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A BIT ON THE KOREAN COMINT EFFORT

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Until the outbreak of hostilities in Korea on 25 June 1950, Korea was an almost unknown country to the average American. The course of the conflict since that time and the effect that it has had on the world for the past 20 years have brought greater familiarity, especially to those who were intimately involved. To those who may be concerned with the present stalemated, but nonetheless potentially explosive situation in Korea, here is a thumbnail sketch of the Korean COMINT effort (less the KORCOM Air problem) when it began.

Prior to 25 June 1950, when the North Korean armed forces crossed the 38th parallel, there was virtually no COMINT effort on the North Korean communications. A U. S. Army Security Agency unit [redacted] began intercepting North Korean traffic and this effort was augmented by South Korean intercept (ROKN Group "M"). By the end of September 1950, Headquarters, ASAPAC (Tokyo, Japan) had established an advanced element in Taegu, Korea and in mid-October the 60th Signal Service Company [redacted] from Fort Lewis, Washington landed in Pusan. The total intercept was increased to 20 positions when [redacted] became operational in the midst of a golf course located in the outskirts of Seoul City.

With the availability of intercepted North Korean communications came the need for traffic analysts, cryptanalysts and linguists. There were no Korean linguists assigned to the Armed Forces Security Agency (AFSA, forerunner of NSA). One civilian who had studied the language while hospitalized and a female civilian of Korean descent both employed by AFSA, together with several Japanese linguists, established the first Korean language unit. It was possible to convert Japanese linguists due to the similarity of the grammar of both languages. To augment this language unit, reserve officer personnel with previous Korean language background were recalled to active duty and the Army Language School at Presidio of Monterey, California (now DLIWC) began to

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accelerate its program of training U. S. Army personnel in the Korean language.

In the interim, one of the two U. S. Army officers of Korean ancestry stationed as instructors at the Army Language School was immediately sent to Japan and assigned to ASAPAC. He was later joined by the remaining instructor and several other AFSA linguists in both Japan and in Korea.

Concurrently with the shortage of Korean linguists, there was an almost total lack of suitable Korean dictionaries and knowledge of North Korean military and technical terminology. In the beginning, terminology appearing in North Korean military communications was compiled and definitions were determined by context or by referring to Japanese and Chinese dictionaries. Other sources of terminology were derived from North Korean prisoners-of-war interrogation and captured documents. During this period, the conduct of prisoner-of-war interrogation was virtually left up to the imagination of the ASA linguists assigned to interrogate the subject. The interrogator was normally given only the military occupation speciality of the prisoner he was to interrogate.

At this point, we cannot continue with this topic without some appreciation of the cryptanalytic aspects of the North Korean COMINT effort. In the beginning phase of the conflict, North Korean encrypted messages used simple cryptosystems in large volumes and the cryptanalytic effort in the field and at NSA enjoyed high success. The North Koreans changed their systems frequently, but since the basic simplicity of the systems was retained, cryptanalytic exploitation was not a major problem. Therefore, the end-product translations produced during the latter part of 1950 and through the spring of 1951 were large in number and of extreme value to the customers. High echelon North Korean messages revealed much information about the capabilities and intentions of the North Korean forces and were considered by the U. N. High Command and field commanders to be a vitally important source of intelligence.

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Exploiting North Korean cryptosystems and producing translation reports was not hampered so much by a complex problem as by the large volume of highly significant messages which had to be published with critically limited qualified linguistic personnel. [redacted]

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(b)(3)-18 USC 798
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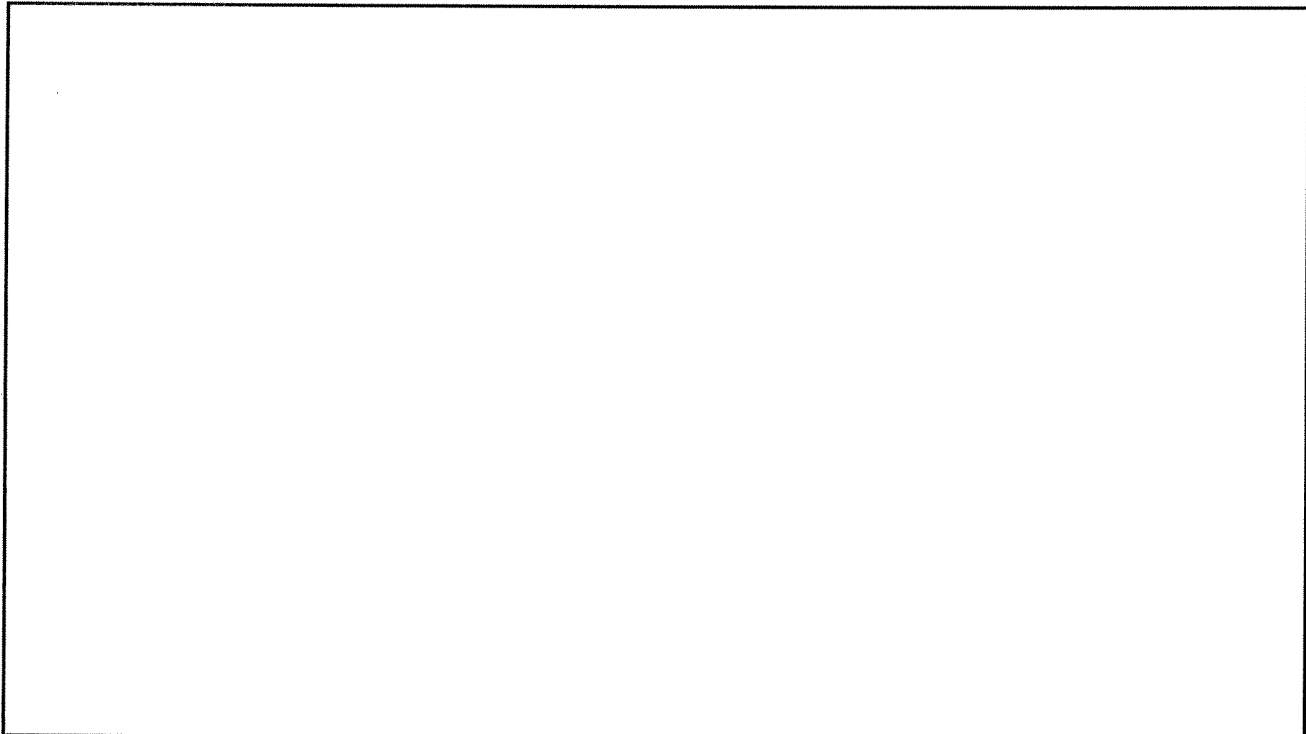
This situation continued until the truce agreement was signed in July 1953.

After the truce agreement was signed, another marked effort was made by the North Koreans [redacted]

[redacted] Since open hostilities had ceased and the situation was becoming static, the North Koreans began less use of radio communication and more use of landline and courier or mail services.

In 1952, North Korean communications targets other than military were intercepted. North Korean internal civil communications, which in many respect resembled the Western Union, produced plaintext messages passed between major North Korean cities and industrial complexes. These messages contained a large variety of subjects ranging from personal messages to coal, lead, zinc and other mining statistics. Order of Battle information was also available when these messages were passed to or from members of the military forces.

[redacted]



We have seen a COMINT problem finding its beginning with the North Korean forces crossing the 38th parallel on 25 June 1950 and developing into a full fledged problem during the hostilities; then with the end of the conflict graually changing into a peace time COMINT effort except for couple of intense periods following the capture of the PUEBLO and shutdown of a U. S. reconnaissance aircraft. However, there is one difference - the North Koreans are not the North Koreans of 1950. They are now a modern, better equipped, better trained and experienced military machine. In addition, there are thousands of well trained and well armed Chinese Communist forces across the Yalu River just waiting to come to the aid of their North Korean frïends. So, there should be no less requirments for continued watchfulness today than that which existed during the Korean War.

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