

R E S T R I C T E D

KOREAN COMMUNICATIONS

(An Official Signal Corps History)

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To the American, Korea is a curious land where old men wear funny little transparent high hats that sit on top of their heads, where women wear turned-up shoes and the waistlines of their costumes correspond to the bustline, where square-rigged fishing boats have orange-tinted sails, and where every shanty seems to have electric light and no plumbing at all.

Thus it is fitting that if there were any place in the world where American Army Signal Corps officers would find themselves in the extraordinary role of administering a national postal system, a vast life insurance business and a nation's broadcasting system, all under the head of communications, that place would be Korea.

And that, in the crisp Korean winter of 1945, is what is taking place.

Shortly after the Japanese surrender, the XXIV Corps, assigned to occupy this country that had been under Japanese domination for 35 years, began trying to contact the Japanese military there by radio, on 25 August. For hours, operators, not knowing the call letters of any of the Japanese stations in the land, called Korea, over and over again, in Kano, the Japanese Morse Code, without response.

Finally, a Japanese operator ("with a fist like a foot on his key," the American radiomen said) sent a reply. Through his station, near the Korean capital, the XXIV Corps contacted Lt Gen Yoshito Kazuki, commanding the Imperial Army in Korea.

General Kazuki agreed to surrender his forces unconditionally to the Americans in accordance with the Imperial Rescript.

Did he speak for all military forces in Korea, he was asked.

No, he did not speak for the Imperial Navy.

Well, could he?

No, he could not.

Then who could?

That would be Vice Admiral Gisaburo Yamaguchi, who was at Jinsen, the seaport of the capital, a few miles away.

So, there was another delay while a message was carried to Admiral Yamaguchi, who readily agreed to surrender.

But, it developed, neither the General nor the Admiral could speak for the military government. So a third message was cleared to General Nobuyuke Abe (Imperial Army, Retired), the governor

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general, and when he had willingly replied with his surrender by radio, Corps made final preparations to move up from the scene of its last hard-fought victory, on barren Okinawa.

But before the movement, the new radio channel carried the astonishing request from the Japanese general for more American propoganda leaflets to be showered upon his area. After the surrender, American bombers had begun dropping leaflets over Korea, telling the people our forces were coming and to keep the peace until we arrived. But the peace, in Korea, was enforced by the Japanese, and the Koreans were impatient for independence (they still are, but that is a later phase of the story). There had been demonstrations and bloodshed when Jap troops opened fire as they always had in the past at the slightest sign of Korean uprising. So General Kazuki was very gled to see the American bombers for a change, and the Americans, anxious to end all strife, obliged him with more leaflet bombardments.

On 4 September, three B-25's carried the advance element of Corps to Korea, including a Signal Corps captain who was Corps Wire Officer. He immediately established circuits over the native wire system between Keijo, the capital, and Jinsen, the seaport, some 25 miles to the west, where the American troops were to land. Keijo and Jinsen are the Japanese names for these cities, but all Korean towns have at least two names, Japanese and Korean, and sometimes a Chinese name as well. Keijo (pronounced KAY-jo) is Japanese, while the Korean name is Seoul (pronounced the same as sole) and the Chinese is Kyongson (pronounced as spelled). The Japanese Jinsen becomes Chemulpo in Korean and Inchon in Chinese.

Two days after the first advance party, a Signal Corps lieutenant with a radio team and a dismantled SCR-399, a PE-75 power unit and an antenna out to frequency, arrived in a C-47 transport plane to establish all-American channels to Okinawa and the Command Ship Catoctin (or AGC 5).

Reinforced by his entire unit of eight enlisted men, the lieutenant marched up to the sentry who stood with fixed bayonet at Japanese Army Headquarters (the Japanese had asked, and been granted, permission by radio to retain their arms to protect themselves from the Koreans), and demanded through an interpreter, to see "the Officer-in-charge".

The Signal Corps unit felt quite a bit outnumbered, to put it mildly, and they all agreed later that the wrath of the day did not justify the perspiration in the palms of their hands and on their foreheads as they were ushered into the midst of hundreds of the hating and hated men they had been fighting not many days before.

The "officer-in-charge" turned out to be Lt Gen Kazuki who appeared none too happy at what he thought was the prospect of having to surrender to a lieutenant. But the lieutenant told him

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he was only interested in their radio station. He did not state, until he was taken to it, what his interest was. Then he went about taking it over and putting it in operation for the U. S. Forces. The first response from Corps headquarters was more comforting than a long-delayed letter from home. To the isolated little group of Signalmen it was like the G-men arriving as the hero was about to be put on the spot in a gangster movie.

The Japanese proved gracious hosts, within their limitations, until Corps arrived on 9 September, after a landing at Chemulpo the day before. Soon after that, the transmitter site was moved to the Japanese radio station at Fuhei, a few miles away. Lack of crystals made most of the Japanese equipment at Fuhei inoperable. Jerry rigging and cannibalizing enabled part of it to be used and crystals were ordered to make the rest operable.

Wire channels consisted originally of two telephones on the desk of the hotel used as Corps Headquarters, to the 7th Division at Chemulpo, supplemented by radio. The two original instruments were increased to six by the time the 101st Signal Battalion arrived with a mobile switchboard in a truck, which it set up in an alley adjoining the hotel. It also set up radio channels to Tokyo, Manila and Okinawa over SCR 399s.

From there on, tactical communications developed normally to cover Army Service Command 24 and the divisions -- 6th, 7th and 40th -- as they took over their assigned areas throughout Korea below the 38th Parallel.

The 38th Parallel is a line that was to assume increasing significance to the American Occupation Forces. That was the line of demarcation between the Russian and American occupation troops in Korea agreed upon by the two governments. Encouraged by General MacArthur, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, who in turn was State Department policy, the XXIV Corps prepared to set up close liaison with our Russian allies. The first inkling they received of how their liaison efforts were to be received was when the Russians chopped off all communications at the 38th Parallel.

That was the foundation of a wall of mystery the Russians erected along the predetermined boundary, and although the wall leaked with lurid tales, largely unconfirmed, little substantiated information has been obtained up to this writing of what there is behind that wall.

An underground cable ran from Manchuria, the length of Korea, connecting with a submarine cable at Fusan that afforded a wire link to Japan, and there were open wire facilities as well, but the Russians opened only one wire circuit to the South, and at the border they placed a switch so that, before the American commanding general could call the Russian commander, a Russian Army officer at the border had to be convinced first that the call should be switched through.

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Because of the language differences between the two occupying forces, the Americans suggested that a Russian radio team be stationed in our area to operate with their headquarters and an American team be sent to the Russian area. The Russians agreed and a Signal Corps lieutenant from XXIV Corps accompanied an American liaison party to the Russian headquarters.

While the ranking American officers in the liaison party were present, discussing many phases of the occupation with the Russians, the lieutenant was extended every courtesy and guardedly allowed the freedom of the area. But when the other American officers departed, the radio team still had not been shown where it was to set up operation, and he remained behind.

"From then on," he stated later, "I was 'escorted' wherever I went by a Russian major. My meals were served in my room and the Russians made it quite plain there were things they did not intend to let me see. They were generally courteous - and they kept me well supplied with liquor - but whenever I wanted to go anywhere, the Russian major showed up, guiding me away from installations. Once, a Russian woman officer came to see me, saying she wanted to refresh her knowledge of English, and asked me many questions about our forces. I didn't tell her anything that wasn't public knowledge."

"Another time, I saw a Russian mobile radio set, and, because most of the Russian equipment I had seen before was American lend-lease stuff, like SCR 399s, I was curious about it. I walked over to the truck and was about to step inside for a look when the Major appeared and took my arm and walked me in the other direction."

The lieutenant finally left before the American radio team had set up for operations, with what he felt was the subtle encouragement of the Russians. The team was finally put on an operative basis, but the extent of their duties was little more than a regular contact with our station and a report of "nothing doing". Necessity for any traffic had all but disappeared when repeated efforts at liaison invariably got hung up on the Russian commander's polite explanation that he was powerless to act except on orders from Moscow.

Meantime, the American enlisted men were housed with Russian troops in a barracks quartering male signal soldiers on the first floor and women signal soldiers on the second. The Russians reported that the women in the Russian Army are not segregated like our WACS, and the Infantrywomen, especially, resent any comparison with WACS, insisting they are soldiers doing the same job as the men. The American soldiers were well treated, and often treated - with vodka - and had little to do.

If the Russian attitude complicated the purely military aspects of occupation, it doubly complicated the civil government, which became a problem child of the American Army as soon as it moved in. The United Nations had promised Korea freedom and inde-

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pendence "in due course" after its 35 years of Japanese domination.

To generalize on what the Koreans themselves wanted, would be an unsafe device for a current historian inasmuch as 87 different political parties registered below the 38th Parallel soon after the U. S. occupation (the figure, it is believed, will be greatly reduced upon close examination), but there was no doubt of considerable dissatisfaction over the division of the country between the Russians and Americans, and there was a general impatience over the time required to rid the country of the Japanese and to turn the government over to the Koreans.

The reasons for this state of affairs were reflected as well in the civil government's Division of Communications as in any other part of it.

American officers gasped at the diversity of activities that came under the so-called Bureau of Communications, involving such unrelated items as the operation of hospitals and sanitariums, and a very large insurance and savings business. But they were told to be thankful they had not taken over before, that until recently all rail and trucking transportation, and air and shipping lines had also been under the Bureau of Communications.

The American lieutenant colonel who took over the Directorship of Communications under the American military governor, found, first of all, that the key positions were occupied by Japanese, and his first mission was to get rid of them.

That could not be accomplished overnight without a breakdown of communications and without severing all hope of anything like an adequate orientation on the organization and operation of the system.

We knew that Korea was a mountainous country, 463 miles long and 170 miles wide, that in 1940 the population was 25 million, of which 600,000 were Japanese, and that in 1938 there were 5,600 miles of telegraph lines, 7,100 miles of telephone lines and 1,031 post offices, all government owned and operated.

We were to learn that of the 20,000 employees, 4,000, or 20 per cent, were Japs, and this 20 per cent held 84 per cent of the key positions. We were to see the results of a bureaucracy run wild, with Japanese drawing huge salaries for fictional duties and useless sections and divisions pyramided to afford soft jobs, as well as large real estate holdings largely representing homes for executives. The whole Bureau was shot through with inefficiency. Bureau policies evidently did nothing to discourage absenteeism and the record of it was staggering.

In the first month of operating the Bureau, we got rid of 1,237 Japanese employees without in the least impairing the organization. Some of them were placed under arrest, such as the one who

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blantly admitted having withdrawn official funds from the bank and transferred them to his own account because he "didn't think they were safe". His own account happened to have been in the same bank.

The Bureau, as we found it, was divided into six sections and 46 divisions; and the country, for purposes of the Bureau's operations, was divided into four districts. Of two of these districts, Pyongyang and Wousan, we know practically nothing because they are north of 38 degrees North Latitude. All military communications stop, of course, at the 38th Parallel and even mail does not move across the line. Below that line, the northwestern district was administered from Seoul and the southeastern district from Fusan.

But only 35 per cent of the Bureau's operations were actually communications, as the Signal Corps considers communications. In addition to telephone and telegraph, the Bureau ran radio broadcasting, the postal system and elaborate offshoots of the postal system such as postal savings and postal insurance. Postal insurance was not the insurance of packages as Americans know it, but actual life insurance with all its variations of annuities and such, and in connection with that the Bureau owned several sanitariums for the treatment of policy holders and employees.

As in Japan, the post office in each town and village was also the telegraph office and usually the telephone office. The post office in the smaller communities was a concession, and the postmaster purchased even the stamps for resale. It was a choice concession, however, and the postmasters invariably prospered. For those who needed a little grubstake, the Japanese had formed a "society" to finance them, since the Bureau of Communications could not expend its own funds for such purposes. The society, interestingly enough, drew on postal savings for its finances.

Like the roads, like the transportation, like all the utilities and most all of the machinery throughout Japan and Korea, much of the communications equipment had been of fair to good quality, but it was in an incredible state of disrepair. Virtually all of it was of Japanese manufacture, mostly copied from German and American designs. Korea itself had facilities only for assembly, testing and repair. As a rule, radio transmitters and receivers were lacking in modern improvements, and telephone instruments, switchboards and inside plant equipment were 10 to 15 years outdated by our standards. City telephone systems were partially automatic. The telephones themselves were sidetone instruments - the Japanese had not manufactured anti-sidetone equipment. Telephone service was slow to a maddening degree. Only from 50 to 60 per cent of the calls were completed, due to untrained operators and unattended boards as well as decrepit equipment. There was a shortage of switchboard plugs, and as many as 13 out of 15 cords on some boards were inoperative.

Over everything lay the damaging effects of neglect. Lack of

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manpower undoubtedly contributed to this, but American experts questioned whether the war was to blame for most of it. Preventive maintenance was a word as foreign to the Japs, and consequently the Koreans, as the white soldiers who towered over them on the streets, and it was difficult to even interpret the phrase into their language. Their theory was, "As long as it works, don't bother with it."

Surveying the rundown facilities in Fusan, the Signal Corps major directing that section of the Bureau of Communications, remarked: "In the States, we would scrap all this junk and start out fresh."

But in Korea, the "junk" had to continue functioning while the Army men responsible for it wrestled with the problem of where they would obtain repair and replacement parts with Japan out of business.

If the Americans had thought the equipment was in a disgraceful state of neglect, they had a new revelation in store for them when they tried to examine the records, such as they were, of the variegated empire that came under the heading of communications.

Under ideal conditions, this would have been a dismaying job in a bureau so complex and shot with corruption, yet withal handling vast sums of money. Add to this the fact that all documents were in Japanese, and what there were had been carelessly kept, plus the fact that no records at all were available from the two districts in Russian territory, and some idea can be obtained of the bewildering morass in which the Army men found themselves.

"It would take a battery of super-accountants to even begin to straighten this mess out - if we had any accountants," said the Lieutenant Colonel in charge of the Bureau. (Accountants were requisitioned from the United States.)

One of the Signal Corps lieutenants assigned to the Bureau had, it developed, worked for an insurance company in civilian life, and he was given the task, among other things, of looking over the life insurance aspects of the Bureau's operations.

It became a standing preface to all his verbal reports, and eventually an office joke, to say, "You won't believe this - I can't believe it myself - but these people have....."

Having quickly shaken the Japs out of obviously parasitical jobs, the Director of Communications began a program of gradually eliminating them throughout the organization. The program calls for replacement of Japanese officials by Korean subordinates with similar replacements by their subordinates down the line until basic vacancies are left for new Koreans. But Koreans capable of filling many important jobs cannot be found. The Japs did have capable and conscientious technicians in many vital positions. The policy of the Director is to make the Koreans run the entire system themselves, with only advice from the Americans. In line with this,

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So many activities come under the Bureau of Communications that twenty-nine buildings in this Headquarters compound at Seoul, the capital, do not seem too many. The two pictures form a panoramic view along a principal downtown thoroughfare.





The Central Telegraph building at Seoul is typical of the modern appearing construction to be found in the capital city. Elsewhere are to be found less impressive buildings, like the combination Post Office and Telephone Central at Kaesong.





Interior decoration does not keep up with modern fronts. This equipment room is in the Seoul Central Telegraph building. Below is a night scene of a telegraph room at Pusan. Night rates are higher because of a wage differential and dislike of night work.





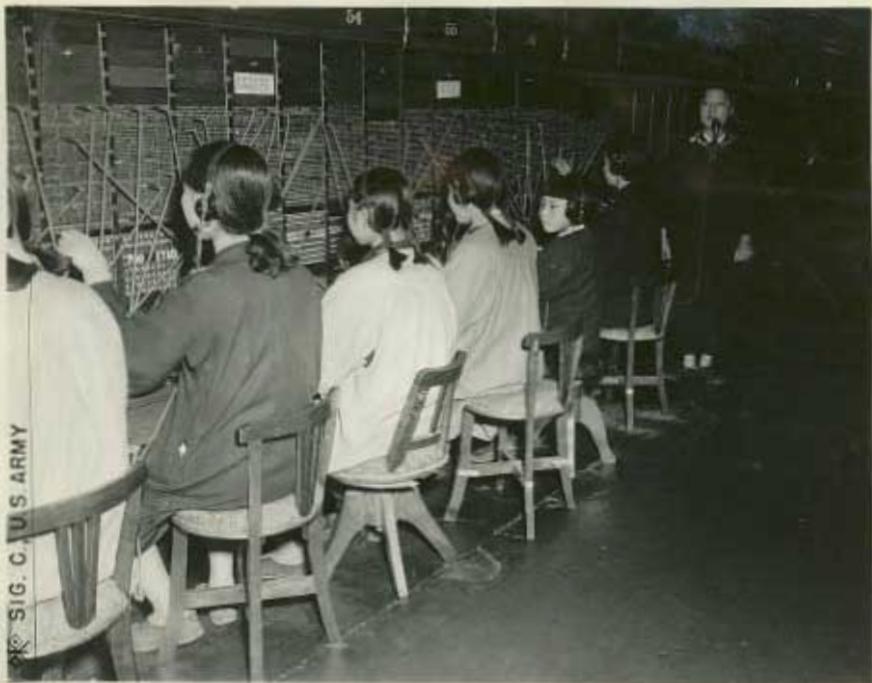
Congregation at rear is usual reaction to request for information by American personnel, in this instance at the Chonju Telegraph office. Below is a service observer position at Pusan, now monitored by Korean male personnel for U.S. Army Intelligence purposes.





Long distance positions at Pusan (above) and Taegu (below) are indicative of the greatly reduced number of toll calls. This is caused by severance of service with Japan and the area north of  $38^{\circ}$ , and departure of Japanese residents, as well as circuit and equipment troubles.





Common battery manual positions at Kokomon telephone exchange, Seoul, employs a typical array of young, not too efficient operators. Difficulties are increased by decrepit equipment. Notice (below) the defective cords.





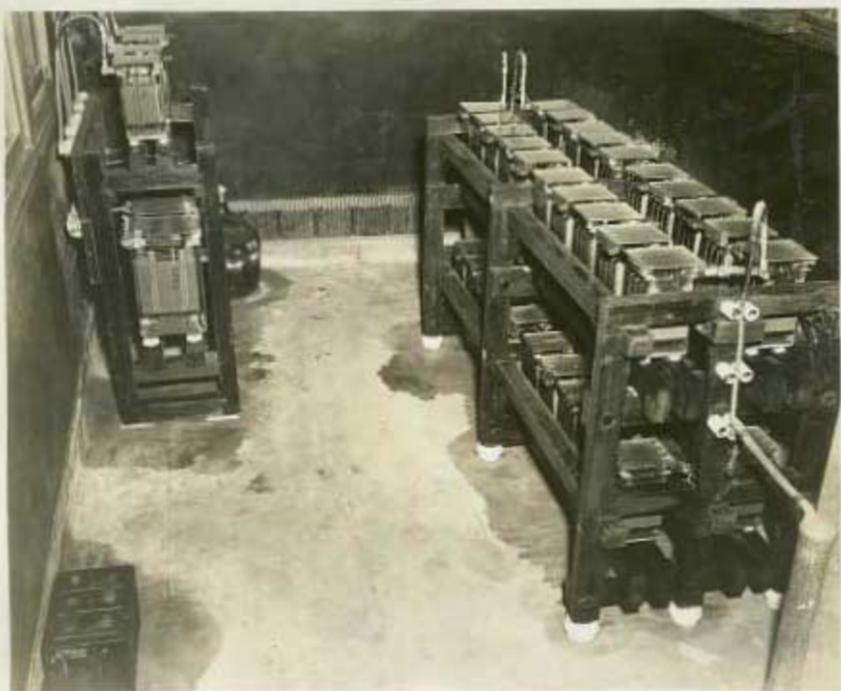
The main distribution frame (above) of the Kokoson telephone exchange typifies common conditions - improvised and unprotected terminal strips, untidy and unsoldered connections. Another similar example (below) is at a Seoul dial telephone exchange.





Carrier bays at a Seoul Repeater station show evidence of cannibalism for replacement parts. In the battery room (below) bamboo sticks are utilized as separators because of lack of replacement parts. The Japanese were not too concerned over maintenance items.





The batteries at the Inchon telephone office have been in service for more than a decade, and are a continual source of trouble. Cable vaults (below) in Pusan are some of the few indications to be found of satisfactory workmanship.





The Japanese manufactured equipment is in many cases relatively modern, but as these carrier bays at Seoul clearly illustrate, practically all such equipment is of American or German design. Good facilities, too, suffered from lack of preventative maintenance.





Pole line maintenance suffered from a shortage of competent personnel, tools, and materials. Running north of Pusan is one of the heaviest single toll lines, bearing eight-pin arms. Original construction was often of good quality.





Toll line over irregular terrain near Pusan typifies poor practice of non-grading, using poles of same height. Still unfinished at war's end was the underground structure (below) at Seoul for air raid protection. Its equipment included an 800-line automatic dial system.

