*Willis Bird, the OSS,*

*and the Korean Provisional Government:* U.S.-Korean Military Ties during the Pacific War

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On August 18, 1945, three short days after the Japanese emperor made his historic speech to convey Japan’s intentions to surrender, Lieutenant Colonel Willis Bird led a mixed crew of Americans and Koreans on a mission to Korea. His instructions were as follows:

You are going under the general authority of implementing the Eagle project and reporting back conditions as you find them. One of your primary missions will be to assist in the controlling, care, and evacuation of Prisoners of War. You should, therefore, immediately upon your arrival, make every effort to contact the senior Allied officer in the Prisoner of War camps in your vicinity and instruct them to remain in position and await further orders.

He was further warned that under no circumstances “should you accept surrender from any Japanese Forces unless specifically ordered to do so at a later date.”1 At the time it was believed that POWs were being interned in multiple locations around the Korean Peninsula including at Seishin [Ch’ǒngjin], Keijō [Seoul], and Jinsen [Inch’ǒn]. 2 Bird responded by reporting that he had “16 people, 4 American, 5 Korean Americans, and 7 Koreans at Hsian [Xi’an] Headquarters” who were ready to go upon hearing news of Japan’s surrender.3

1 OSS, China Theater, William P. Davis to Lt. Willis H. Bird: “Mission to Korea” (August 15, 1945), OSS New York/Overseas Station Records, RG 0226, Container #9, Folder 127 (Eagle Mission to Keijo). United States National Archives and Record Administration, College Park, Maryland (hitherto NARA).

2 Ibid.

3 “Bird to Heppner: “Operational Priority” (August 15, 1945), ibid. Bird had been instructed on August 10 to prepare to fly to Keijō at the “first available opportunity” following Japan’s surrender.

Bird first attempted to fly to Seoul on August 16, the day after the Japanese emperor made his broadcast. This initial attempt had to be aborted en route after news arrived that the Japanese military was continuing operations and that riots had broken out in Korea. The emperor had also broadcast a second message appealing to Americans to stay out of Japanese waters.4 The mission was delayed further by Bird’s aircraft having sustained a broken wing during the initial attempt. Two days later, however, the mission was ready to resume. Bird ignored a suggestion that he limit the number of people to be able to increase the amount of supplies for the POWs,5 and even substituted its crew members; one important substitution was his decision to replace a Korean passenger with a journalist. As they approached the Korean Peninsula, the mission attempted to make contact with the Japanese for instructions, communications that went unanswered until his plane was within thirty minutes of its destination. At this time, a Japanese pilot engaged him in a “chicken” challenge, only to veer off at the last minute to avoid colliding with the American plane which held its course. The Japanese pilot then instructed Bird’s crew to land at Yŏido, now the center of Korean politics, but at the time a major Japanese airbase in Seoul.

Upon landing, the Americans were greeted by a “staff of officers…and a company of Japanese soldiers. A great many of planes were on the field including about 20 fighters.” The enemy, however, was ignorant of the purpose behind Bird’s mission and thus ill-prepared to meet his demands. Initially Bird had difficulty conveying the reason for his mission to the Japanese, who assumed it to be related either to the anticipated U.S. occupation of the peninsula or connected with U.S. terms of surrender. The Japanese were rather surprised to learn of Bird’s true purpose — why had he agreed to undertake such a risky mission just to check on POWs? They then informed him that as they had not received instructions from Tokyo, they could not accommodate him. Bird’s report on the mission notes that the person whom he understood to be the airbase’s chief of staff remarked that despite the emperor’s speech he still considered their countries to be at war. The Americans “should not have come; that to stay was dangerous.… [They] should leave immediately.” Regarding the POWs, the Japanese officer assured them that “they were safe and in good hands.” The crew was then placed under heavy guard and led to a hangar where they were provided with light refreshments. Bird

4 Bird to Colonel Richard P. Heppner, “Preliminary Report of Mission to Keijo, Korea, for the Relief of Prisoners of War Interned in that Country” (August 23, 1945), ibid.

5 “Helm to Peers (Urgent)” (August 17, 1945), RG 226, Box 186 NARA.

informed the Japanese that it would be impossible for them to depart any time soon as their fuel supply only allowed for a one-way trip; they would have to stay on the base until they obtained the fuel they needed to return to Xi’an. The Japanese offered to obtain the fuel, but it would have to be flown in. The crew would have to spend the night on the enemy base.

Bird’s report then skips to the next morning, at which time he made a second request to see the POWs. Again, the Japanese refused. He then requested that the Japanese provide a written explanation detailing the reasons behind their refusal. These interactions occupied much time as, Bird reasoned, the Japanese had to relay his requests to their superiors located elsewhere. Finally, with (inadequate) letters and word that the fuel had arrived, the Japanese demanded that Bird and his crew board their plane and prepare to leave immediately, their rather congenial attitude turning suddenly hostile. Bird’s report describes the Japanese sendoff as follows:

During the interval [of negotiation with the Japanese], two tanks were brought up from behind the hangars and approached the house, and the turrets were swung facing our rooms. Mortars were set up on the airfield pointing toward the house as well as machine guns. A heavy weapons company was then brought up into view facing the house also. After this display of armament, a new officer was send [sic] and in a very arrogant hostile and unfriendly manner informed us that our presence was no longer desirable and that we must leave immediately regardless of whether we were satisfied with the results of our visit or not. Since it appeared that arguing or insisting on accomplishing our mission was not producing the desired results, orders were given to the mission to pack up their belongings and prepare for departure to the plane.6

The Japanese, he added, appeared ready to attack should the Americans pursue the matter further. After boarding the aircraft, Bird learned that the fuel they required had in fact not yet arrived, thus delaying their departure further. Finally, a Colonel Shimoda relayed news that the Japanese had managed to find 500 of the 800 gallons of fuel that the mission required. Moods then calmed and Shimoda engaged the crew in light banter; he

6 Bird to Colonel Richard P. Heppner, “Preliminary Report of Mission to Keijo.”

talked of his two trips to the United States and the desperate food situation in Seoul. The mission departed at 15:30 and managed to fly to Weihsien [present-day Weifang], another Japanese-controlled airfield, on the Shantung Peninsula in China.7

Bird’s heroics earned him decorations by the U.S. military. In early November he was awarded the Legion of Merit and the Soldier’s Medal for “heroic actions during the period 16 August 1945 to 19 August 1945, when he was Commander of a Prisoner of War Humanitarian mission.” The citations recognized his courage for “instill[ing] enough confidence in all concerned to fly the dangerous mission in a C-47 plane whose range permitted only a one-way trip.” They further noted his “cool judgment, exemplary courage and fine diplomacy [that] inspired his entire team. His achievements in the face of great odds reflect the highest credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States.”8 At the same time, however, the reporter that Bird had included on the flight was filing his story that added a few damaging details that Bird had neglected to report. Before getting to this part of the story it is important to introduce the Eagle Project, the operation that had initiated this mission.

# Arming Koreans in the Pacific War

The Eagle Project, formally initiated in early 1945, began with a much more ambitious agenda than simply checking on POWs after Japan’s surrender: dropping Koreans behind enemy lines to conduct “unconventional operations.”9 It began at a time when the duration of the war remained unknown: the battles on the European continent still raged and the atomic bomb was still just a concept. From this time concrete plans

7 Ibid. Though a Japanese airfield, it was under the command of the Chinese “puppet” officer, General Li Wen-li, who happened to be a friend of one of the Korean passengers, General Yi Pŏm-sŏk.

8 “Willis Bird File” (November 4, 1945), OSS Personnel Files, 1941-1945, RG 226 Records of the Office of Strategic Services. Box 57, NARA.

9 There is little published information on the Eagle Project. One exception is Robert S. Kim. *Project Eagle: The American Christians of North Korea in World War II* (Lincoln: Potomac Books, 2017). See also Bill Streifer, “The OSS in Korea: Operation Eagle,” *American Intelligence Journal* 30, no.1 (2012): 33-38; Mark E. Caprio, “The Eagle has Landed: Groping for a Korean Role in the Pacific War,” *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 21 (2014): 5-33; Maochun Yu, *OSS in China: Prelude to Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 229-30; and Robert J. Myers, *Korea in the Cross Currents: A Century of Struggle and the Crisis of Reunification* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), Chapter 5.

to train Koreans began to materialize. The possibility of using peoples exiled from Axis-occupied territories in unconventional operations, however, had been an idea contemplated from early in the war primarily by the United States’ newly formed spy agency, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), which in 1942 had been created as an agency of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and modeled after the British MI6 spy organization. One August 1942 report envisioned these peoples performing the following duties:

Organized Sabotage: (i) To organize and incite to action native groups in enemy occupied territory. (ii) To arrange for the entry of arms and equipment for these groups. (iii) To distribute seditious pamphlets. (iv) To give instruction in the character and use of demolition material. (v) To direct, supervise or to conduct sabotage activities. (vi) To set up “reception committees” to meet and to aid our armed forces.

Guerrilla warfare was to be undertaken by “individuals of foreign birth or foreign descent who are already in the armed forces and have had at least three months training,” after which time they would be attached to military units. Upon demonstrating their loyalty to the United States they would be “organized into language guerrilla groups, and should be made available to theater commanders conducting operations in countries to which such groups are native.” The recruits could either join an invading wave or be parachuted behind enemy lines in advance to unite with reception committees already organized among the natives. 10 One successful example was the Detachment 101 operation, commanded by Captain Carl

F. Eifler, that trained Kachin natives in Burma to ambush Japanese patrols, rescue felled U.S. pilots, and clear jungle to build landing strips.11 The OSS also welcomed connections with people of suspicious character, such as the future Vietnamese Communist leader Ho Chi Minh. Such operations set the OSS apart from traditional military practices.

Koreans began participating in battles on both the European and

10 W. B. Smith and L. R. McDowell, “Memorandum. ‘Functions of the Office of Strategic Services: Organized Sabotage and Guerrilla Warfare’” (August 19, 1942), Millard Preston Goodfellow papers, Box 4, Folder 4, Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

11 David A. Phillips, “The Toughest, Deadliest Hombre,” in *Military Intelligence: Its Heroes and Legends,* Compiled by Diane L. Hamm (Honolulu, HI, University Press of the Pacific, 2001), 85.

Asian continents from the earliest days of U.S. involvement in World War II, but mostly within the more traditional branches of the military as enlistees. The Los Angeles-based Korean Independence, a newspaper that often reported on the accomplishments of Korean men and women in the military, bragged that Koreans represented the highest degree of participation among minorities residing in the U.S. For example, Koreans in China, aided by their hosts, had engaged the Japanese in battle on that front. One of the earliest military groups was the “righteous army” (*ŭiyonggun*).12 A handful of Koreans had also joined British units in India. There were even Koreans within the highly decorated “all-nisei” 442nd Infantry Regiment that fought in Europe.13 The U.S., however, refrained from organizing Koreans or supporting Korean efforts that remained outside its control.14 The OSS, recognizing the value of exploiting Korean assets — their knowledge of foreign languages and of both Korean and Japanese societies — realized their potential from early in the war. One project, code-named Olivia, sought to provide “sabotage training to loyal native [residents] of [Japanese] occupied areas,” including parts of China, Formosa, Thailand, the Philippines, the Dutch East Indies [present-day Indonesia], and Korea. This operation envisioned transferring personnel selected for such missions to a site near Chongqing [Chungking], China, for training by U.S. military officers.15

During the Pacific War, the OSS would open at least three training sites — in the Washington, D.C. area, off the California coast on

12 Kang Man-il, *Chosŏn minjok myŏngtang kwa t’ongil chŏnsŏn* [Korean People’s Revolutionary Party and the United Front] (Seoul: Yŏksa pip’yongsa, 2003), Chapter 7.

13 For an interview of Kim Young Oak, who led a unit of Japanese into battle, see <http://www.goforbroke.org/learn/archives/oral_histories_videos.php?clip=047A> 01 (accessed September 8, 2020).

14 For a discussion on the use of Koreans for military purposes, see the report, Charles W. McCarthy, Alvin F. Richardson, and Raymond E. Cox. “State-War- Navy Coordination Committee: Utilization of Koreans in the War Effort” (April 23, 1945). Document found in Yi Kilsang, ed. *Haebang chǒnhusa charyojip* [Documents on pre-liberation and post-liberation history] vol. 1 (Seoul: Wonjumunhwasa, 1992), 254-56.

15 “Memorandum for Colonel Donovan: Subject—Scheme ‘Olivia’” (January 27, 1942) Goodfellow papers, 1942-1967, Box 4, Folder 2, Stanford: Hoover Institution. An April 4, 1942 memo from General Joseph Stilwell advised that proceeding with “Olivia” as planned was “highly inadvisable,” and perhaps only applicable to India for use in Burma (ibid). Other reports in this folder that outline different plans of this nature, primarily concentrate on operations in Manchuria rather than Korea.

Catalina Island, and near Xi’an, China — to train Korean Americans, Korean POWs, and members of Korean independence armies in China, many of whom had escaped from their Japanese units. One OSS document acknowledged the importance of penetrating the Korean Peninsula in the following way:

Korea is Japan’s most vital, strategic area outside Japan Proper. It contains many strategic war industries. It is a staging area for military operations in Manchuria, North China and Southeast Asia. It is Japan’s most invulnerable channel of communication with Japanese-held areas on the continent. Korea’s support of Japan’s war requirements in industry, natural resources, manpower and communications makes Allied knowledge of Korea essential for strategic planning and operations to defeat Japan. Yet, our certain knowledge of military and related activities in Korea is fragmentary, uncertain and inadequate. At present, our sources of intelligence about military activity in Korea are restricted to “remote-control” sources, such as photo-cover, radio intercept, and publication analysis. To date, Korea has been virtually unpenetrated for strategic or tactical intelligence.16

From this time the OSS would juggle at least two projects that shared a similar purpose, the Napko and Eagle projects. The Napko Project, which recruited mostly Koreans in the United States, planned to deliver them to the coast of the Korean Peninsula by boat. The Eagle Project, however, aimed to parachute Koreans trained in China onto the peninsula. Koreans brought a number of advantages to these operations. First, the organization would employ recruits who had just recently resided in Korea and Japan, who potentially had the most recent and most valuable information on the two countries. Those who had served in the Japanese military also had a unique military knowledge that the U.S. military could exploit. Thirdly, it saw their language ability in Korean, but also in Japanese, Chinese, and even Russian, as a valuable asset. Lastly, their extreme anti-Japanese sentiment armed them with a strong incentive to excel.

An additional incentive was that the U.S. saw Korean recruitment

16 OSS, China Theater, “The Eagle Project: For SI Penetration of Korea” (February 24, 1945), 2. OSS New York/Overseas Station Records, RG 0226,

Folder 129, NARA.

as a way to counter to what they believed to be the Soviet Union training of Korean residents for their quick deployment to northern Korea soon after Japan surrendered. While the Soviet Union was still allied with the

U.S. and Great Britain against Nazi Germany, some harbored doubts over this relationship extending beyond the European war. The following is just one of many expressions of this concern:

Now Russia sees clearly that she is on the winning side and Japan is being faced with eventual defeat. Therefore, she has extended her hands into the Korean Provisional Government in Chungking [Chongqing]. On one hand, Russia appears to be agitating against Korean unity through such men as Messrs. Kyu Sik Kim [Kim Kyu-sik] and Yak San Kim [Yaksan Kim Won-bong] and on the other hand she has discharged the Koreans in her Army numbering approximately a division and a half, in order to penetrate Korea with them before any other nation, and as soon as a sign of Japanese defeat appears. These discharged men from the Russian Army are waiting on the border for an order to step into Korea as fifth columnists. In fact, Russia does not deny this matter at all. …. We can still notice that Russian newspapers including official publications, cry for Manchuria and Korea.17

The author of this report, intelligence officer Daniel C. Buchanan, noted that this ambition should come as no surprise. The Russians, after all, had for “several centuries” coveted an ice-free port on its eastern frontier.18

Discussions for the use of Koreans in unconventional warfare began to appear soon after the United States entered the war. One plan was devised by two men with a special knowledge of Manchuria and Korea, identified only by their surnames Larsen and Underwood,19 who proposed that the U.S. organize revolts in these two important areas of the Japanese empire. A feasibility assessment of this plan, however, ruled it “inoperative” in the case of Korea due to the belief that too many Koreans

17 Daniel C. Buchanan, “Japan-China Sec., FSSI to Chief SI: Memorandum on Korean Affairs” (April 12, 1945). Napko Files, Kanghon Electronic Documents Center. https://e-gonghun.mpva.go.kr (accessed March 12, 2022).

18 Ibid.

19 Possibly Emmanuel Larsen of the U.S. State Department, and possibly one of two Horace Underwoods, although both father and son had been interned in Korea until being repatriated in June 1942.

maintained feelings “sympathetic to Japan and are [being] used as special police in both Korea and Manchuria.” Any attempt at revolt, it concluded, “would be put down at very short notice.”20

In October 1942, the chairman of the U.S.-based Korean Commission, Syngman Rhee [Yi Sŭngman], met with Colonel Millard Preston Goodfellow of the OSS to discuss possible roles that Koreans could serve in the war efforts. Goodfellow, who would be instrumental in Rhee’s rise to power in southern Korea after liberation from Japanese colonial rule, had become acquainted with the Korean while still in the publishing business, before he was recruited by OSS Director William “Wild Bill” Donovan to join the organization. In a letter, Rhee shared with Goodfellow ideas that would come to resemble those used in both the Napko and Eagle projects. Rhee advised the officer to:

present to the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee for their consideration and approval a project wherein Korean nationals in the United States and Hawaii could be trained by U.S. military authorities to serve as liaison agents between the theatre command in the Far East and the available veteran soldiers of the Korean National Army in China.21

Rhee claimed that he had the applications of fifty Koreans for “training in guerrilla warfare and military service,” an estimated 500 recruits, and another 25,000 veterans of guerrilla warfare who could also be trained,22 but this was believed by many to be grossly exaggerated. He continued by advising Goodfellow to proceed at once to Calcutta, India, to meet with a General Li Chung Chun, the commander in chief of the Korean National Army. Rhee’s motivation, to gain U.S. diplomatic recognition of the Korean Provisional Government [KPG] founded in 1919 in Shanghai but relocated during the war to Chongqing, was evident in his claim that the organization’s president, Kim Ku, would also travel to Calcutta to meet with Goodfellow. The OSS officer followed these ideas by proposing a

20 Eifler to Goodfellow, “Mission: Sabotage in the Far East” (April 17, 1942), Goodfellow papers, Box 4, Folder 2. It is not clear if “secret police” refers to *kempeitai* or not.

21 “Rhee to Goodfellow: Offer of Korean Military Resources to U.S. Military Authorities” (October 10, 1942), in *Migungmusǒng Han’guk kwangye munsǒ* [Internal Affairs of Korea, 1940-1944], vol. 3 (Seoul: Wonjumunhwasa, 1993), 318.

22 “Rhee to Goodfellow.”

plan to train 100 Japanese language-proficient Koreans in espionage and sabotage operations, and by urging the State Department to recognize the Korean organization. He warned that any delays in advancing these ideas would only benefit plans that the Soviets may have for postwar Korea. The Far Eastern Affairs of Division of the State Department, however, rejected these ideas. Its reasoning, disunity among exiled Korean groups and doubts in the KPG’s capacity to implement parts of the plan,23 perhaps reflected differences in the thinking of the two organizations: the OSS focused solely on the war at hand, the State Department on both wartime and postwar circumstances.

Though concrete plans toward using Koreans in this capacity did not emerge until over one year later, the OSS continued to recruit Koreans in the United States for various operations. Major-Sergeant Sukyoon Chang, who served in Carl Eifler’s Detachment 101 Unit in Burma, was later transferred to Camp McCoy in Wisconsin where he served as an undercover agent to evaluate individual POW sentiments toward Japan and their potential as OSS recruits.24 In October 1944 the OSS also began interviewing Koreans for undefined operations. 25 Formal plans and training of Koreans did not commence until close to mid-1945, when the OSS and the KPG finally managed to coordinate their goals: the OSS, recruiting Koreans for military purposes, and the KPG, strengthening relations with the U.S. This delayed start would eventually prevent the projects from landing Koreans on the peninsula prior to Japan’s defeat.

# The Eagle Project

It was a postwar extension of the Eagle Project that eventually sent Willis Bird and his crew to the Korean Peninsula in August 1945 to initiate the postwar period. Plans that defined the project’s approach and goals that appeared in late February 1945 focused on the immediate deployment of Koreans to the peninsula for wartime purposes. Their primary goal was

23 Hong-Kyu Park, “From Pearl Harbor to Cairo: America’s Korean Diplomacy, 1941-1945,” *Diplomatic History* 13, no. 3 (Summer 1989): 354; James Matray, “An End to Indifference: America’s Korean Policy During World War II,” *Diplomatic History* 2, no 2 (Spring 1978): 185-86.

24 Edward T. Chang and Woo Sung Han, *Korean American Pioneer Aviators*

(Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 96.

25 “Lt. Colonel W. W. Walker to Van R. Halsey: Recruiting of Korean Personnel” (October 9, 1944). National Archives of Korea. One of the Koreans interviewed was a David Kim who was the husband of Agnes Davis, who later authored *I Married a Korean* (New York: J. Day Co., 1953).

“to train, organize, and place 45 Korean intelligence agents into Korea in early summer 1945, to collect and report strategic and tactical intelligence.” The project’s basic plan read as follows:

After three months training in intelligence collection and reporting, and in communications, 45 Korean agents will penetrate Korea and will collect and report intelligence from five selected strategic areas supporting Japan’s war effort. It is expected that these agents will be introduced into western Korea by either overland movement or by air and water drop depending upon the situation, from where they will locate themselves in the five field areas. They will report by radio through OSS communications, and by courier. They will report military, economic, political and social intelligence, emphasizing industrial production and capabilities of essential, strategic war supplies, target date (particularly military and industrial installations and naval bases, communications, air fields, storage areas, shipping), beaches, land communications, and public morale as it reflects potentialities of the Korean underground, revolutionary movement.26

The success of this mission, the report continued, would indicate the feasibility of the OSS supporting Korea’s underground anti-Japanese movement. It estimated that within 150 days information “should be flowing from Korea to OSS.”27

This brief two-page report was followed by a longer, more detailed report that listed the five critical areas from which the project would concentrate attention: northeastern Korea (Seishin [Ch’ǒngjin], Rasin, Yuki, Mosan), northwestern Korea (Shingisha [Shinŭiju]), north- central Korea (Heijo [P’yǒngyang], Genzan [Wǒnsan]), south-central Korea (Keijo [Seoul], Jinsen [Inch’ǒn]), and southeastern Korea (Pusan, Chinkai [Chinhae]).28

This longer report also contained a more detailed discussion on the project that included a list of the U.S. and Korean participants, the training that the Koreans would undergo, and suggested areas of expansion. It also carried a rather long description of General Yi Pŏm-sŏk [Lee Bum

26 OSS, China Theater, “The Eagle Project,” 2.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., 11

Suk, Chinese name, Li Fan-hsi], who the OSS had chosen to act as a liaison between the U.S. personnel and the Korean agents. The report described General Yi as a 44-year-old Korean who was “strictly a revolutionary military commander.” Born of royalty, he had been educated in Russia, Japan, and China, and thus spoke four languages. Yi also had a “meager” capacity in English. The report mentioned another quality of Yi’s that the OSS found attractive: his sole personal desire being “to aid in gaining Korea’s freedom from Japan.”29

The report then offered a synopsis of the Korean recruits themselves. It identified two groups: one under the command of General Kim Won-bong, whose men were being used by the Chinese and the British in India, and General Yi’s group of over one hundred young Koreans then training in and around northern China. It was from this second group that the Eagle Project would choose its trainees. The majority of these Koreans were between 18 and 30 years of age; some had been in the Korean forces from early in the war, while others had arrived just recently after escaping from Japanese military units in China.

Most of them were brought up in Korea. A fair number of them attended military schools, and most of them have been in the Group since it was organized in July, 1942. A few, however, have arrived as recently as December, 1944, when two groups reached Sian [Xi’an] after deserting from the Japanese Army where they were interpreters and soldiers. All of them speak, read and write Korean. Most of them speak Japanese and Chinese fluently, and some of them also read and write Japanese and Chinese. Two or three have a limited knowledge of English. Approximately one-half are high school graduates or graduates of military academies. Half a dozen are college graduates. By civilian professions and hobbies, the group include[s] photographers, painters, merchants, carpenters, tailors, mechanics, chauffeurs, watch-makers, masons, printers and writers.30

Captain Clyde B. Sargent, who was assigned to the OSS China Theater, was officially selected as the field commander for the Eagle Project in late June 1945. The notice of his appointment placed him “in

29 Ibid., 18

30 Ibid., 19

charge of the recruitment, training, dispatch and operations of agents for the purpose set forth in the Eagle Plan.” He would be allotted $8,000 per month to run the program.31 Sargent, however, had already been involved with the project planning for at least two months.32 In early April the OSS officer met with General Yi and other Korean military officers at a small restaurant in Tianjin, China. Sargent reported that at this time their discussion centered on the “reciprocal advantage of Korean-American cooperation in the war against Japan.” His report did not mention any discussion regarding the U.S. and the Koreans establishing diplomatic relations, a condition that in the past Korean political leaders had tied to military assistance. Had they, the OSS would not have had the authority to provide this recognition, although it could have agreed to plead Korea’s case with the proper authority, the State Department. The U.S. side was concerned whether a joint project would “have the support of all the Korean leaders and groups.” General Yi assured Sargent that “the Korean government [the KPG] does not constitute a problem and is whole heartedly behind the operation.” Indeed, the OSS dealings with exiled Koreans would be limited to only those under KPG control even though there were those among the various exiled Korean political groups that did not recognize the authority of this political body.

The Koreans then asked Sargent about a Captain Clarence Weems,33 whose deep connections with Korea — he had grown up there in a missionary family — positioned him among the OSS’s primary authorities on the country. According to one account, Weems had presided over a meeting held on January 31, 1945, where 37 recently commissioned Korean officers were presented to the OSS representative for a special operation.34 But the Korean generals had doubts on Weems’ commitment. Sargent’s assurance of Weem’s trustworthy credentials cleared a

31 “Lt. Colonel Paul I. E. Helliwell to Captain Clyde B. Sargent: Letter of Instructions” (June 26, 1945), OSS New York/Overseas Station Records, RG 226, Folder 129, NARA.

32 Bill Streifer, “The OSS in Korea: Operation Eagle,” 33.

33 This was perhaps Clarence Weems Jr., the son of a Protestant missionary who Kim Tong-sin describes in his study as a person who showed greater affinity for leftist thinkers than other members of missionary families. See Kim Tong-sin, “Migun chŏngi Miguk sŏngyosa 2se wa Hanguk chŏngch’iseryŏk ŭi hyŏngsŏng

- willŏmsŭ (George Zur Williams) wa wimsŭ (Clarence N. Weems, Jr.) lŭl chungsim ŭro” [The influence of American Second-Generation Missionaries on

U.S. Administration: With Emphasis on George Zur Williams and Clarence N. Weens, Jr.], *Hanguk minjok undong yŏngu* 91 (2017): 203-244.

34 Kim, Project Eagle, 112.

misunderstanding that General Yi had held; Sargent took this as a “sign of distinct improvement” as the Korean officer had been one of Weems’ “strongest opponents.” The Koreans then invited Sargent to travel to T’u- ch’iao [Tuqiao], just outside of Chongqing, to visit KPG headquarters, which he agreed to do if transportation were available.35 He made the trip on April 3, at which time he met with Korean officials to discuss military strategy, and met with President Kim Ku as a courtesy. His meeting with Kim was sudden and short, lasting only thirty minutes, but proved to be most useful as it allowed Sargent to also meet with the first 37 Koreans trainees for the project. Sargent described this “unsolicited and unexpected” meeting as follows:

The interview was held in a modest but comfortable reception room on one wall of which hung a Korean flag flanked on one side by a Chinese National Flag (not Party flag) and on the other side by a French flag, hung, as explained to my inquiry, in recognition of recently- granted recognition of the Korean Government by the French Government.36

He then described Kim Ku’s entrance into the meeting room:

President Kim entered the room, dressed in an attractive, plain Chinese gown, for which he apologized on excuse that he had not been well and was resting. In spite of his 70 years, which he showed completely in both appearance and manner, he bore himself with dignity and composure tempered by modesty and gentleness that seemed incompatible with the patriotic assassin and terrorist of 25 years ago.

35 Sargent’s report on meeting with Yi Pŏm-sŏk and other Korean generals (April 3, 1945), in OSS New York/Overseas Station Records, RG 226, Folder 129, NARA.

36 This “recognition” by the Free France movement was a misunderstanding by the exiled KPG desperate for outside attention. British documents reveal that in May 1945 a French general named Pechkoff explained that the French, liberated the previous year from German rule, had extended to members of the KPG nothing more than “sympathetic personal relations.” “Chungking Seymore to Bennett” (May 10, 1945), Far Eastern 1945 FO 371 Japan File No 1394, The (British) National Archives, Kew, Great Britain.

The conversation consisted of pleasant indulgence by the two men; military issues had been discussed in earlier meetings with Korean officers. Kim expressed his appreciation for the interest that the United States was showing and affirmed his intention to “cooperate fully, particularly by making available personnel, including the 37 Korean men…” Kim further expressed his pleasure over the development of the Sargent-Yi relationship and that “he approved of all that had grown out of the relation.” In parting, Sargent expressed his aspiration that they “meet frequently in the future, and finally in Korea.”37 This relationship between the KPG and the OSS, however, would be short-lived, lasting barely long enough to welcome the end of the Pacific War.

On this same day, Sargent gave a brief five-minute explanation of the project to the Korean recruits. After, he requested that the group sing the Korean national anthem along with a Korean marching song, which they did. Sargent reported that he was very impressed with the group of Koreans now under him: “Every member of the group appeared to be intelligent, alert and keen. As a military group it was the most intelligence [sic] group I have seen, and the caliber I think would compare favorably with any group of young American officers. I was told that most of them are college graduates, and several of them spoke very passable English.” He advised General Yi to lead the entire group to the training center.38

From this time the number of potential recruits to the project increased. Sargent requested that other Koreans be transported from around China to the training center. In July he wrote to Lieutenant Colonel Paul I. E. Helliwell concerning the possibility of having “53 high caliber” Koreans who had deserted from the Japanese Army and were then in Ju’ch’eng in China’s Hunan province sent to him for training. To do so, he advised, would require KPG approval. He added that there were more such Koreans in other locations who could be assembled in Ju’ch’eng for possible transport to the training grounds or to Chongqing.39 The role of the KPG had become critical from even before Sargent’s April meeting with Kim Ku. Sargent mentioned this as a concern at his meeting with General Yi in early April. The U.S.-KPG relations also had their limitations. In a memo sent by Helliwell to a Colonel John Whitaker in late April, Sargent’s superior explained that though the project required a “liaison” relationship with the KPG, there would be matters that for

37 Sargent report on meeting with Kim Ku (April 3, 1945), OSS New York/Overseas Station Records, RG 226, Folder 129, NARA.

38 Sargent report on meeting with 37 recruits to the Eagle Project (April 3, 1945), ibid.

39 “Sargent to Helliwell: Recruiting Koreans at Ju’ch’eng” (July 16, 1945), ibid.

security reasons the U.S. could not share with the Koreans, a point to which, he remarked, the Koreans understood.40 As we shall see below, this relationship might also have been interpreted by the Chinese as the

U.S. infringing on their territory.

Sargent’s instructions required him to submit monthly reports on the project’s progress, the first of which he drafted in late May 1945. In it he included a detailed description of the training facilities, his assessment of the progress that the recruits were making, as well as certain problems that the project faced at the training area, in Tu-ch’u just outside of Xi’an. Here his troops were being housed in a small temple complex and neighboring buildings that the OSS had leased from the Chinese. One storage building came with “twelve hideous and frightening wooden gods” that protected the supplies stored there. Another temple building required extensive repairs before it could be used for “communications instillations,

[a] photo lab, [and a] small reproduction unit, etc.” The costs for these repairs, which he estimated would run to CNC$10 million, posed a problem: they were unreasonable and exceeded the project’s allotted funding for such matters.

Sargent also included his views on the Korean members of the project, giving them high marks over the progress that they were making. He reported that he had arrived at the camp to commence the operations on May 9, with his staff joining him before and after this date. At the time he drafted his report, there were 160 Koreans in the camp including the 50 enrolled in the first training class, 50 others waiting to be trained, and assorted staff members. His remarks centered on their leader, General Yi, whose “personal qualities and energetic cooperation” contributed to his men having developed an “excellent esprit de corps.” The general had established with them a “father-son relationship… without intimacy or familiarity”; his men addressed him as “ba-ba” or “father.”

Turning to the recruits, he mentioned that he was “impressed by the calibre of our men, and they uniformly impress all visitors… Discipline and morale are excellent, which is amazing in view of the way they have been pushed around in the past.” Sargent attributed their positive attitude in part to the perks that they had gained through their participation: the clothing they received that “made them a nice-looking outfit.” The three-meals-a-day diet that they enjoyed was a nice change from the bland diet they had endured heretofore. His impressions were echoed by other Americans based at the camp. One intelligence instructor, Lieutenant John

40 “Helliwell to Whitaker: Korea” (April 25, 1945), Overseas Station Records, RG 226, Folder 129, NARA.

P. Donohue, rated the recruits as “above average.”

The project, however, had issues. In addition to problems with the facilities, Sargent noted their desperate need for interpreters to bridge language gaps.41 For the time being, Sargent believed that he could make do with Americans or Koreans. Another possibility was to recruit participants from among anti-war Japanese POWs in U.S. custody. In addition, the project also required competent instructors to “direct and coordinate all intelligence materials.” He also added shortages in transportation, security, and finance to his wish list.

Sargent’s long report also included a section on the project’s future “possibilities,” which were, he predicted, “unlimited — except by the length of ‘the duration’ and by reinforcements of Korean personnel.” This latter issue he made in reference to the Koreans scattered throughout China whom he had requested earlier be transferred to him. He closed by underlining a number of issues addressed above:

An immediate intelligence potentiality exists right here now, and we need only American personnel to produce this intelligence. We have nearly 50 men who have come from Korea and other Japanese-occupied areas at various times during the pastyear [sic]. Around 65% of them have served in the Japanese Army. Their possession of all types of strategic and tactical intelligence is immense. With our limited personnel, it is a slow job to drag from them all the intelligence that they possess and we want.42

In another report Sargent addressed a separate problem that involved a possible conflict of interest that the project could confront with their Chinese hosts, a problem that the American had anticipated from the project’s earliest days. In the February planning report this issue had received brief mention, and then been dismissed at the time plans for the

41 Sargent’s superiors may already have been made aware of such language problems. A few weeks before he submitted his report, Lieutenant Colonel Paul Helliwell had already requested that Horace G. Underwood, a longtime resident of Korea who had been sent to Boulder, Colorado, to study in the navy’s Japanese program, be assigned to the Eagle Project, adding “no training needed.” “Lieutenant Colonel Paul Helliwell to Secretary of State” (May 12, 1945), OSS New York/Overseas Station Records, RG 226, Folder 127, NARA.

42 “Sargent to Helliwell: “Monthly Report for May: Eagle Project” (May 30, 1945), Folder 129, container 9, OSS New York/Overseas Station Records, RG 0226, NARA.

project had first been drafted. At this time Sargent was convinced that though “Korean-Chinese politics will not embarrass the project,” there was reason for concern. This early report explained that the

recent extension to the Korean Provisional Government’s military forces [by the Chinese Nationalist Military Council] assure General Li’s [Yi Pŏm-sŏk’s] ability to cooperate with the OSS without impediment from the Chinese Government. With removal of “political advisers” from the Korean military groups, the Chinese Government released all control of these groups, except fiscal control of groups that remain dependent upon Chinese funds.

There was, however, a possible source of conflict in General Yi’s relations with a General Hu Tsung-nam,43 which came to light in May when he appeared unannounced at the training site accompanied by a Colonel Staples from the British Military Mission.

Sargent reported the visit in a memo to U.S. Major Gustav Krause. On the morning of May 26, he wrote that the two men arrived without having cleared their visit with General Yi, who happened to be absent from the site at the time. He characterized the British officer’s attitude as “inexcusably rude and obnoxious.” The more immediate concern, Sargent believed, was the British officer’s connection with the Chinese officer. The “Chinese Government has not favored any appreciable development of the Korean independence movement, and certainly the aid which the Chinese government has given the Koreans in recent years has been little to surpass nominal aid.” He reasoned that Chinese resentment had arisen over the aid that the OSS was offering the Koreans through the Eagle Project. He recalled a possible competition that may have been from General Yi’s contacts with a Chinese general, Li Tai, who had taken the Korean to dinner just after the Chinese had expressed approval of the project. Sargent interpreted this gesture as an attempt by the Chinese to dissuade Yi from cooperating with the OSS. He saw the British officer’s sudden appearance at the camp as a “test to see how strongly we would oppose being crashed in upon.” Sargent recommended that as the “[s]econd detachment comes directly under the influence of the Korean Provisional Government, and no longer is under the Chinese National Military Council as it was until a few months ago…. it is

43 OSS, China Theater, “The Eagle Project,” 20.

appropriate that any visit to the area should be cleared at least by OSS channels, and probably also through Korean government channels.” He further advised that Colonel Stables, “or any [other] representative from [the British] organization be refused clearance to visit the area.”44

Ties between the KPG and the OSS continued to develop. In August, Kim Ku met with OSS Director William “Wild Bill” Donovan for the most important meeting that the KPG leader would hold with a U.S. diplomatic official during the war. Though the OSS director had traveled to Xi’an for a completely different reason, he grudgingly agreed to meet with Kim. The KPG leader, interpreting the meeting as the start of U.S.- KPG diplomatic relations, had the meeting hall decorated with the flags of the two countries, as if he was hosting a summit meeting. Donovan, who had no authority to advance such relations, saw the meeting strictly as a means of advancing the Eagle Project. Had the now deceased Franklin Roosevelt still been alive and in office, he most probably would have seen this meeting as another example of his OSS director taking extraordinary means to meet their shared goal: defeating the Axis powers. The new president, Harry S. Truman, also shouldered this basic goal. However, he had also developed a critical attitude toward Donovan’s unconventional approaches. The new president became “infuriated” upon learning of the meeting through a message sent by Kim that indicated his hope that “American-Korean positive cooperation initiated in China during the last months of the War against Japan will continue and grow.” Three weeks later Truman replaced the OSS with his own spy institution, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).45

# The Postwar Eagle Project

It may be assumed that Kim Ku, and perhaps Donovan as well, had no knowledge of the top-secret Manhattan Project to build a nuclear weapon, much less of the successful test that had been conducted in late July in the New Mexico desert. They most likely envisioned the war extending into the next few months, if not the following year. Yet, the sudden announcement by the Japanese emperor of Japan’s decision to surrender placed OSS projects such as Eagle and Napko in limbo, rendering obsolete plans for Koreans to infiltrate their homeland behind enemy lines. On August 13, perhaps anticipating the war’s end, Sargent reported on a two-

44 “Sargent to Krause: A Visit from the British Military Mission” (May 26, 1945), OSS New York/Overseas Station Records, RG 0226, Folder 129, NARA.

45 For a description of this meeting see Maochun Yu, *OSS in China: Prelude to Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 229-30.

hour discussion that he had held with General Yi Pŏm-sŏk regarding the future of the estimated 2,000 Korean soldiers scattered throughout China. Yi recommended that the U.S. screen them and dispatch them to different places around the soon-to-be-former Japanese empire to combat possible guerrilla groups. He also recommended that these Koreans be used by the

U.S. when it landed on the Korean Peninsula. This he saw as a logical outcome to the significant connections that the Eagle Project’s trainees had developed with the U.S., as well as the apprehension that they both felt toward the Soviet Union’s declaration of war with Japan, and the ramifications of this development for Korea’s future.46

Willis Bird, who assumed leadership of the project from Sargent, most likely also attended this meeting. He felt that there still was value in dropping Koreans onto the peninsula, indicating that even at this late date the possibility remained that the war could continue indefinitely. The Japanese decision to end the war two days later caused him to put in motion a different plan: “flying into Keijo with as many of mixed [Koreans and Americans] group as will fit into C-47 with intention to be first on ground.”47 With this in mind Bird and his crew attempted to fly into Seoul on August 16 and, after failing initially, again two days later. As mentioned above he returned to China without having completed his mission. Soon after returning to China he received word from Colonel Richard Heppner, who advised Bird to make “a return schedule if you have enough gas to get from Weihsian to Keijo. If so proceed to Keijo and gas will be flown to you there. If not we will fly gas to Weihsian. The Russians may soon be all over Korea and unless we get in there and stay in American interests will be prejudiced.”48 It is most probable that Bird never attempted a return trip.

Bird’s report, as cited in the beginning of this paper, accurately reported the risks and sensations of the mission. However, it was incomplete; the parts that he had omitted would tarnish the laudatory words that graced his military citations. Missing from Bird’s report were details of the evening that the crew spent on the airbase, events that a military reporter, Henry R. Lieberman, whom Bird had included on the second flight at the expense of a Korean passenger, entered into his article on the mission. One can only imagine what was behind Bird’s decision to include the reporter in the first place. A reasonable assumption might be

46 “Hector to Heppner & Roosevelt” (August 13, 1945), OSS New York/Overseas Station Records, RG 226, Folder 129, NARA.

47 “Telegram from Hector to Heppner” (August 13, 1945), OSS New York/Overseas Station Records, RG 226, Folder 129, NARA.

48 “Heppner to Bird” (August 20, 1945), RG 226, Box 187, NARA.

that Bird expected his flight to make important news, either by his simply visiting with POWs, or perhaps by his ignoring orders and accepting Japan’s surrender in Korea. Either way, the decision would come to haunt Bird. The journalist filed his story under the title “Yanks Rescue Team Cursed and Wined in Korea: Allied Mercy Crew has Odd Experience with Foe at Air Field,” just days before Bird’s award citations were dated. In his article Lieberman briefly summarized what Bird had included in his official report: the threatening reception that the Japanese had given the mission, as well as the enemy’s refusal to cooperate with the mission’s purpose. He then filled in the part that Bird neglected to report under the subheading “Drinks, Songs — and Guns”:

The mercy team and the crew of the plane put up for the night because the Japanese commandant was unable to get enough gasoline for the C-47 to leave immediately. The Japanese meantime brought up two tanks and set up trench mortars around the plane.… During the night the Japanese entertained the Americans with beer, sake, and Japanese songs. Flight Officer Edward McGee of Durant, Okla., commenting on the scene said: “If someone had told me two weeks ago I’d be in a setup like this I would have turned him over to the loco ward.” Although the members of the team were armed with revolvers, tommy- guns and hand grenades just in case of trouble, Captain Patrick Teel of New York City, who was with the first Ranger Battalion at Anzio, said: It’ll take just five minutes to make us all dead ducks.”

….

During supper that night the Japanese were quite convivial. After singing Japanese songs, one asked, “What is the American air force song?” Led by Capt. John Wagoner of the air transport command, from Grand Island, Neb., the Americans let loose with the chorus of “Off we go into the wild blue yonder.” The Japanese beamed and beat time on the table with their fingers. After the Americans finished, the Japanese sang their air force song, “The Fighting Wing” [Tatakau tsubasa].

The newspaper story continued by reporting the threatening events of the

following day, as described in Bird’s report.49 Bird’s mission now came to be seen through a different lens, and he was reprimanded for fraternizing with the enemy. Pressure mounted for him to return to Seoul when a number of missions succeeded in meeting with the POWs.50

One might wonder how the Korean members of the mission viewed their U.S. counterparts’ actions on this particular evening. Surprisingly, at least by one account, they, too, actively participated. One of the four Koreans included on the mission was Kim Chun-yǒp whose 1980 memoir devotes a chapter to this experience. 51 Kim had been a student-draftee of the Japanese military while studying at Keiō University. Dispatched to China, he was able to escape his unit and, after crossing the country, joined a Korean Liberation Army [Hanguk kwangbokgun] unit located near Chongqing. He was selected for the Eagle Project, a project he determined was necessary to pave the way for the arrival of exiled Koreans after the war.

Our responsibility was very heavy. At the time of entering the country, we would bring Koreans who had been conscripted by the Japanese military. We were to assume control, command Japanese disarmament, and organize a national self-defense force. We were to make a kind of atmosphere where evil political people would not have influence.52

In his memoir, Kim, who was included in the second attempt by Bird to fly into Seoul, offers vivid descriptions of the harsh reception that the crew received upon landing and the events of the evening they spent on the airbase. Kim recalls making contact with Koreans stationed on the base, telling them to prepare for the arrival of Americans now that the war was over. Koreans, too, had an important role to play in their country’s future.

49 “Yank Rescue Team Cursed and Wined By Japs in Korea,” *The Lafayette Ledger*, October 26, 1945, https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=8627285

(accessed November 12, 2020).

50 “Citation for Major Hennessy” (undated), RG 226, Box 186 (Field Station Files, OSS Field Office Records), NARA. This box contains a number of reports detailing missions that succeeded in U.S. officials meeting with POWs in Korea.

51 Kim Chun-yŏp, *Changjŏng 1: Na ŭi kwangbokgun sichŏl sang* [The Long March: My Experiences with the Glorious Restoration Army] (Seoul: Tosŏch’ulp’an, 1987). See Kim’s chapters titled “8-15 Chŏnhu I & 2” (Before and After 8-15).

52 Ibid., 337

He also recalls having joined in on the drinking and singing session that transpired that evening, and even convinced a fellow Korean that he should partake in his first-ever taste of alcohol to celebrate their country’s liberation. The war was, after all, over. The next day he joined the crew in their return trip to Weihsien, China, with the expectation that they would soon be making a return flight to replace the Japanese in Korea. This, however, was not to be.

# Epilogue

Upon returning to China, the Koreans faced an uncertain future as the OSS, soon to be dissolved, confronted the challenge of how best to use the Koreans who had been placed under its care. Plans to dispatch them across the defeated Japanese empire, as proposed by General Yi in his meeting with Sargent, never materialized. On August 30, a telegram arrived from Kunming, China, questioning whether it would be possible to salvage any part of the recently “liquidated” Eagle Project.53 The next day a report was sent to the commanding officer of the China Theater requesting instructions on what they should do with the Koreans, who were now in Xi’an and “being held in readiness”: What was their present status? Did Korea remain in the China Theater? If so, did the commanding officer “desire intelligence operations in that country?” If not, “what disposition should be made of the trained personnel now at hand?” 54 Sargent continued to lobby on behalf of General Yi and the other Koreans into September but apparently to no avail. The positive connections that the OSS had established with the KPG apparently turned negative after the war had ended and the OSS confronted its demise. The thought of an army loyal to a particular Korean faction (as was the case with Koreans in the Eagle Project and the KPG) potentially may have had the power to influence Korean politics in a skewed way.

Then again, had the U.S. government allowed the Koreans to return to their country they would most likely have reduced the need to retain Japanese and their Korean trainees in their bureaucratic and police positions in southern Korea. Eventually, they were repatriated along with the KPG, on the condition that they refrain from conducting political activities (a promise that many, including KPG President Kim Ku, soon violated). General Yi Pŏm-sŏk remained active in military training; he was

53 “Telegram: Kunming to [William P.] Davis” (August 30, 1945), OSS New York/Overseas Station Records, RG 0226, Container 9, Folder 129, NARA.

54 “Eagle Project” (August 31, 1945), OSS New York/Overseas Station Records, RG 0226, Container 9, Folder 129, NARA.

instrumental in the formation of the Korean National Youth Corps, which according to one member of the U.S. Army Military Government in Korea was a rather “well-trained and armed” rightist army. This group trained in Suwon under the guidance of a “German-speaking Korean [Kang Se- hyŏng (aka Sche-Hyong Kang, Sze Hyong Kang)] who had been a resident of Germany from 1931 to 1935 as an open admirer of Adolph Hitler’s “brown shirt” youth brigade.55 Yi would later assume various positions within the Rhee administration after the Republic of Korea was founded in 1948.56

Willis Bird, as well, lived a checkered postwar life. His formal military career apparently ended soon after he returned from Seoul in August 1945. Sometime after, he apparently made his way to Thailand where he married the daughter of a Thai Air Force officer named Siddhi Savetsila and became involved in some shady operations in the 1960s that involved the Vietnam War. Bird was able to use his family contacts — many of his brothers-in-law were influential members in the Thai military

— to become, as Jonathan Marshall concludes, “the supply agent for the two biggest dope-trafficking forces in the region.” Marshall also discovered that Bird maintained contacts with the CIA, for whom he acted as their Bangkok agent for Sea Supply, a trading company that served as a front for one of its secret operations in the region.57 Bird, who was issued an indictment by Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy in 1962, escaped prison time by never returning to the United States to stand trial.58 This paper has traced the development and ultimate failure of the

most successful attempt to employ a Korean unit in the Pacific War. While Koreans residing overseas had contributed to the war effort in a number of different ways, the OSS plans for their participation differed in the unconventional ways it sought to employ their unique talents. The spy organization, however, appeared to be tolerated, but not fully accepted, by the other traditional branches of the military. Thus, it was disposed of rather easily soon after the war had run its course. Its lack of popularity

55 Richard D. Robinson, “Betrayal of a Nation,” reproduced in Frank Hoffmann and Mark E. Caprio, eds., *Witness to Korea 1946-47: The Unfolding of an Authoritarian Regime* (Berkeley, CA: Academia Publishers, 2022), 267.

56 See Gregory Henderson, Korea: *The Politics of the Vortex* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 215.

57 Jonathan Marshall, “Cooking the Books: The Federal Bureau of Narcotics, the China Lobby and Cold War Propaganda, 1950-1962,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 11, Issue 37, no. 1 (September 15, 2013): online journal.

58 Peter Dale Scott, *Drugs, Oil, and War: The United States in Afghanistan, Columbia, and Indochina* (Lanhum: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 196.

worked against the Koreans it trained when they tried to gain a position of significance in Korea’s post-liberation occupation by the U.S. and Soviet forces. It is difficult now to ascertain whether these Koreans could have made any significant contribution to the Allied occupation of southern Korea (and the entire Korean Peninsula) had they been allowed to return to their homeland immediately after Japan capitulated. The U.S. administration in southern Korea directed the Japanese, and the Koreans employed by them during the colonial period, to remain at their posts as it claimed that Koreans needed to be trained to assume these roles. 59 However, the Koreans who participated in the OSS training projects had received U.S. training, had demonstrated their loyalty to the war cause, and had secured the confidence of their American instructors. It would soon be clear that Koreans who had retained their positions would not be willing to relinquish them once their potential replacements were ready to replace them. Given the shortcomings of the U.S. administration of post- liberation southern Korea, many of which emerged from this ill-advised directive to retain colonial-era personnel, these OSS-trained Koreans could hardly have been a worse alternative.

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59 I cover this issue in Mark E. Caprio, “The Politics of Collaboration in Post- liberation Southern Korea,” in *In the Ruins of the Japanese Empire: Imperial Violence, State Destruction, and the Reordering of Modern East Asia*, edited by Barak Kushner and Andrew Levidis, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2020), 27-49.