"The Best Little Army In Asia:"

KMAG, the ROK Army, and the Failure of American Policy in Korea

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Part I: Introduction

In the predawn hours of June 25th, 1950, thousands of artillerymen of the North Korean People's Army (NKPA) stood to their guns. Angles were checked, propellant and shells loaded, and at 0400 the order went out to fire the opening shots of the Korean War. Behind the devastating artillery barrage and supported by Russian-made T-34 tanks, the NKPA's assault formations descended upon the Republic of Korea (ROK) Army's positions along the 38th Parallel, wreaking havoc and achieving breakthroughs with relative ease.

As the NKPA began overrunning the South Korean positions, Colonel Paik Sun Yup, commander of the ROK 1st division, attempted to cope with the deteriorating situation. Understaffed and out of touch, Paik frantically tried to mount resistance to the North Korean onslaught. Paik was then dealt a second blow. His American advisor informed him that Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG) had issued the order for Americans attached to Korean units to withdraw. Knowing how much his troops depended on the KMAG group, Paik was astounded. "KMAG's withdrawal," Paik remarked years later in his memoirs, "meant we would be fighting empty-handed."[1]

Within a week Seoul, the South Korean capital, was captured by the NKPA. The units that had so easily crushed the ROK Army's positions along the 38th parallel raced south, inhibited more by Korea's hilly terrain than by any organized resistance. The terrified men of the ROK Army fled before the North Korean onslaught, abandoning their weapons and equipment in a desperate bid to outrun their pursuers. By the time the retreat ended and the North Korean attack was stalled at the Naktong River, the ROK Army had lost half of the 100,000 men it had started the war with as well as most of its equipment. For the army *Time*

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[1] Paik Sun Yup, Gen., ROKA, *From Pusan to Panmunjom* (Washington: Brassey's (US), Inc., 1992), 6.

Magazine had heralded as "the best of its size in Asia,"[2] the first weeks of the Korean War had been a disaster.

How did such a precipitous crisis befall the ROK Army? In order to provide some answers to this question, I will explore how the United States administered Korea between 1945 and 1948, and how it created and then attempted to train the ROK Army in the years before the outbreak of war in Korea. By looking at the American Army's policy during the occupation of Korea and towards the creation of the ROK Army, I will evaluate why the ROK Army was so easily defeated by an opponent of equal numbers.

Histories of America's advisory effort generally fall into two camps. Robert K. Sawyer, the US Army's official historian of KMAG, suggests that, "Perhaps the most important limitation imposed upon KMAG was that of time itself."[3] Sawyer assumes that given more time the ROK Army could have amassed more equipment and KMAG could have more adequately prepared the South Koreans for war. Sawyer's argument has resonated with other historians. Brian R. Gibby adopts this line of reasoning in his analysis of KMAG, but he takes it a step further by positing that KMAG's ability to hold the ROK Army together during the Korean War vindicates its capability as an advisory group.[4]

The other point of view takes a more critical approach to the KMAG advisory effort and the ROK Army. Max Hastings' work *The Korean War* adapts this position when he notes that "...like its parent regime, the ROK Army was a corrupt, demoralized body entirely devoid of

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[2] Time Magazine, "KOREA: Progress Report, Jun. 5, 1950." http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,812568-1,00.html (cited 12 Aug. 2009).

[3] Robert K. Sawyer, Maj., USA, *Military Advisors in Korea: KMAG in Peace and War* (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, US Army, 1962), 187.

[4] Brian R Gibby, "American Advisors to the Republic of Korea; America's First Commitment in the Cold War, 1946-50" in *Military Advising and Assistance: From Mercenaries to Privatization, 1815-2007* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 106.

motivation."[5] The problem was not entirely a shortage of time and equipment, but the inability of American advisors to face the realities of the ROK Army. In this line of thought, the shortcomings of the Korean Army are inherent in its structure and situation, regardless of the actions of the American advisors.

Both treatments of KMAG hold merit; however both also have shortcomings that need to be addressed. Both Gibby and Sawyer take too much for happenstance in their treatment of KMAG. Although it is commendable that American advisors worked with success to maintain the cohesion and capability of the ROK Army during the war, it does not excuse the fact that their military project was all but defeated in 1950. The treatment of the problems confronting the advisory effort also displaces responsibility for KMAG's shortcomings; the difficulty in training people of a different culture and language, the insoluble equipment issue, an insurgency, and a host of other complications account for the lack of success of the advisors. Hastings' approach also ascribes too much to insurmountable problems in the advisory effort, asserting that factors like corruption in the ROK Army accounted for the failure of KMAG's mission.

The failure of the ROK Army was the result of American decision making rather than the consequence of arbitrary problems. The policies of the military government in Korea under General John R. Hodge had political and economic ramifications for the ROK Army. KMAG, working within the context of the legacy of the military government's policies, often failed to adequately address the needs of the ROK Army. Although advisors demonstrated some creativity in their training plans, they had difficulty in implementing their ideas. Consequentially, rather than an effective ROK Army, the NKPA faced an assortment of undertrained battalions in the summer of 1950.

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[5] Max Hastings, *The Korean War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 53.

The experience of American military advisors in Korea reflects the new and uncertain position the United States held in the Cold War world. The United States found itself involved in Korea more by accident than out of any particular interest in the affairs of the small East Asian peninsula. Korea had barely figured in America's post-war planning; it was mentioned briefly in the Cairo Declaration in 1943 and was barely discussed at the Potsdam conference in 1945.[6] The first Americans in Korea entered a nation that was to them completely alien, and the hastily assigned occupation forces did not have a concrete idea of how to administer Korea. The decisions made by the American military government in Korea created policies that were often detested by the Korean people and served to create more problems than they solved. An understanding of the decisions made by the occupation government helps to explain the origins of several of the problems KMAG would face training the ROK Army.

As a consequence of the occupation government's decision making, the advisory effort was hindered at the start. This does not mean, however, that the advisory effort was entirely at the mercy of prior events, since the US Army made its fair share of mistakes in attempting to train the ROK Army. Additionally, the American military did not regard Korea as a plum assignment. Consequently, Korea became a "dumping-ground for incompetence."[7] Procuring advisors to work in Korea was challenging; finding replacements for incompetent advisors was nearly impossible. With such a diversity of capabilities, KMAG advisors represented an odd cross section of the American army.

Tasked to create an army from scratch with a strength of 60,000 (later 100,000) capable of defending South Korea, the 500-man team of advisors was thrown back on its own resources. Often, advisors cut corners to facilitate the creation of the ROK Army, causing problems down

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[6] Nam-Sung Huh, *The Officer Training School: The Cradle of the Korean Officer Corps, 1946-1950* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982), 9.
[7] Ibid, 80.

the road in other areas. The language barrier made it extremely difficult for the Americans to effectively communicate with their Korean counterparts. While the NKPA received a constant and dependable stream of military hardware from the Soviet Union, the ROK Army was forced to operate with weapons left over from the American occupation and a paltry trickle of supplies from the United States. Both flaws in training and the outbreak of an insurrection in South Korea constantly upset the fragile timetable the advisors created for training the ROK Army. The difficulty of working with often corrupt ROK Army officers made a challenging task all the more frustrating. Despite the diverse nature of these problems, they were, both directly and indirectly, the product of American policy in Korea.

Part II: The Occupation and the Military Government

Events Leading to the Occupation: 1866-1945

The American soldiers going ashore at Inchon as part of "Operation Blacklist 40" in the morning hours of September 8th, 1945 were the vanguard of America's major Cold War commitment to Korea. They were not, however, the first American troops to set foot upon Korean soil. In 1866 Koreans burned an American merchant ship, the *General Sherman*, in retaliation for sailing into Korea's interior waterways. The incident prompted the United States to attempt to open up the "Hermit Kingdom" to treaties governing shipwrecks and trade.[8] The ensuing punitive expedition the American Asiatic Squadron launched in 1871 saw marines and sailors landed on Kangwha Island, but no treaty was brokered, and soon the Americans packed up and left.

In the ensuing years events rapidly broke down Korea's isolation from the world. Korea's strategic location at the confluence of the three regional powers, China, Russia, and Japan, forced it onto the world stage. The rapidly modernizing Japanese, with grand designs on the Asian continent, pressured the Koreans into a treaty in 1876, opening the country to trade first with Japan and gradually with other Western powers.[9] Realizing the precarious nature of his situation, King Kojong of South Korea attempted to reform the Korean army. After a failed attempt to modernize his army with Japanese advisors (the Japanese-trained Koreans attempted a coup), Kojong began to make requests to the United States for military assistance.

The experiences of America's first military advisory mission to Korea foretell many of the problems the United States and KMAG faced a half century later. Beginning in the early 1880s Kojong began making regular requests for advisory assistance from the United States.

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[8] Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 58.

[9] Headquarters Eighth United States Army, *KMAG's Heritage: The Story of Brigadier General William McEntire Dye* (San Francisco: Historical Branch Eighth United States Army, 1966), 11.

American policy makers were hesitant to become involved with Korea, fearing that its political instability might embroil America in the country's affairs.[10] With three other powers already jockeying for influence in Korean affairs, the United States was cautious about becoming an active player in the peninsular nation. Kojong's purchase of several thousand breech-loading rifles from an American firm, and the amendment of his request for aid to "non-regular" army advisors however made his terms more attractive.[11] The American government relented in 1888, and put together plans to send a small military mission to Korea to aid Kojong.

The War Department chose William McEntire Dye to head the mission. Dye's credentials were certainly commendable. An army veteran of the Indian Wars and the Civil War, he had gone to Egypt to 1873 to serve in the Khedive's army.[12] His experience with foreign armies as well as his retired status made him the ideal candidate to head the mission. Dye accepted, and on April 7, 1888, a three man advisory mission arrived in Korea.

Korean political instability hindered the early advisory effort, but other obstacles inhibited the mission's attempts at forging a modern Korean army. Modernizing a nation's army is a daunting and challenging task. Three advisors would be barely enough to train the few thousand Korean Palace guards, let alone a Korean army. The inability of the advisors to speak Korean, as well as the paucity of qualified interpreters to help them further hindered their efforts.[13] The advisors, however, were sometimes the greatest obstacle to their own success. The experienced Dye demonstrated gusto for working in Korea, but his two colleagues quickly tired of their mission. Rather than focus on training the Korean army, Dye's colleagues fought to

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[10] Ibid, 21.
[11] Richard P. Weinart, "The Original KMAG" *Military Review,* Vol. 45, No. 6, June 1965, 95.
[12] HQ Eighth US Army, *KMAG's Heritage*, 21.
[13] Ibid, 24.

get out of their contract, and in 1891 they quit.[14] A few years later the advisory mission itself was terminated when, in the wake of the Queen Min's murder, the Russians and Japanese elbowed Dye aside and began their own projects to modernize the Korean army. Aging and no longer needed to head military instruction for the Koreans, Dye became an agricultural minister.

For the following decade Russian and Japanese interests clashed in Korea, as they attempted to build larger spheres of influence. Then in 1905 Japan secured its position in Korean affairs with its crushing victory over the Russian Navy at Tsushima a few miles off the southern Korean coast. That same year Korea became a Japanese protectorate, and a flood of Japanese immigrants, soldiers, and administrators inundated the country. Many Koreans attempted to fight the Japanese encroachment, but the Japanese Army swiftly and ruthlessly put them down. In 1910 the Japanese forced the elderly Kojong to sign away his rights as sovereign, and annexed Korea.[15] The ensuing Japanese occupation in Korea ushered in decades of Japanese military governance and brutality.

In 1943 US interest in Korea picked up again. This is not to say that the Koreans had not attempted to make their plight known to the world: for three decades Korean citizens (among them Syngman Rhee, the future president of South Korea) in China, Europe, and the United States had been lobbying for support for the beleaguered nation. The outbreak of war in the Pacific, however, dragged the United States out of its isolationism, and by 1943 the Allies were envisioning the shape of the post-war world. Although the Soviet Union had entered a non-aggression pact with the Japanese prior to the Pacific War's outbreak, the United States was still wary of Soviet influence in the Far East. As one State Department committee reported in November, 1943:

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[14] Weinart, "Original KMAG," 97.
[15] USC-UCLA Joint East Asian Studies Center, "Treaty of Annexation, August 22, 1910," <http://www.international.ucla.edu/eas/documents/kore1910.htm> (cited 19 Jan. 2010).

> Korea may appear to offer a tempting opportunity to apply the Soviet conception of the proper treatment of colonial peoples, to strengthen enormously the economic resources of the Soviet Far East, to acquire ice-free ports, and to occupy a dominating strategic position in relation both to China and to Japan…A Soviet occupation of Korea would create an entirely new strategic situation in the Far East, and its repercussions within China and Japan might be far reaching.[16]

Korea's strategic location at the convergence of three powers, as well as the introduction of the United States as a major player in the region's power struggle, ensured its importance in the post-war world. Despite recognition of Korea's strategic importance to the United States, the issue failed to be included in the complicated deliberations of the Allied powers over spheres of influence. The only mention of Korea was a declaration from the Cairo Conference in November 1943, ambiguously declaring that "in due course Korea shall become free and independent"[17] Over the next two years, as landmark conferences like Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam passed, Korea remained absent from discussion by the allied powers.

In August 1945 American interest in Korea was piqued again, but this time with a greater sense of urgency. At the Yalta Conference in February 1945, Franklin Roosevelt sought Soviet assistance in the war against Japan, specifically in fighting Japan's not insignificant armies in Manchuria and Korea. Roosevelt and other American policy makers hoped that the Red Army could absorb the losses that would be incurred from such an attack, allowing the United States to focus solely on the invasion of the Japanese homeland. The rapid disintegration of the Japanese army in Manchuria, however, alarmed Washington. Japan's rapid collapse had been unanticipated, and the possibility that the Soviet Union might occupy the entire peninsula became a distinct possibility.

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[16] Hastings, *The Korean War*, 26.

[17] US Congress, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Background Information on Korea: Report 81st Congress, Second Session* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1950), 1.

The rapidly changing situation on the ground in Korea brought together two men in the late night hours of August 10th, 1945. Given a half hour by the eagerly waiting State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, and with a small map of East Asia, Major Dean Rusk and Colonel Charles Bonesteel unwittingly set Korea on a turbulent course. Noticing that the 38th Parallel cut the country almost evenly in half, and that the nation's Capital and the majority of its agriculture was south of the parallel, Rusk and Bonesteel drafted the zones of occupation and handed them over to SWNCC.[18] The proposal was sent to the Soviets, and in mid-August 1945, much to the United States' relief, the Red Army halted at the 38th Parallel.

[18] J. Lawton Collins, *War in Peacetime: The History and Lessons of Korea* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1969), 25-6.

The Occupation Begins

The American occupation of Korea, much like the division of the country, was a haphazard affair. In late August 1945 the order to prepare to embark for Korea was transmitted to the veteran XXIV Corps which had fought in the grueling Okinawa campaign.[19] Although the plans for the invasion and occupation of the Japanese mainland had been underway for months, XXIV Corps was given two weeks to plan the landing of three infantry divisions and their supporting units in a country about which most of the planners knew nothing. In an impressive tactical accomplishment in two weeks time and only scraps of intelligence, XXIV Corps scrounged up enough naval transport and supplies to land the first American troops on Korea on September 8th, 1945.

If the military aspects of "Operation Blacklist Forty" went smoothly, the American planners were wholly unsuccessful in their efforts at civil affairs. XXIV Corps was first and foremost a combat unit. Its commander, Lt. General John Reed Hodge, was an adept combat commander, but a poor choice for governing Korea. He had no experience with economics or politics (a core element of any civil affairs endeavor), and viewed the Korean people with disdain, referring to them as "the same breed of cat as the Japanese."[20] His command was similarly unqualified: there were no civil affairs specialists attached to XXIV Corps. To compensate, a battalion of anti-aircraft gunners was transformed into the Military Government Headquarters, and on them rested the burden of planning the occupation of southern Korea.[21]

The anti-aircraft gunners of the newly minted Korean military government were quickly overwhelmed by their task. None of them spoke Korean, nor were they successful in acquiring

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[19] General Headquarter XXIV Corps, "Staff Study: Baker-Forty" (August, 1945), 1.
[20] Clay Blair, *The Forgotten War: Americans In Korea* (New York: Times Books, 1987), 38.
[21] Donald W. Boose Jr, "Portentous Sideshow: The Korean Occupation Decision" *Parameters*, Vol 25, No. 4, Winter 1999, 125.

any Korean linguists. They instead depended on a handful of Korean POWs captured fighting on Okinawa with the Imperial Japanese Army to gather the most rudimentary knowledge of the language.[22] From the Korean POWs they also tried to learn about Korea's people, terrain, and culture.

The orders available to the occupying force were not of much help either. The Cairo declaration was the only explicit American reference to Korea at this time. It did not however make any provisions for the Korean people except for the ambiguous declaration of their freedom. The plans for "Blacklist Forty," with their detailed scenarios dealing with the Japanese Army, were similarly of little help to the de facto civil affairs unit for Korea.[23] Armed with these resources, the word from a handful of Korean POWs, and a collection of aerial photographs, XXIV Corps departed Okinawa for the sea port of Inchon in early September 1945.

The first American soldiers to land in Korea were unprepared for just how daunting the task of administering Korea was to be. Although Korea had been mostly spared the physical devastation wrought on so many liberated nations during World War II, the decades long Japanese occupation and abrupt end to hostilities had shattered the Korean economy. Before the arrival of the Soviet and American armies, the Japanese had stripped Korea's industry of machinery and printed millions of counterfeit bills which they injected into the money supply.[24] The loss of industrial machinery, and the difficulty replacing it, made the production of critical goods almost impossible. The ignominious end of Japan's lengthy occupation of Korea ensured that even post-war Korea would be racked with herculean economic troubles

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[22] Duncan Sinclair, "The Occupation of Korea – Initial Phases" *Military Review,* Vol. XXVII, No. 4, July 1947, 34.
[23] General Headquarters US Army Forces Pacific, "Basic Outline Plan For 'Blacklist' Operations to Occupy Japan Proper and Korea, Edition 3" (August 1945) 13.
[24] Duncan Sinclair, "The Occupation of Korea – Operations and Accomplishments" *Military Review,* Vol. XXVII, No. 5, August 1947, 56.

In her memoir, Louise Yim, a Korean patriot and representative of Syngman Rhee's government, recalled approaching the American military government in Seoul with a list of her neighborhood's needs. When she met with an aide and made her inquiries, his response characterized the attitude of the American occupation force:

> You can't blame us. Nobody can blame us for this mess. When we received orders to come to Korea, we were trained for fighting on Okinawa. I think there is only one man with this whole army of occupation who can act as a Korean interpreter. What can you expect? I just discovered today you've got almost thirty million people. I didn't know this country was half that big. Thirty million people and they expect an untrained army of combat soldiers to become civilian administrators! This is bunk! Somebody in Washington made a serious error. They were never even prepared to enter Korea.[25]

Within the first year of the occupation many South Koreans realized the United States was clueless about its role in Korea. Resentment of the American occupation grew in a population that had languished under Japanese rule and believed that the Cairo Declaration had been a promise of immediate freedom.

The actions of the American military government did not mollify the negative opinion of many Koreans. In his first formal declaration to Korea General Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Allied Commander in the Pacific, acknowledged the liberated status of the Koreans, couched with his demands for their "active aid and compliance".[26] Though fairly heavy handed in announcing the conditions of the occupation, MacArthur was still certain to remind the Koreans of the ambiguous language of the Cairo Declaration, assuring their independence in "due time." Where MacArthur tread softly however, John Hodge demonstrated an iron fist. Upon his arrival in Korea, he was greeted by a small deputation from the provisional People's Republic of Korea (KPR), a leftist government established in August, 1945 by Yeo Un-Hyeong. Hodge dissolved their government on the spot, declaring, "...there is only one government in

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[25] Louise Yim, *My Forty Year Fight For Korea* (New York: Wynn Inc., 1951), 242.
[26] General Headquarters, United States Army Forces Pacific, "Proclamation No. 1, To The People of Korea, September 7, 1945," in House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Background Information*, 3.

South Korea – the United States Army Military Government."[27] For a people eagerly anticipating their independence, it was a sobering blow.

Hodge's other policies were self-defeating, and further angered the Korean people. Upon the discovery that a black market was developing in Korea for American goods, Hodge resolved to rectify the situation. His solution, as described by Louise Yim, reflected Hodge's heavy handed approach to governing Korea when he mandated that American soldiers could "no longer be entertained in Korean homes."[28] This step furthered the impression that the United States was an army of occupation. The average soldier was all but prohibited from daily dealings with Korean citizens, further eroding the morale of the occupying army. For the Koreans, in some cases dependent on the American black market because of rampant inflation, the move was overly draconian. Though the ban was later lifted, the damage had been done.

Hodge's other policies pale in comparison to his most controversial blunder: the retaining of Japanese administrators and Korean collaborators in government. Believing Koreans unqualified to govern themselves, Hodge found the Japanese more pliable. He decided early in the occupation to retain them in administrative jobs.[29] For the Koreans, Hodge's preference for their former Japanese masters came as a shock.

It was painful, recalled Yim, to see that "…the same police who served the Japanese, who tortured Korean patriots, were retained in the Police Department, which operated under the supervision of the American Military Government."[30] The Koreans were not the only ones who resented Hodge's decision. In spite of Hodge's protests that disbanding the Japanese

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[27] Harry G. Huppert, Maj., USA, "Korean Occupational Problems," *Military Review*, Vol. XXIX, No. 9, December 1949, 11.
[28] Yim, *My Forty Year Fight*, 251.
[29] Bruce Cumings, *Origins of the Korean War: Vol. 1, Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 138-9.
[30] Yim, *My Forty Year Fight*, 241.

administrators would plunge Korea into chaos, President Harry Truman intervened and by the end of September, 1945 the Japanese were finally removed from their posts.[31] This episode, regardless of its brevity, greatly damaged the reputation of the American military government in Korea. Considering that Hodge could have drawn upon the members of the defunct KPR, Kim Koo's government in exile in China, or the Koreans returning from the United States for these jobs further reflects his disdain for the Korean people. It demonstrated a tragic tendency on the part of the American military government to oversimplify complicated problems, as well as their inexperience and ignorance of Korean affairs.

[31] Lee Suk Bok, *The Impact of US Forces in Korea* (Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 1987), 10.

The Occupation on the Ground

Hodge and his staff directed policy, but the majority of Koreans' exposure to the American occupation came in the form of daily contact with American soldiers. American soldiers had an opportunity to interact with Koreans, both in sanctioned and in illicit dealing of American goods on the black market. The opportunity to build a solid rapport between Americans and Koreans however was dashed aside by many Americans' disdain for their assignment and their dislike of Koreans. One American soldier's comment that "the whole place stank," in reference to the Korean practice of using human fertilizer on their fields perhaps best captures the mood..[32]

Service with the American occupation force in South Korea was among the most widely disliked assignments in the entire United States army. Although Barbara Richardson, the daughter of an army major attached to the occupation force, described her time in Korea as a "fantastic vacation to the Orient," replete with colorful Asian markets and "sunning time" in an issue of *Army Information Digest,*[33] most Americans in Korea felt differently. Mitchell Clyde, the former president of the New Korea Company better captured the mood of Americans in Korea when he wrote in 1951 that:

> General Hodge's Army Command, 'on the end of MacArthur's line,' continually found it impossible to provide decent living and working conditions for American civilians and officer personnel…American officers working in relative comfort in Japan and other occupation zones considered the Korean assignment 'a Siberian exile.' They were not far from wrong.[34]

Japan was paradise compared with Korea.. An American soldier serving in post-war Japan could afford his own house as well as the best in both alcohol and mistresses with his

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[32] Joseph Goulden, *Korea: The Untold Story of the War* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982), 33.
[33] Barbara Richardson, "Life in Korea" *Army Information Digest,* Vol. III, No. 5, May 1948, 10.
[34] Mitchell Clyde, *Korea: Second Failure in Asia* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Institute, 1951), 20.

meager salary.[35] An American soldier in Korea was hard pressed to find anything at all to buy in the economically depressed Korea. Young men looking for companionship were discouraged by a Korean taboo against fraternization, which served to strengthen Hodge's standing orders.[36] No wonder Americans tried to avoid serving in Korea; these factors built an unfavorable image of service in Korea. Some Americans enjoyed their service in Korea, and in some cases even sought extensions to their tour of duty, but the majority could hardly wait to leave.

The American military government had a particularly challenging time obtaining officers and civilian experts. Poor housing and the need to leave families at home made it exceedingly difficult to obtain required personnel.[37] There were never enough qualified personnel to fill important positions in the military government. Korea's reputation as a "dumping ground" brought in several misfits whom the army had no other place for. Although the crippled nation required a creative and experienced military government to alleviate its herculean problems, it received none.

The poor quality of occupation troops in Korea did not bode well for the creation of a rapport between occupiers and occupied. The Far East Command's report on the morale of the American soldiers in Korea captured the essence of the problem, explaining that the young soldiers coming into Korea, barely through training and lacking in confidence, were having a difficult time adjusting to life in Korea.[38] Though the report ascribes the majority of this problem to the youth and inexperience of the soldiers, the culture shock of nineteen and twenty year old soldiers just arriving in Korea, a country most could barely locate on a map, would have played a large role in this as well. The negative reaction of many of the young soldiers to their

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[35] David Halberstam, *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War* (New York: Hyperion, 2007), 142.
[36] Robert T. Oliver, *The Truth About Korea* (London: Putnam, 1951), 59.
[37] Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, Far East Command, *US Troop Conditions in Korea, Pt. II, Report of Investigation,* (Tokyo, 1947), 12.
[38] Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, *US Troop Conditions in Korea*, 2-3.

new surrounding did not help endear them to the Korean people either. Coming face to face with a different culture, many American soldiers displayed an attitude of superiority to the Koreans, much to their chagrin and resentment.[39]

A sense of superiority to the Koreans ran all the way up the chain of command. As Major Harry G. Huppert described the Koreans in a report on the difficulties facing the occupation:

> The vast majority are not personally interested in politics. They will quickly and blindly follow any strong type of leadership. Approximately 65% of the people are illiterate; less than 10 percent have been exposed to any education on the high school level. Only about one-half of 1 percent have received any college education whatsoever. The Korean people are interested in the outside world only as it effects them personally The American occupation has opened a new window of light to them, but only a few have the intelligence and determination to receive it. The rest are satisfied as they are. A few well-educated individuals are striving to lead the country out of ignorance. Unfortunately, most of these individuals are attempting to gain what amounts to dictatorial powers.[40]

Huppert's categorization of Koreans as either backwards or well-educated tyrants reflected the thinking among many officers. Hodge's decision to retain the Japanese administrators and disband the KPR reflects the same line of thought: the Koreans, he believed, were "inadequately prepared" to govern themselves and those who claimed to be were selfishly motivated. This sense of superiority caused the military government to take steps that were detrimental not only to their mission as occupiers, but to the attempted redevelopment of South Korea.[41]

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[39] Frederick T. Voorhees, Col., USA, *Military Government in Korea: USA & USSR* (Carlisle: Army War College Student Paper, 1951), 7.
[40] Huppert, "Korean Occupational Problems," 10.
[41] Carlton L. Wood, *Civil Affairs Relations in Korea* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Operations Research Office, 1954), 20.

The Creation of the ROK Government

The American military government in Korea was intended to function as a temporary entity. Its foray into Korean politics, however, exacerbated the effect it would have on Korea's development after it departed. From the moment Hodge disbanded the KPR and declared the primacy of American military government, the American forces in Korea became enmeshed in a chaotic political episode. A young H. K. Shin, whose family was swept up in the political turmoil created after Korea's occupation by the United States, remembered the explosion of political organizations created in the power vacuum, and the unrest it created:

> Koreans had long been proud of their distinctive racial features, which created a strong bond among them. Over the brief period since August 1945, however, the confrontation of right- and left-wing politics led sons to turn against fathers, old friends against each other, bourgeoisie against proletariat, and, perilously, south against north. A people once so proud of their intact, homogeneous society quickly turned against each other. Even in a small country town like Koch'ang such right- and left-wing confrontations were rampant, and locals suffered greatly from the party politics conducted on a grander scale.[42]

Caught in the middle of the political infighting was the American military government.

While Koreans fractured over their country's uncertain political future, it was no great secret that the conservatives held the military government's ear. Hodge was a conservative, who held firm anti-communist sentiment. His decision to disband the KPR, a nominally leftist and nationalist organization, reflected Hodge's willingness to conflate leftists with communists.[43] Hodge's determination to combat communism was not out of step with American policies in other occupied countries. The problem, however, was Hodge's willingness to court conservatives and shun leftists in Korea. In February 1946 Hodge organized a council of Korean

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[42] H.K. Shin, *Remembering Korea 1950: A Boy Soldier's Story* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2001), 9.
[43] Bonnie B.C. Oh, *Korea Under the American Military Government, 1945-1948* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 3.

political leaders to advise the military government.[44] Though intended to feature Koreans from both the right and left, the council overwhelmingly represented the interests of Korea's leading conservatives. Mitchell Clyde, a civilian advisor to the military government, noted that this became problematic:

> The American military government continually tried to force the South Koreans more and more into a state of political maturity. In February 1946, it set up a Representative Democratic Council to advise the Commanding General. Rhee Syngman, who had returned from long years of exile in Hawaii and Washington, was made chairman. For this body the military government chose mainly "rightists." To the Koreans that term meant landlords plus some ex-collaborators with the Japanese, plus some men of wealth and Western training. The leading liberals boycotted the body, compared it with a Central Advisory Committee set up by the Japanese, and refused to be contaminated by association with it...[45]

By surrounding himself with conservatives, Hodge began a process of shutting Korean leftists out of South Korean politics.

While the communists and other Korean leftists protested the American occupation government's activities in Korea, the conservatives, and critically Syngman Rhee, worked hard to win the military government's favor. Syngman Rhee, at a rally in October 1945, encouraged his followers to work towards a unified and independent Korea by working with the American military government.[46] Rhee understood, as did many conservatives, that the key to controlling Korea's political future was with the American military government. This did not mean, however, that Rhee was a puppet of Hodge. When the trusteeship plan for Korea formulated at the Moscow Conference in October 1945 met opposition from the Koreans, Rhee took a strong anti-trusteeship stance and won favor among the Korean people.[47] Although this proved to be a

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[44] General Headquarters Supreme Allied Commander for the Allied Powers, "Summation of Non Military Activities in Japan and Korea No. 5 February 1946," in *KMAG: Korea Military Advisory Group* (Seoul: National Defense Press, 1999), 73.
[45] Clyde, *Second Failure in Asia*, 18.
[46] General Headquarters Supreme Allied Commander for the Allied Powers, "Summation of Non Military Activities in Japan and Korea No. 1, September-October 1945" in *KMAG: Korea Military Advisory Group*, 7.
[47] Oh, *Korea Under the Military Government*, 53.

large diplomatic headache for the United States, Rhee and the conservatives' dependability as a bulwark against communism in Korea helped to preserve their standing with the military government.[48]

Rhee and the conservatives' political ascent would not have been possible without the tacit support of the American military government. It was no secret to the military government that foul play was a component of Rhee's political maneuvering. After the 1946 elections for the Korean Interim Legislative Assembly (where Rhee's party picked up a majority of the seats), the Korean centrist Kim Kyu Sik voiced his opposition to the results of the election. Kim pointed out that while conservative politicians had been free to campaign, the police had suppressed candidate from the left through coercion and investigations.[49] Despite this knowledge no steps were taken to ameliorate the lack of leftist representation, and members of the Korean left were further isolated.

Rhee's success in Korean politics was further aided by the unwillingness of the military government to work with other Korean political leaders. Yeo Un-Hyeong, after the KPR was disbanded by Hodge, responded to allegations that his government was communist by declaring:

> What is the Red, where is it in constructing a new democratic nation nowadays after the liberation from Japan? Why should we exclude the communists? We could join together to construct a democratic nation. Everything should be decided by general popular election…I am not afraid of Communists. But I do not think that the theory of the extreme left is right. Those who think that the "People's Republic" is Red, are like the first grade primary school students. If we are divided, we can not build our nation. But if we unite, we can. The Korean Democratic Party, Kukmindang, the Committee for the Preparation of Korean Independence, all of us should devote our energies to the construction of an independent nation-state. This can be done by the People.[50]

In light of these statements, Yeo's efforts are less in favor of a communist regime in Korea, but rather a real striving towards overcoming factionalism for the creation of an independent

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[48] Ibid, 15.
[49] Commander in Chief United States Army Forces Pacific, "Summation No. 14, United States Army Military Government Activities in Korea for the Month of November 1946," in *KMAG: Korea Military Advisory Group*, 175.
[50] Oh, *Korea Under the Military Government*, 91.

country. Yeo and other moderate members of the left, however, could expect no support from the American military government. Hodge and the military government, determined to contain communist influence in Korea, were unwilling to grant a major role to the left in Korean politics, even to moderate leftists like Yeo.[51]

The American military government also withheld support from members of the Korean right who sought to overcome factionalism and make overtures to leftists. Kim Koo, the elderly statesmen who had led the Korean government in exile during the Japanese occupation, repeatedly sought to bridge the gap between left and right. As early as 1946, Kim worked to build a unified party apparatus, only to be rebuked by both the communists and conservatives.[52] As with Yeo Un-Hyeong, the military government did not support Kim's attempts, despite his partnership with Syngman Rhee in the conservative camp. An American intelligence report from the eve of the first elections in the ROK lambasted Kim for his vacillation towards the left, asserting, "He never has had the necessary qualities for a national leader."[53] His prestige damaged with other Korean conservatives and alienated by the military government, Kim's political clout waned while Rhee's grew.

In July 1948 Syngman Rhee won the presidency of the foundling Republic of Korea (ROK) in a landslide. Kim Koo and others had warned the UN Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK) that the political environment in the south, dominated by Rhee's police and youth organizations, was not free and would lead to Rhee consolidating power in a one party state.[54] Despite the warnings, UNTCOK and the military government still allowed the elections

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[51] Ibid, 53.
[52] General Headquarters Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, "Summation of Non-Military Activities in Japan and Korea No. 4, January 1946," in *KMAG: Korea Military Advisory Group,* 60.
[53] US Dept of Army General Staff G-2, "South Korea's Election and the Occupation," *Intelligence Review*, No. 118, 27 May 1948, 62.
[54] Clyde, *Second Failure in Asia,* 24.

to proceed, the final step in allowing Rhee to secure his power. The military government, looking for an expedient way out of Korea, decided that a pro-American South Korea was preferable to a united country favorable to the Soviets.[55] In the wake of the military government, the United States sought to leave in Korea a government which would serve as a bulwark against communism. Rhee's election was therefore a boon for the military government, since his staunch anti-communism fulfilled this objective.

For the Korean people, Syngman Rhee's election was a final, cruel part of the US military government's tenure in Korea. Rhee set about consolidating his power, and it was not long before most of his opponents (including Kim Koo and Yeo Un-Hyeong) were either imprisoned or assassinated. The failure of the military government was not lost on the American army. Colonel Frederick T. Voorhees, writing about the experience of the military government, concluded:

> It is apparent that from a practical standpoint the military government and occupation of South Korea by the United States was a failure. The objectives of the United States were not attained and Koreas did not receive the freedom and independence which they had been promised in a usable form. In fact, they lost much of what they had previously.[56]

Many Koreans shared Voorhees' pessimistic conclusion about the military government. . H.K Shin's biography recalled that for many of those Koreans not in Syngman Rhee's government or police, his election meant oppression:

> President Rhee soon created a ruthless dictatorship in South Korea. Many found it difficult to understand how such a well-educated man, with extensive exposure to Western democratic systems, could impose such an unpopular dictatorial regime in his long-sought motherland…under his rule totalitarian tactics were commonplace, including police brutality and the use of government youth organizations to terrorize non-Communist opposition groups and parties.[57]

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[55] Oh, *Korea Under the Military Government*, 34.
[56] Voorhees, "Military Government in Korea," 27.
[57] Shin, *Remembering Korea*, 10.

Part III: The Advisory Effort

The Creation of the South Korean Constabulary

The US Army had discussed the creation of indigenous security forces for South Korea since the early days of the occupation in 1945. The SWNCC understood that it would be important to supplement the American occupation force with Korean security personnel, and directed MacArthur and Hodge to begin organizing the Korean National Police (KNP). Taking precedent from the creation of a Civil Police by the American occupation force in Italy, the SWNCC mandated the creation of a 25,000 man strong police force to be equipped with leased American small arms by January 1946.[58] The American military government hoped that the KNP would quickly take over the civil policing of Korea, freeing American troops for other duties. This measure was also intended to make it easier for the military government to hand over responsibility for Korean affairs to the Koreans.

The creation of a Korean defense force was deferred in 1945 by the American military authorities however. In light of the recent Moscow Conference and the decision to administer Korea through a trusteeship, the Americans did not seek to provoke the Soviets. Since Korea was divided between American and Soviet spheres of influence, the SWNCC and the American military government believed that unilaterally creating a South Korean Defense Force was unwise.[59] The creation of an independent South Korean military would have been perceived as reneging on the agreements made in Moscow in December 1945.

For a time the KNP proved adequate for the maintenance of order in South Korea. But as Korean resentment against both the trusteeship proposal from the Moscow Conference and the Military Government's policies grew, they were hard pressed to maintain order. Their reputation for brutality did not help. By the end of 1946 unrest had reached such levels that the police were

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[58] State-War-Navy Coordinating Subcommittee for the Far East, "Police Force and National Defense Forces For Korea, 19 December 1945," in *KMAG: Korea Military Advisory Group*, 42.
[59] Ibid, 43.

being attacked and killed in their stations by mobs of disgruntled Koreans.[60] Skirmishes between police and rioters were brutal, and the mobs launched bloody reprisals against the KNP. One report from the American Sixth Infantry Division described the violence in Taegu:

> Policemen were tied up with their hands behind their backs and sharp-pointed slate rocks thrown at them until they fell to the ground from loss of blood. Then about six rioters would carry a large boulder over and drop it on the policeman's head crushing it beyond recognition. Faces and bodies of policemen were hacked by axes and knives.[61]

During the uprisings in Kyongsang during October 1946, 82 policemen and 186 rioters were killed in skirmishes.[62]

The American military government's process for the creation of the KNP was a major factor accounting for the violence that began erupting in South Korea. The American military government, hesitant to use American soldiers for the maintenance of civil order, relied too heavily on the former instruments of Japanese oppression. Armed with American equipment and vehicles, the KNP proved itself to be just as brutal as its predecessor under the Japanese. The United States did take steps to remove Japanese officers from the KNP, but they retained Koreans who had served the Japanese in the KNP, and made little effort to curb their often brutal methods.[63] Those Koreans who had tortured and murdered their fellow countrymen to quell nationalist fervor against the Japanese now employed the same brutal methods to quell unrest against the American military government. As Max Hastings pointed out, "a long roll call of prominent torturers and anti-Nationalist fighters under the colonial power found themselves in positions of unprecedented authority."[64] By pulling American soldiers from Korea's streets and

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[60] General Headquarters Commander In Chief United States Army Forces Pacific, "Summation No. 14 United States Army Military Government Activities in Korea, November 1946," in *KMAG: Korea Military Advisory Group*, 167.
[61] Headquarters 6th Infantry Division Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, "G-2 Summary #1 Kyongsang Communist Uprising of October 1946," in *KMAG: Korea Military Advisory Group*, 182.
[62] Ibid, 185.
[63] General Headquarters Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, "Summation of Non-Military Actives in Japan and Korea, September-October 1945," in *KMAG: Korea Military Advisory Group*, 12.
[64] Hastings, *The Korean War*, 38.

replacing them with the KNP, the American military government inadvertently contributed to the unrest it was trying to prevent.

Though it was American policy that was causing unrest, American soldiers were not targeted by the same acts of violence as the officers of the KNP. On one hand, they were "off limits:" the leaders of the uprisings had ordered the rioters to refrain from attacking American personnel.[65] The KNP on the other hand was completely at the mercy of the mob. With the American army having disentangled itself from the hassle of maintaining civil order, the Korean police officers had become the enforcing arm of the military government. Thus the Korean people directed their anger towards the most easily recognizable instruments of their disenfranchisement.

The KNP was not the only Korean security institution the American military government had to rely on. In the wake of the KNP's poor management of a riot at Namwon in 1945, the military government decided to create a police reserve.[66] The plan for creating South Korea's new security force, called BAMBOO, was proposed by Brigadier General Arthur S. Champeny, the director of National Defense in the American military government. Recalled Champeny in 1952:

> "...the plan for an army was entirely too elaborate and would not be approved. He [Hodge] asked me to develop something more practical and smaller. I came up with a plan of a police reserve consisting of 25,000 to be trained along infantry lines...This plan was submitted and approved by XXIV Corps."[67]

Envisaged as being organized along the lines of an American infantry unit, the police reserve could provide support to the KNP in times of civil crisis. Because its responsibility was internal

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[65] HQ Sixth Infantry, "Kyongsang Uprising," In *KMAG: Korea Military Advisory Group,* 183.
[66] Allan R. Millett, "Captain James H. Hausman and the Formation of the Korean Army, 1945-1950" *Armed Forces & Society,* Vol. 23, No. 4, Summer 1997, 509.
[67] Sawyer, *KMAG in Peace and War,* 13.

security as opposed to national defense, it also provided a handy way to circumvent the challenge of attempting to construct Korean security forces without arousing Soviet condemnation.

The Constabulary began to take shape in early 1946, when the first 110 officers attended an English language school set up by the military government. Comprised almost completely of officers with experience fighting in the Japanese Army, this first group of officers formed the core of the Korean Constabulary, and later the ROK Army.[68] In early 1946, the military government began to expand the constabulary to its planned strength. Recruiting manpower for the Constabulary was not difficult. The military government incorporated many of the private armies in South Korea into the new organization, and plenty of Koreans looking for work volunteered for service.[69] Although the Korean recruits ranged from illiterate farmers who had never handled a rifle to veterans of the Japanese Army, the Korean constabulary gradually reached its 25,000 man strength over the course of the year.

The Constabulary was not however the ideal alternative to the brutal KNP. The majority of the freshly minted officers in the Constabulary had served with the Japanese Army. Like their counterparts in the KNP they brought some of their old habits with them. Discipline in the Constabulary was harsh, and the punishment for "infractions" was often arbitrary.[70] Attempting to resolve this problem was not easy. The Officer Training School which had grown out of the original English Language School was chronically understaffed and faced a huge demand for officer candidates.[71] The ability of the Americans to adequately address and influence the new officers was severely handicapped by the disparity in instructors to Constabulary officers. Habits

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[68] Millett, "Formation of the Korean Army," 511.
[69] Sawyer, *Military Advisory Group to the ROK*, 11.
[70] Gibby. "American Advisors to the Republic of Korea," 84.
[71] Huh, *The Officer Training School*, 150.

recruits picked up while serving in the ranks of the Manchukuo Army were carried into the core of the Constabulary.

Another major challenge to the Constabulary's success came from the Korean National Police. Because it had been armed with American equipment before the Constabulary, the KNP had hoped that it was the core of Korea's armed forces.[72] The KNP saw the constabulary as intruding on their turf (as well as cutting in on the opportunities for illicit profit), and began jockeying for influence against them. The two organizations, which should have complemented each other, were instead locked in a conflict with one another over who would control Korea's national security.

The creation of the first Korean "armed forces" in the American zone of occupation simultaneously drove the need for the first American advisors. The military government did not have to look beyond Korea to find the first advisors. As the components of XXIV Corps began to be deactivated in 1946, the military government began taking officers and enlisted men who were left over after their units were rotated home. On the 24th January, 1946, eighteen lieutenants were selected from the recently deactivated 40th Infantry division to begin training the Korean constabulary.[73]

Making the Koreans into a cohesive and useful force was as haphazard a process as any other American policy towards Korea had been. Exactly what the Americans' goals were plagued the military government, Koreans, and advisors for months. Although the Koreans referred to their constabulary as "The National Defense Army," a trend that would continue until

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[72] Millett, "Formation of the Korean Army," 514.
[73] Sawyer, *Military Advisory Group to the ROK*, 20.

it formally became the ROK Army in 1949, the Americans were forbidden to even refer to the constabulary as an army.[74]

The experience of the first American advisors to the Korean constabulary reflected their inexperience and the American military government's inattention. Devoid of funds and supplies, the advisors were each assigned a small team consisting of one American who could speak Japanese and a handful of Korean officers from the language school, then detached to the various provinces to start assembling from scratch the constabulary's units.[75] The Americans, who previously had been junior officers responsible for platoon-size formations, found themselves attempting to establish and oversee significantly larger formations of Koreans.

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[74] Sawyer, *Military Advisory Group to the ROK*, 56.
[75] Sawyer, *KMAG in Peace and War*, 16.

The Expansion of the Constabulary

By the end of 1947 it was becoming apparent to most of the American military that things in South Korea were rapidly deteriorating. As it became more obvious that the hopes for a unified Korea were increasingly unrealistic, and that the governments in both the US and Soviet zones were growing into independent "one-party" states, the US Army began searching for a way out. In a memorandum to the Secretary of State, the SWNCC declared that the army "had little strategic interest in maintaining the present troops and bases in Korea" and that the two divisions remaining "could well be used elsewhere."[76] For an army slowly being strained by American demilitarization in the post-war period, the termination of the US commitment to Korea appeared a logical choice.

The United States, however, could not simply abandon Korea. In the same memorandum that advocated the withdrawal of American combat forces, the SWNCC cautioned against the disorder that might arise from the sudden departure of American forces, stating that "a precipitate withdrawal of our forces under such circumstances would lower the military prestige of the United States."[77] The question of creating an indigenous army for the South Koreans now assumed paramount importance. Hodge believed that the constabulary could be expanded, trained, and equipped into a proper fighting force numbering 100,000 within a year.[78] For Hodge, this would free his XXIV Corps from service in Korea, but leave the South Koreans with a bulwark against Communism.

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[76] State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, "Memorandum by the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on US Policy in Korea" in *KMAG: Korea Military Advisory Group,* 223.
[77] Ibid, 224.
[78] Commander in Chief Far East, "Message From Commander in Chief Far East, 22 October, 1947" in *Korea Military Advisory Group*, 226.

The decision to begin gradually expanding the constabulary was approved, and the project went into effect at the end of 1947. Equipping the expanding force with American small arms was not challenging, since the American formations departing Korea in 1947 could leave their weapons behind for use by the constabulary. The Operations and Logistics offices of the occupation force drew up plans for the transfer of available American weaponry to the constabulary, as well as instructors to train Korean ordnance officers.[79] The plan benefitted both parties: the constabulary was weaned off of the captured Japanese weapons it had been relying on and the US Army was spared the cost of shipping its weapons back to the United States.

The plan quickly came under fire from high-ranking members of the XXIV Corps. Major General Albert Brown, the deputy commander of XXIV Corps, labeled the plan impractical. Citing existing political contention with the Soviets and the difficulty of maintaining a steady supply line to the constabulary, Brown opposed arming the Korean Constabulary with American weapons."[80] As XXIV Corps deputy commander, Brown knew how hard it was for the Americans to acquire equipment from the end of MacArthur's long supply line in the Pacific. Maintaining a steady stream of ammunition and replacement parts to the constabulary would be equally challenging. Brown also feared introducing American firearms into the political strife and internecine conflict between the KNP and constabulary, pointing out that "rival political factions will make every possible effort to persuade the superior weapons…to join their forces."[81] Instead of alleviating Korea's security problems, Brown believed this would exacerbate the military government's troubles.

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[79] "Comments of G-3, G-4, and Ordnances Officer, USAFIK, 10 November 1947," in *KMAG: Korea Military Advisory Group*, 235.
[80] Albert Brown, Maj. General, USA, "Comments of Deputy Commander XXIV Corps, 10 November 1947" in *KMAG: Korea Military Advisory Group*, 241.
[81] Ibid, 238.

The occupation's top civilian advisor was also opposed to equipping the constabulary with American arms. Joseph E. Jacobs, the chief political advisor to XXIV Corps, was mindful of the United Nations' ongoing consideration of a resolution for the Korean problem in 1947. Jacobs believed that equipping the constabulary with American arms would "give the Soviets a good line of propaganda against us by alleging that the US was not sincere in taking the Korea problem to the UN."[82] The political fallout from building anything resembling an army in South Korea would no doubt have eroded the American position at the U.N. bargaining table. Considering however that the Soviets were training Koreans in Moscow, it is quite unlikely that they would have been eager to expose American efforts lest their own efforts came to light.[83] Regardless, political uncertainty still dominated the question of not only building a Korean army, but arming the constabulary with American weapons.

Ultimately the decision to arm the Koreans rested with Douglas MacArthur. The United Nations' decision to adopt the American proposal of overseeing independent elections in North and South Korea led to an outburst of political activity, and a sharp increase in violence between right and left wing organizations.[84] This outburst, combined with the growing impetus for Korean independence demanded a quick decision from American policy makers. In February 1948 MacArthur cast the die, deciding to expand the constabulary to 50,000 men and equip it with American infantry weapons (excluding artillery).[85] The Joint Chiefs endorsed MacArthur's decision and it and received the support of the US Military Government in Korea. In April 1948 the military government began augmenting the force's manpower. General Hodge however had

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[82] Joseph E. Jacobs, "Comments of Political Advisor, 12 November 1947," in *KMAG: Korea Military Advisory Group*, 243.
[83] Sawyer, *Military Advisory Group to the ROK*, 177.
[84] Shin, *Remembering Korea*, 9.
[85] Chief of Staff, U.S. Army, "Memorandum to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on Augmentation and Equipping of South Korean Constabulary, 10 March 1948," in *KMAG: Korea Military Advisory Group*, 257.

warned even in October 1947 "that it may now be too late to hope for an efficient large force in time to meet needs."[86] The military government was beginning this process in April 1948, half a year later.

[86] "Message From Commander In Chief Far East, 22 October 1947" In *KMAG: Korea Military Advisory Group,* 226.

The American Advisory Effort

The expansion of the constabulary required the expansion of the American advisory effort to South Korea. The advisors assigned to the constabulary in the spring of 1948 were barely enough to advise its original strength of 25,000; now that the force had doubled they were wholly inadequate for the training mission they had been assigned. Brigadier General William L. Roberts, the new head of the military government's Internal Security Department, created a board of officers to screen and "shanghai" candidates in the Far East Command for assignment to Korea. "Korea was considered a very undesirable assignment," recalled one member of the board, "those [officers] on duty in Korea wanted to get out."[87] The shortage of qualified and willing volunteers for advisory work was a major setback to the attempts of the military advisors.

The advisors operating in Korea represented an odd mix of personalities and abilites, ranging from experienced men to greenhorns. Some, like Captain James H. Hausman, were experienced veterans of World War II who worked hard to forge their Korean counterparts into competent soldiers.[88] Other advisors were inexperienced and lacked motivation for their assignment, one going so far as to beat up his students as his chief means of "imposing advice."[89] The advisors picked up in the levy by Brigadier Roberts' board represented a peculiar cross-section of the officers and enlisted men of the Far East Command. Korea's reputation as a godforsaken place made it particularly hard to obtain replacements for dysfunctional advisors.

Being stuck in Korea was bad enough for many disgruntled advisors; for many others working with their Korean counterparts was equally frustrating. When asked by the Operations

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[87] Sawyer, *Military Advisory Group to the ROK,* 64.

[88] Hausman played an important role in then Lt. Paik Sun Yup becoming the Constabulary's Director of Intelligence after the Cheju-Do uprising. Paik would later become the ROK Army Chief of Staff, and perhaps the most competent ROK Army commander during the war. Millett, "Formation of the Korean Army," 507.

[89] Sawyer, *Military Advisory Group to the ROK,* 103.

Research Office at Johns Hopkins University how long the optimum length of assignment with Koreans should be, KMAG members answered:

Optimum Length of KMAG Assignment[90]

Time Assigned to Korean units	% of Respondents
About 3 Months	2%
About 6 Months	35%
About 9 Months	24%
About 1 Year	28%
Longer than 1 Year	5%
No Answer	6%

The KMAG advisors were unwilling to work for long periods of time with the ROK Army. Remarked one advisor in his questionnaire:

> The KMAG job shouldn't last longer than six months. It's a strain...you get sick of the sound of the language, and have to be on your toes all the time to understand it. You get very lonely with no one to talk to but your interpreter. Six months is the maximum time; after that it gets you and you begin to not give a damn.[91]

Frustrated by the language and cultural differences with their Korean counterparts, advisors quickly grew weary of their mission. Much like William M. Dye's two compatriots in 1889, a large number of advisors worked harder on orders to get out of Korea than on actually training

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[90] Alfred H. Hausrath, *The KMAG Advisor: Role and Problems of the Military Advisor in Developing an Indigenous Army for Combat Operations In Korea* (Chevy Chase: Operations Research Office, Johns Hopkins University, 1957), 101.

[91] Ibid, 101.

the Koreans.[92] Those who suffered the most from these advisors' lack of enthusiasm were the Korean soldiers for whom they were responsible.

The language barrier between Korean soldiers and their American advisors would plague the attempt to forge an effective fighting force. Of the 500 soldiers attached to the advisory mission, none spoke fluent Korean, and only a handful made any attempt to learn even a smattering of Korean.[93] The advisors instead relied on interpreters, which were available in sufficient numbers by 1949.[94] The leadership of KMAG made little attempt to encourage the advisors to learn Korean. The advisor's handbook encouraged learning basic phrases, but emphasized finding good interpreters and counterparts who spoke English.[95] The advisors' dependence on their interpreters and search for English-speaking Korean counterparts was sometimes taken to extremes. In one ROK division promotion was largely based on an ability to speak English.[96]

Relying on interpreters was not a surefire way of surmounting the language barrier. In another survey circulated after the war to KMAG members, advisors were asked to rate their interpreters. Though the interpreters were generally perceived as reliable, they often were unsuccessful in facilitating communication between an advisor and their counterpart. In another poll circulated to KMAG members, advisors revealed that half of their interpreters withheld information from them, whether out of fear of the ROK officers or a failure to understand certain

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[92] Millett, "Formation of the Korean Army," 530.
[93] Sawyer, *KMAG in Peace and War,* 62.
[94] Comically, 26% of advisors in one poll revealed that they would rely on "pictures, writing, or other gestures" in communication with their counterpart, while 0% indicated that they made use of Korean in communication with their counterpart. Hausrath, *The KMAG Advisor,* 67.
[95] United States Military Advisory Group to the Republic of Korea, *Advisor's Handbook* (San Francisco: October 1949) 2.
[96] Headquarters Eighth US Army in Korea, "Special Problems in the Korean Conflict," (n.d), 21.

terms.[97] The occasional unreliability of the Korean interpreters, the main mode of communication between advisor and the ROK officer, made things even more difficult.

A critical aspect of the language problem was the dearth of modern military phrases in Korean. Since the development of the Korean language had been extremely limited during Japanese rule, certain phrases like *machinegun* and *squad* did not exist in the Korean vocabulary.[98] This missing link often made communication even more difficult than it was in the first place. Further complicating the issue was Syngman Rhee. Although the Japanese language (known to a great number of Koreans as a consequence of the occupation) did have these phrases, Rhee had strictly forbidden the use of Japanese in any of the ROK Army's publications, directives, or schools.[99] Given Rhee's antipathy towards the Japanese and the hope of establishing a *Korean* identity in the army, this ban is understandable. Rhee's meddling, however, made the passing on of advice more complicated than it had to be. In an effort to alleviate the communication problem, KMAG's G-3 section compiled a list of several hundred military phrases for translation. An elderly Korean named "Mr. Oh " worked to create a military dictionary starting in 1949, but the project was far from finished when hostilities broke out in June 1950.[100]

The advisors were also handicapped by the sheer size of the assignment, and the ad hoc nature of their training regimen. Lieutenant Robert G. Shackleton was one of the officers affected by the MAG's levy of officers from the 7th Infantry Division. Although Shackleton (a West Point graduate from 1946) was not opposed to serving as an advisor, he was shocked when

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[97] Hausrath, *The KMAG Advisor,* 121-6
[98] Sawyer, *KMAG in Peace and War,* 63.
[99] EUSAK, "Special Problems," 23.
[100] Tragically, Mr. Oh and his dictionary were both lost during the first week of the Korean War. Sawyer, *Military Advisory Group to the ROK,* 110.

as a small unit leader with only a year of experience he was made senior advisor to the constabulary's 1st Reconnaissance Troop: a cavalry formation composed of horses and armored cars.[101] Shackleton's precipitous rise from a platoon leader reflected the shortage of American advisors. If the gulf between the demands of commanding a platoon and commanding a battalion was enormous; those between an infantry and a cavalry/reconnaissance formation were even more so. Yet the shortage of American manpower in Korea demanded such drastic measures. The ROK 7th Infantry Division, the best equipped and led formation in the ROK Army, had only 15 advisors (barely half the contingent idealized by Roberts and KMAG) to train nearly 12,000 Korean soldiers.[102]

There was however one large pool of manpower and knowledge on which the American advisors could rely, and that was the XXIV Corps forces still in Korea. Although by 1948 many of XXIV Corps' units and veterans had left Korea, a number of well trained and specialized American soldiers from different components of the US Army remained. Shackleton and several other advisors made use of their expertise. Shackleton learned the basics of reconnaissance work from a nearby American reconnaissance unit, and arranged for them to provide tactical demonstrations for the 1st Reconnaissance Troop.[103] The American advisors benefitted from the presence of XXIV Corps' specialists, as did the soldiers of the constabulary and the ROK Army. In a letter to the commander of the 20th Infantry Regiment of the American 6th Division, the commander of the Korean 4th Constabulary Regiment praised the demonstrations provided by some of Brown's units as providing his regiment with "good results" in their own training.[104]

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[101] Gibby, "American Advisors to the ROK," 94.
[102] Thomas A. Hall, "KMAG & The ROK 7th Division" *Infantry*, Vol. 79, No. 6, Nov/Dec 1989, 19.
[103] Gibby, "American Advisors to the ROK," 96.
[104] Lee Han Lim, Lt. Col, 4th Regiment, Korean Constabulary to Rothwell H. Brown, Col., 20th Infantry Regiment, USA, 26th February, 1948 in Rothwell H. Brown Papers, Special Collections, US Army Heritage and Education Center.

These units were not, however, available in sufficient numbers to aid all the Korean units. In July 1949 this asset was lost to KMAG when the last US combat unit was withdrawn from Korea.

The Korean Soldiery

With the withdrawal of the US combat units in the summer of 1949, the responsibility for South Korea's defense fell to the ROK Army. Deprived of heavy weapons and equipped as light infantry, these enlisted men and officers were now responsible for maintaining stability within South Korea and deterring an attack from North Korea. Their rise from a police reserve in 1946 to South Korea's national defense force in 1949 was as precipitous and rapid as the rise of their advisors. And like their advisors, the ROK soldiery was crippled by the consequences of prior policy and the speed with which they were forced to become an army.

The ROK Army in 1949 had little to recommend it as a competent fighting force. Although no two military units can be expected to perform exactly the same, the discrepancies in capability between ROK units were staggering. While some ROK units rated high in marksmanship and weapon qualifications, other units had barely any personnel who had qualified with the M-1 rifle (the standard-issue weapon for the ROK Army).[105] Interestingly, one area where the ROK Army did excel was on the parade ground. After an inspection of ROK units in the field one advisor commented that despite generally poor marksmanship and even malnutrition in some units, "close order drill, military courtesy and bearing were excellent."[106] This did not, however, ameliorate their capabilities as combat units.

KMAG employed some creativity in attempting to forge the disparate units of the ROK Army into a capable fighting force. Utilizing a revised version of the US Army's Mobilization Training Plan (MTP) 7-1, KMAG created a six month time table for the training of ROK soldiers

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[105] Sawyer, *KMAG In Peace and War* 69.

[106] Headquarters Korean Military Advisory Group, "Report of Inspection, Reserve Units, Kangwando Province, 31 May 1949," in *KMAG: Korea Military Advisory Group*, 348.

beginning at the individual level and working up to the regimental level by December 1949.[107] Adjusted to fit the logistic realities of the ROK Army, KMAG's revised training had potential. It was unsuccessful, however, in execution. There were not enough advisors to adequately advise Korean soldiers at the individual and squad levels, and consequentially many units began lagging behind KMAG's schedule. In several units, advisors sought to get units back on schedule by reducing the scores needed to qualify with weaponry.[108] Although KMAG's plan called for the quick development of the ROK Army's smaller units, the ROK Army had made little progress by September 1949.

The insurgency which erupted in Korea in the summer of 1949 was another major obstacle to the training of the ROK Army. Although guerillas had been active in South Korea since the early days of the American occupation, by 1949 they had become a coordinated movement which lashed out at villages and installations with regularity.[109] A major reason for the outburst of guerilla activity was the election of Syngman Rhee. As Rhee's regime began cracking down on leftists and employing increasingly draconian tactics, many leftists were forced underground. Shut out from participation in Korean politics by Rhee and the conservatives, many of these leftists began fighting back, targeting police officers, government officials, and wealthy landowners.[110] To combat this threat, the ROK Army was often forced to put its training on hold in order to hunt down guerillas.

The ROK Army's skirmishes with the guerillas revealed the glaring defects in its soldiers and their training. In a message to the advisors in the field, Roberts emphasized the need to

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[107] Sawyer, *KMAG in Peace and War*, 70.
[108] Ibid, 72-3.
[109] Ibid, 74.
[110] Shin, *Remembering Korea 1950*, 10.

control the ammunition expenditure of the ROK Army, which as early as August 1949 was headed towards a supply crisis.[111] The ROK units engaged in guerilla operations demonstrated tendency to expend copious amounts of ammunition in engagements with little results. It was not uncommon for advisors to encounter incidents like at Kuman Ni, where a company of ROK soldiers expended all their ammunition shooting at a hill which was 1200 meters from their positions.[112] The advisors' willingness to lower the standards for training with the Korean soldiers' weapons had dire consequences for both the ROK Army's capabilities and its meager supply of spare parts and ammunition.

The ROK Army's good performance on the parade ground and poor performance as combat units was a symptom of a greater problem in the ROK Army: the corruption of its officer corps. While the constabulary, because of its small size and professionalism, attracted competent officers, its expansion into the army made it a more lucrative opportunity for Koreans looking to profit off black market military goods.[113] Syngman Rhee's election further opened the door to corruption. Rhee used service in the ROK Army to reward political loyalty, and appointed his associate Chae Pyong-Dok as the ROK Army's commander.[114] Instead of focusing on becoming capable officers, Rhee's political appointees used their positions to increase their status in the ROK pecking order. Several ROK officers requisitioned soldiers away from their training to serve as bodyguards and servants as they toured through the South Korean country-side.[115] The pomp with which these officers conducted themselves was a source of frustration for the KMAG

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[111] United States Military Advisory Group to the Republic of Korea, "To All American Advisors with Units in the Field," in *KMAG: Korea Military Advisory Group* 363.

[112] 1200 Meters is at the maximum effective range of the Browning 1919 machine gun and triple the effective range of the M-1 Garand rifle the ROK Army was equipped with. Headquarters 8th Regiment, Office of the Advisor, "Critique of the Kuman NI Incidents, 6-23 August 1949," in *KMAG: Korea Military Advisory Group* 364-6.

[113] Millett, "Formation of the Korean Army," 520.

[114] Chae's incredible girth (he stood 5'3" and weighed 300 lbs.) was a joke amongst KMAG advisors, who nicknamed him "Fat Chae." Ibid, 521.

[115] Sawyer, *KMAG in Peace and War* 66.

advisors, who were ordered in a flustered communiqué to "sneer at their parade ground tactics" in an effort to get units in the field.[116]

The corruption of ROK officers was a major thorn in the development of the ROK Army. For KMAG, already on a shoe-string budget, this was crippling. The revelations of one advisor after inspecting units in the Kangwando province, where an ROK officer regularly withheld food and pay from his men while requesting money for supplies he never purchased, were hardly distinct.[117] Many ROK officers supplemented their incomes through participating in South Korea's extensive black market. Korean civilians regularly purchased or leased ROK Army equipment which was in excess of the units' immediate needs, helping to fatten the pockets of many prospective officers.[118] Participation in the black market for military goods was not confined to lower grade officers; the upper echelons of the ROK Army actively participated in the trade. Louise Yim discovered through a group of South Korean spies that Chae Pyong-Dok had emissaries in the north brokering deals with North Korean officers for the sale of ROK Army material.[119]

For KMAG and the ROK Army, corruption and black marketeering was particularly devastating in light of the equipment shortages confronting the ROK Army. Although the South Korean economy was capable of producing the clothing and food necessary to support the ROK Army, it could only manufacture 15% of the army's demand for ammunition.[120] Nearly every bullet and spare part needed by the ROK Army had to be shipped from the United States.

Considering that the US military allocated a meager $10 million in aid for the ROK Army for the

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[116] HQKMAG, "To All American Advisors," 363.
[117] HQKMAG, "Report of Inspection," 350.
[118] EUSAK, "Special Problems," 26.
[119] Yim, *My Forty Year Fight*, 298.
[120] Sawyer, *Military Advisory Group to the ROK*, 165.

fiscal year 1950, this was small trickle of supplies at best.[121] Every piece of equipment illicitly sold by the ROK Army could take months to replace. Even as the ROK Army grew to be 100,000 strong, the US Government continued to allocate the funds and supplies for an army of 65,000, spreading existing equipment issues thin.[122]

Further complicating the ROK's equipment shortages was the unwillingness of the United States to equip it with anything larger than a handful of outdated artillery and anti-tank pieces. The ROK Army was denied access to aircraft, armored vehicles, and heavy artillery. Although Rhee and several members of the ROK military made repeated requests to Truman for access to these instruments of modern warfare, Truman and the Joint Chiefs would not relent.[123] The price of Rhee's requests would have exceeded the funds allocated for the ROK Army. The US government's refusal, however, reflected a greater unwillingness by the United States to be involved in Korean affairs more than it had to. Rhee made no secret of his desire to rule a united Korea, and many in the US government worried that if armed with heavier weaponry, Rhee would launch an invasion of the North and drag the United States into a war.[124] Having propped up the Rhee regime in 1948, the United States now cut off the military support its army needed. When Rhee took his complaints to General Roberts in 1950, Roberts ducked his demands by declaring that the ROK Army was already, "the best little army in Asia," the public line KMAG adopted about its progress with the ROK Army.[125]

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[121] When hostilities broke out in June 1950, only a few thousand dollars worth of the allocated ten million was in the ROK Army's hands. House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Background Information*, 34.
[122] Park Il-Song, *The Dragon From the Stream: The ROK Army in Transition and the Korean War 1950-1953* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 2002), 47.
[123] Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 45.
[124] Gibby, "American Advisors to the ROK," 103.
[125] Ibid, 104.

Part IV: Conclusion

The NKPA tanks advancing across South Korea in the summer of 1950 were a bitter indictment of the American attempt to train a capable ROK Army. To be sure, some of the men leading the NKPA thrust were among the most experienced soldiers in the world. One American officer recalled that "these were men who in many cases had been fighting for more than a decade and had survived wars where the other side *always* had superior firepower."[126] The majority of enlisted men, however, like their South Korean opposites had been civilian volunteers or draftees. Their transformation into soldiers was overseen by a large number of Koreans who had trained for years in the USSR, and a massive corps of Soviet advisors. Possessing a wide range of technical skills, the Soviet advisors were assigned at a ratio of 150 per division (the Americans were lucky to field 17 advisors per division) and worked to rapidly transform the NKPA into a powerful fighting force.[127] Their quick victories demonstrated the folly of the bare-bones commitment of American advisors to the ROK Army.

The experience of the first American combat units in South Korea provides another, perhaps more general incrimination of the efforts to build the ROK Army. The truck-borne American soldiers, armed with infantry small arms and a collection of light anti-tank weapons, represented in many ways the model of the light infantry division KMAG envisioned patterning the ROK Army's divisions on. Like their counterparts in the ROK Army, American soldiers watched as their anti-tank weapons failed to even penetrate the NKPA armor and broke and ran as they were outflanked and overwhelmed by North Korean infantry.[128] The message was simple: light infantry operating unsupported in Korea could not hope to compete effectively with

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[126] Halberstam, *The Coldest Winter*, 54.
[127] Sawyer, *Military Advisory Group to the Republic of Korea*, 174.
[128] Hastings, *The Korean War*, 78-9.

enemy armor. Although the light infantry model had been sufficient for the fight against the guerillas, it was wholly inefficient in the outbreak of a conventional conflict between North and South Korea. Ironically, it was the American employment of heavy armor, artillery, and close air support, the instruments of warfare denied Rhee's army, that allowed the Americans and ROK Army to eventually stand their ground in Korea.[129]

The United States wanted as little to do with Korea as possible during the early years of the Cold War, and this accounts for the poor policy towards the peninsular nation. From the occupation to the attempts to train the ROK Army, the United States continued to fumble on their policy towards Korea. Once their original mission of disarming the Japanese Army in Korea was completed, the military government in Korea was almost at a loss at what to do next. As a combat unit, they were inadequate for the task of administering a country that for decades had languished under the yoke of Japanese imperialism. They made mistakes that could be expected from any army of occupation unprepared for its task, whether retaining Korean collaborators in administrative positions or helping to foster the creation of a one party state just as brutal and totalitarian as its sister government in the North.

When the tenability of America's occupation in Korea came into question towards the end of the 1940s and the US Army began transferring responsibility for security to the Koreans, the consequences of poor decision making haunted KMAG. America's strategic indifference to Korea combined with the chaotic political situation resulted in a scanty commitment of American resources to assist the country's security. The advisors' willingness to cut corners, demonstrated in their willingness to reduce the qualifying scores for ROK units, would have disastrous consequences when war broke out. The inability to successfully advise and dissuade

[129] Ibid, 255.

the profiteering of their counterpart officers all but ensured that the ROK Army's officer corps would be burdened with extremes of corruption and brutality.

Ironically, by attempting to train an army on the cheap, the United States further embroiled itself in a greater, costlier conflict. The inability of the ROK Army to stop the NKPA meant that for three years following the outbreak of hostilities, American, South Korean, and UN soldiers fought and died in a "police action" to preserve South Korea. This is not to say that had the ROK Army been better trained and equipped that American forces would not have become involved; or even that the existence of a competent, modernized ROK Army would have deterred an invasion from the North. But the unpreparedness of the average South Korean soldier for war all but ensured that Korea's survival would depend on assistance from the United States.[130]

Although the armistice ending the Korean War was signed over fifty years ago, the conflict still offers valuable lessons for today. In the field of advising, the United States Army has made much progress and certainly taken many of KMAG's painful lessons to heart. But a look at the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan betrays much about the difficulty of advising missions. Reports of Afghan soldiers profligately expending ammunition at non-existent targets and of Afghan officers withholding food from their soldiers are eerily similar to occurrences advisors noted within the ROK Army.[131] They are a reminder that the challenges which confronted KMAG are still very real today.

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[130] American soldiers regularly derided the combat proficiency of ROK soldiers, and their poor performance and tendency to retreat earned KMAG the nickname "Kiss My Ass Goodbye" from many soldiers who had fought alongside the ROK forces. Halberstam, *The Coldest Winter* 83.

[131] C.J. Chivers, "Marines Do Heavy Lifting as Afghan Army Lags in Battle" *The New York Times*, February 20, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/21/world/asia/21afghan.html?pagewanted=1> (cited 25 Feb. 2010).

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