assignments in Special Forces. What was missing was a formal program to collect and use the experiences gained by the advisors.

“At the [initial] selection process at Camp Drake, we were told not to expect publicity. It led to the ‘silent professional’ mentality,” Price recalled. “When we were debriefed on leaving the 8240th, we were told not to talk about the tour. They placed heavy emphasis on our not drawing any attention to our experiences.”⁵³ Consequently, the knowledge and lessons learned by these first SF advisors were not disseminated to the 10th and 77th SFGs.

The Korean War was the first employment of Special Forces to a combat theater. All SF soldiers sent to Korea were individual replacements working with other Army personnel detailed to guerrilla elements. No SFOD-Alphas (ODA) deployed to Korea for the war. “There was never any plan to run twelve-man teams,” recalled 1LT Charley Norton. “We could have effectively employed one ODA per regiment, but the teams were all back at Fort Bragg [77th SFG] or enroute to Germany [10th SFG].”⁵⁴ This was due in large part because, throughout its existence, guerrilla command was never configured along doctrinal lines established in the Army’s Field Manual 31-21, *Organization and Conduct of Guerrilla Warfare* where the ODAs could have been properly employed.⁵⁵

The late arrival of Special Forces-trained personnel in the last months of the war makes it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the SF training programs. Their commitment to FEC demonstrated that the partisan



Roll call for a guerrilla unit. As 2LT Maurice H. Price found out, the guerrillas would attempt to pad the numbers in formation to get a larger share of the food resupply.

“The distribution of rice was the rationale for the weekly headcounts. It was clear that we were getting inflated numbers.” – 2LT Maurice H. Price

advisory mission was a valid UW skill. It showed the Army that SF could train indigenous forces to support conventional forces. These same skills form the cornerstone of the Special Forces UW mission today. 📌

The author would like to thank the many veterans who gave generously of their time for interviews and provided the photographs incorporated into this article.

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Endnotes

- 1 This article is based on an earlier effort, “Wolfpacks and Donkeys: Special Forces Soldiers in the Korean War”, by Kenneth Finlayson, published in *Veritas*, Vol 3, No 3, 2007, pgs 31-40. It incorporates material gathered since 2007.
- 2 With few significant changes, the Main Line of Resistance in October 1951 became the Demilitarized Zone with the signing of the Armistice. It remains in existence today. See Walter G. Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front* (Washington DC, Center of Military History, 1992), 17-20, 36-40, 45-47, 507-508.
- 3 HQ, United States Army Forces, Far East, Technical Memorandum ORO-T-64, *UN Partisan Warfare in Korea, 1951-1954*, dated 19 September 1956, U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle Barracks, PA 30-36. Hereafter referred to as the ORO Study.
- 4 Michael Krivdo, “Creating an Army Guerrilla Command: Part One, The First Six Months,” *Veritas: The Journal of Army Special Operations History*, Vol 8 No. 2, 2012, 12-26. (For the purpose of clarity, the various permutations of the guerrilla unit name will be referred to collectively as guerrilla command unless otherwise noted).
- 5 Gordon L. Rottman, *Korean War Order of Battle: United States, United Nations, and Communist Ground, Naval, and Air Forces, 1950-1953* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 2002), 15, 57.
- 6 Headquarters, Eighth U.S. Army Korea, Table of Distribution No 80-8086, Miscellaneous Group, 8086th Army Unit, undated, Record Group 319, National Archives, Washington DC.
- 7 ORO Study, 35.
- 8 **Do means island in Hangul (Korean). Thus Cho-do is Cho Island.**
- 9 ORO Study, 35. **Figures are based on the disposition of partisan units in June 1952.**
- 10 Alex R. Lizardo, 8240th Army Unit, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 22 February 2010, History Support Center, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 11 Alex R. Lizardo, 8240th Army Unit, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 9 March 2010, History Support Center, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 12 Richard M. Ripley, 8240th AU, interview by Dr. Kenneth Finlayson, 14 August 2007, USASOC History Support Center, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 13 ORO Study, 31.
- 14 Ripley interview. 14 August 2007.
- 15 Ripley interview. 14 August 2007.
- 16 ORO Study, pg 77.
- 17 Paddock, The 8240th Army Unit, *Special Forces: The First Fifty Years* (Tampa FL, Faircount LLC, 2002), 85.
- 18 Alfred H. Paddock, Jr., *U.S. Army Special Warfare: Its Origins*, (Lawrence, KS, University Press of Kansas, 2002) 106. **United Nations Partisan Forces Korea was another organization prone to name changes. It is often referred to as the United Nations Partisan Infantry Korea (UNPIK).**
- 19 ORO Study, 77.
- 20 Eugene G. Piasecki, “Smoke Bomb Hill: Birth of the Psywar Center, Part I,” *Veritas: The Journal of Army Special Operations History*, Vol 7, No. 1, 2011, 94-102.
- 21 ORO Study, 77.
- 22 Richard M. Ripley, 8240th Army Unit, interview by Dr. Michael Krivdo and Mr. Eugene Piasecki, 31 January 2013, USASOC History Support Center, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 23 **A comprehensive list of the 10th Special Forces Group personnel who deployed to Germany and Korea in 1953 compiled from the original orders is contained in *Special Forces: The First Fifty Years* (Tampa FL, Faircount LLC, 2002), 94-101.**

- 24 Charles W. Norton, 8240th Army Unit, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 9 April 2004, USASOC History Support Center, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 25 Norton interview, 9 April 2004.
- 26 Rueben L. Mooradian, 8240th Army Unit, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 21 November 2005, USASOC History Support Center, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 27 Norton interview, 9 April 2004.
- 28 Robert W. Downey, 8240th Army Unit, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 24 March 2011, USASOC History Support Center, Fort Bragg, NC. **By this time in the war, the Combined Command for Reconnaissance Activities – Korea (CCRACK), an FEC staff section was responsible for logistical support to the guerrilla units.**
- 29 Downey interview, 24 March 2011. **Downey would later serve in Special Forces with the 77th Special Forces Group.**
- 30 Myron J. Layton, 8240th Army Unit, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 21 November 2011, USASOC History Support Center, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 31 Layton interview, 21 November 2011.
- 32 **FEC stopped sending American or British soldiers on deep airborne insertions after the failure of Operations SPITIFRE and VIRGINIA ONE. After the deaths of 1LT Castro and CPT Payne, the number of raids on the mainland had dropped off precipitously as the signing of the Armistice approached.** ORO Study, 52-53, 62-64 and 74-76.
- 33 Eugene G. Piasecki, "TLO: Line-Crosses, Special Forces, and the 'Forgotten War,'" *Veritas: the Journal of Army Special Operations History*, Vol 8, No. 2, 2012, 38-48.
- 34 Earl L. Thieme, 8007th Army Unit, interview by Dr. Richard Kiper, 11 August 2003, USASOC History Support Center, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 35 Earl L. Thieme, 8007th Army Unit, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 21 November 2005, USASOC History Support Center, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 36 Sam C. Sarkesian, 8007/8112th AU, interview by Dr. Richard Kiper, 8 October 2003, USASOC History Support Center, Fort Bragg, NC. **In Sarkesian's recollection there was no Team #2. 8007th AU worked for the FEC G-2.**
- 37 Sarkesian interview, 8 October 2003.
- 38 Mooradian interview, 21 November 2005.
- 39 Sarkesian interview, 8 October 2003.
- 40 Thieme interview, 11 August 2003.
- 41 Thieme interview, 11 August 2003.
- 42 Thieme interview, 21 November 2005.
- 43 Norton interview, 9 April 2004.
- 44 Ripley interview, 31 January 2013.
- 45 Norton interview, 9 April 2004.
- 46 Norton interview, 9 April 2004.
- 47 Maurice H. Price, 8240th AU, interview by Dr. Kenneth Finlayson, 12 December 2012, USASOC History Support Center, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 48 Price interview, 12 December 2012.
- 49 Price interview, 12 December 2012.
- 50 Price interview, 12 December 2012.
- 51 Norton interview, 9 April 2004.
- 52 Price interview, 12 December 2012.
- 53 Price interview, 12 December 2012.
- 54 Norton interview, 9 April 2004.
- 55 Department of the Army, FM 31-21, *Organization and Conduct of Guerrilla Warfare*, October 1951, copy in USASOC History Support Center, Fort Bragg, NC. **The principal author of FM-31-21 was LTC Russell W. Volckmann who led the Philippine guerrillas on northern Luzon in World War II. Volckmann visited with COL John H. McGee in Korea in late 1950 and incorporated McGee's assessment of the guerrilla situation in Korea into the field manual.**

LST 546 loading guerrillas on Kanghwha-do for the movement to Cheju-do for demobilization. LTs Charlie Norton and Maurice Price accompanied the demobilizing guerrillas. They were the only Caucasians on the vessel which had a contracted Japanese crew.

