



**The History of
Army Security Agency Operations
On Kanghwa Do (1956-1976)
...And Beyond**

The History of Army Security Agency Operations on Kanghwa Do, Korea (1956-1976)...and Beyond

In The Beginning: Army Security Agency in Korea 1945 to 1950

The hostilities of World War II were brought to a close by the surrender of Imperial Japan announced by Emperor Hirohito on August 15, 1945 and formally signed on September 2, 1945.¹ Less than two weeks later, on September 15, 1945, the Signal Security Agency (SSA) was separated from the Signal Corps and became the Army Security Agency (ASA).² The newly established Army Security Agency assumed command of all communications intelligence (COMINT) and communications security (COMSEC) activities and personnel in the United States Army.³

Japanese rule over Korea ended upon the surrender of Japan in World War II. The division of Korea between the United States and the Soviet Union after the defeat of Japan was part of an agreement reached at the Potsdam Conference in 1945.⁴ General John R. Hodge's US XXIV Corps landed at Inchon in September 1945 and established a military government south of the 38th parallel while the Soviet 25th Army served as the occupation force in the north.^{5,6}

The Army Security Agency Pacific (ASAPAC) was activated on November 23, 1945 at Manila, Philippine Islands.⁷ ASAPAC exercised operational control over a number of units in the Pacific Theater including the 111th Signal Service Company, San Miguel, Philippine Islands and the 126th Signal Service Company, Kyoto, Japan.⁸

The 1st Operating Platoon of the 126th Signal Service Company was the first ASA unit to operate in Korea. The unit deployed to Korea from Japan on December 20, 1945 to provide COMINT support to U.S. forces in Korea.⁹ The operations site was located eight miles from downtown Seoul at a former Japanese radio station.¹⁰ By the spring of 1947 the 1st Operating Platoon of the 126th Signal Service Company consisted of no more than 20 men and was replaced by 111th Signal Service Company on April 26, 1947.¹¹

During its deployment in Korea, the 111th Signal Service Company monitored communications traffic of the Soviet 25th Army in North Korea from a semi-fixed operations site located five miles east of Seoul.¹² Coincident with the final stages of the Soviet withdrawal from North Korea, the 111th Signal Service Company redeployed to Okinawa in July 1948.¹³ Consequently, from July 1948 until the beginning of the Korean War there were no ASA units stationed in South Korea and U.S. COMINT coverage of North Korea was virtually non-existent.¹⁴

By 1949 the United States had withdrawn its occupation forces from South Korea leaving only the 500 man Korean Military Assistance Group (KMAG) to train the fledgling Republic of Korea (ROK) Army.¹⁵ After 1949 the Army Security Agency turned its attention to developing mobile field units to support tactical commanders at every level, a task accelerated by the outbreak of the Korean War on 25 June 1950.¹⁶

Army Security Agency in the Korean War

The ASA Pacific Liaison Detachment (Provisional) was activated in September 1950 and staffed with personnel from ASAPAC in Japan.¹⁷ The detachment, consisting of three officers and five enlisted men, landed in Pusan on 18 September 1950.¹⁸ Its mission was to support 8th US Army, Korea (EUSAK) and to coordinate and control support being furnished by a South Korean COMINT group.¹⁹ The detachment became the first ASA unit to conduct operations in Korea during the Korean War.

On 2 October 1950 the 50th Signal Service Detachment, a COMSEC unit, arrived in Pusan from Tokyo, Japan.²⁰ The detachment monitored all radio telegraph nets operating with UN Ground Forces under operational control of 8th US Army, Korea in order to detect and report COMSEC violations.^{21, 22}

The 60th Signal Service Company was the first ASA mobile unit in Korea.²³ Following intensified training as a mobile unit at Fort Lewis, Washington, the company arrived in Pusan on 9 October 1950.²⁴ The company arrived in Seoul by convoy on 16 October 1950.^{25, 26}

By November 1950, ASA Pacific Liaison Detachment (Provisional) had been deactivated and replaced by ASA Pacific (Advance) augmented by personnel of the 50th Signal Service Company.²⁷

As the Korean War was being fought, the Army Security Agency reorganized. ASA redesignated its existing signal service companies as numbered communication reconnaissance companies.²⁸ ASA also activated new communication reconnaissance (Comm Recon) companies, battalions, and groups to support tactical commanders.²⁹

The 303d Comm Recon Battalion, Headquarters Detachment, was the first communications reconnaissance unit to arrive in Korea during the Korean War. It arrived during January 1951 and co-located with ASA Pacific (Advance) as theater ASA command and control.³⁰

The 501st Comm Recon Group became operational in July 1951 and assumed administrative and operational control of all ASA units in Korea.³¹ At the same time, ASA Pacific (Advance) was deactivated and all of its equipment and records were transferred to the 501st Comm Recon Group.³²

By the end of the Korean War, the 501st Comm Recon Group had three battalions and five companies assigned.³³ In addition to the many citations awarded³³ to its subordinate units, the 501st Comm Recon Group was credited for participation in six campaigns and was awarded the Meritorious Unit Commendation of the United States Army and the Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation.³⁴

Post War Army Security Agency Reorganization

During the Korean War, the Army Security Agency had operated with flexible battalion headquarters overseeing the operations of independent security (COMSEC) and collection (COMINT) companies.³⁵ Then in 1955, the Army Security Agency created fixed battalions with organic companies that combined both COMSEC and COMINT.³⁶

Also in 1955, the Army Security Agency took over the responsibility for electronic intelligence (ELINT) and communications related electronic countermeasures (ECM) from the Signal Corps.³⁷ In Korea, the Signal Corps transferred two ELINT units to the 501st Comm Recon Group on 1 November 1955.³⁸

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The 9490th Technical Service Unit (TSU), Signal Service Team was one of the two ELINT units that were transferred from the Signal Corps to the 501st Comm Recon Group. Concurrent with its transfer to ASA, the 9490th TSU was redesignated as the 12th ASA Detachment (7212 DU) on 1 November 1955.³⁹ The unit's operations site was located at Kumchon overlooking the DMZ, approximately 18 miles north of Seoul.⁴⁰

Changes to Army Security Agency TOE's during 1956 resulted in ASA TOE units being redesignated from "Communications Reconnaissance" to "Army Security Agency" on 1 July 1956.⁴¹ The 501st Comm Recon Group became the 501st Army Security Agency Group and all of its subordinate Comm Recon TOE units were also redesignated as "Army Security Agency" units.⁴²

Army Security Agency Kanghwa Do Operations Begin

By the end of June 1956, the 43d Engineer Group had commenced work on a new site for the 12th ASA Detachment at Kanghwa Do, an island off the west coast of Korea.⁴³ The new ASA site was located on Koryo-san, a mountain with an elevation of 1,430 feet and just five miles from North Korean territory.⁴⁴

In October 1956, Elmer Hackbarth was an electronic warfare equipment repairman (MOS 283.1) assigned to the 12th ASA Det, 501st ASA Group. Elmer was part of the team that performed the initial Kanghwa Do site set up. The following is his story about the start up of the ASA site on Kanghwa Do.

"Arrived in Korea Oct 1956 and was assigned to the 12th ASA Detachment out of the 501st ASA GP. The 12th ASA Detachment was on a hill next to the DMZ north of Seoul. I was there for about a month and then was sent on ahead of my unit to the west coast island of Kanghwa-do at the mouth of the Han River in the Yellow Sea. This was a new camp and construction was just being completed. There was no wiring for operations and no power except for the generator. My first job was to scrounge some wire and start wiring the operations hut on top of the mountain. It was not easy as we had but the crudest of tools (hammer, nails, and pocket knife). In about three weeks, my unit and equipment were moved to this location and operations commenced as soon as we could get some antenna's up."

"The operator's MOS was 204.1 and my MOS was 283.1. I was the electronic technician and was responsible, along with two others, for maintenance of the equipment. Before long I was the only one left to maintain the equipment due to rotation. In the unit we had the usual radio ops, cooks, motor pool, and one or two officers. We only numbered around 20 in all."

*Elmer Hackbarth (283.1)⁴⁵
501st ASA Gp 1956-57*

The 12th ASA Detachment moved from Kumchon to Kanghwa Do in December 1956.⁴⁶ The detachment's mission was to search for, intercept and process non-communications signals (ELINT).⁴⁷ Less than a month later, the 12th ASA Det was redesignated from 12th ASA Detachment (7212) to 255th USASA Detachment effective on 1 January 1957.⁴⁸

During 1957, the Army Security Agency inactivated all of its TOE units and replaced them with mission tailored TD units.⁴⁹ These new TD units were given the designator U.S. Army Security Agency (USASA) to distinguish them from Army Security Agency (ASA) TOE units.⁵⁰

Thus, the 501st ASA Group was inactivated effective 15 October 1957 and the 508th USASA Group was organized as its replacement TD unit.⁵¹ At the same time, the Group's subordinate TOE units were also inactivated and replaced by TD units.⁵²

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Also effective on 15 October 1957, the 277th USASA Company (a new TD unit) was organized as a subordinate unit of 508th USASA Group.⁵³ The 277th USASA Company was organized from the personnel and equipment of the discontinued 255th USASA Detachment on Kanghwa Do in addition to the assets from five (5) other numbered detachments of the inactivated 501st ASA Group.⁵⁴

Because the 277th USASA Company was organized from ASA detachments located at widely separated geographic locations, the elements of the company were also dispersed throughout Korea.⁵⁵ The resulting organizational structure of the 277th USASA Company and a summary of activities are outlined below:

The Company Headquarters Section, Control Section, and Service Platoon was co-located with the Headquarters Company, 508th USASA Group at Camp Spade in Yong Dong Po.⁵⁶

1st Platoon (formerly 255th USASA Det and Det 6, 501st ASA Gp) was located on Kanghwa Do.⁵⁷ The platoon maintained a central compound, two operations sites, and a mobile team. Effective 1 September 1958, the 1st Platoon relinquished COMINT intercept and DF functions to the 177th USASA Company and subsequently closed one operations site.⁵⁸

2d Platoon (formerly 256th USASA Det and Det 1, 501st ASA Gp) was located on the island of Paengyong-do (P-Y-do), 150 miles from Yong Dong Po and seven miles from North Korean territory.⁵⁹ The platoon maintained a central compound and two outlying sites, each six miles from central area. Effective 30 April 1959, the 2d Platoon ceased ELINT operations and then on 30 May 1959 it turned over the compound to ROK Defense Security Agency.⁶⁰

3d Platoon (formerly Det 2, 501st ASA Gp) was located at Wonam-ni, on the east coast of Korea.⁶¹ The 3d Platoon's mission and compound were transferred to the 177th USASA Company on 30 August 1958.⁶²

4th Platoon (formerly Det 3, 501st ASA Gp) was located at Chuncheon.⁶³ On 31 October 1957, after just sixteen (16) days in existence, the 4th Platoon was inactivated due to shortage of personnel and a poor operations site.⁶⁴

By September 1958, the 277th USASA Company had discontinued both its 3d and 4th Platoons along with their COMINT missions. In May 1959 the company discontinued its 2d Platoon, leaving only the 1st Platoon on Kanghwa Do with its ELINT mission. As a result, by July 1959 the company headquarters and control section, as well as, the service and ELINT platoons were consolidated on Kanghwa Do.⁶⁵

On 1 June 1961, the 277th USASA Operations Company was redesignated as the 226th USASA Operations Company (C) directly subordinate to the 508th USASA Group (Field Army).⁶⁶ By this time, the company's ELINT operations had been supplemented with a COMINT capability, elevating the company to a SIGINT operation.

The 226th USASA Operations Company (C) continued operations at Kanghwa Do until December 1967 when the company was redesignated as USASA Operations Company Kanghwa Do.⁶⁷ The company's name change was due to a Department of the Army decision that TD units would no longer bear numerical designations.⁶⁸ The decision affected ASA TD units worldwide including the 508th USASA Group (Field Army) which was also redesignated during December 1967 as USASA Group Korea.

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The distance separating ASA personnel on Kanghwa Do from headquarters USASA Group Korea was more than doubled when the Group relocated from Camp Spade in Yong Dong Po to Camp Humphreys (K-6), 40 miles south of Seoul, on 6 March 1970.⁶⁹ USASA Group Korea was then co-located with USASA Operations Company Pyongtaek, the control element for USASA Operations Company Kanghwa Do.⁷⁰

Until 1970 the ASA unit on Kanghwa Do was accessible only by ferry.⁷¹ In early 1970 the first Kanghwa Bridge was completed which significantly reduced surface travel time to destinations on the mainland.

The withdrawal of the US 7th Infantry Division in March 1971 was part of a major troop strength reduction in Korea.⁷² Another casualty of the drawdown in Korea was USASA Group Korea, which was replaced by a smaller unnumbered field station (USASA Field Station Korea) on 30 September 1971.⁷³

In late 1971, under a plan to eliminate high exposure sites, manned SIGINT operations on Kanghwa Do were replaced by a remote operation controlled from USASA Field Station Korea at Camp Humphreys. Kanghwa Do Detachment of USASA Field Station Korea was organized on 30 September 1971 as a replacement unit for the discontinued USASA Operations Company Kanghwa Do.

After beginning remote operations under Project Adventurer, most personnel from the Kanghwa Do detachment were reassigned to the USASA Field Station Korea at Camp Humphreys. In the final stages of closing the base camp, Captain Gail D. Oxley, the Kanghwa Do Detachment Commanding Officer, departed Korea on 17 December 1971 to attend a stateside Army school. With Captain Oxley's departure there were no commissioned officers remaining on Kanghwa Do, leaving a Chief Warrant Officer, Don Nesheim, in command the detachment.

First Lieutenant Paul Queck was reassigned from the USASA Field Station Korea at Camp Humphreys to the Kanghwa Do Detachment and arrived there on 3 January 1972, which restored command of the detachment to a commissioned officer. Lieutenant Queck had been the USASA Field Station Korea S3 and had written the plan for how the Kanghwa Do Detachment would be supported by the Field Station after closure of the base camp. Queck became the last commanding officer of the operations on Kanghwa Do before closing of the base camp. The following is his story about the closing of the base camp on Kanghwa Do.

"It was a cold January day on the mountain when I first met Don Nesheim. It was January 3, 1972. I was there to take over as Commanding Officer from him after the folks at ASA headquarters in Arlington Hall Station, Virginia realized ASA Korea had put Don, a W-3, in charge of a company – an Army no-no back then."

"We had a friendly, but very short meeting. The lower compound was being cleaned out for turnover to the ROK Marines, while topside was being set up to be self-sufficient. Don told me the unit had a plan that was working and recommended I stay with it. I did, and he was right!"

*Paul Queck⁷⁴
Kanghwa Do Detachment
1972*

When the base camp was closed and turned over to the Republic of Korea Marines on 10 February 1972, a small cadre of maintenance and support personnel was retained at the Kanghwa Do Detachment to support the remote controlled operation on Koryo-san. First Lieutenant Queck returned to the USASA Field Station Korea at Camp Humphreys and assumed his former position as the Field Station S3. The USASA Field Station Korea continued to conduct remote controlled SIGINT operation of several sites overlooking the Korean DMZ, including Kanghwa Do, until 1977.

Intelligence and Security Command (INSCOM) Operations Begin

During 1977 the Army reorganized and consolidated its intelligence units. Effective 1 January 1977, the Army Security Agency (ASA) was redesignated as the Intelligence and Security Command (INSCOM).⁷⁵ Also on 1 January 1977, the U.S. Army Intelligence Agency (USAINTA) was assigned to INSCOM.⁷⁶ Subsequently, USAINTA was merged with INSCOM on 1 October 1977, which completed the integration of Army intelligence assets into a single major Army command.⁷⁷ The formation of INSCOM put an end to the fragmentation of Army intelligence assets under separate control of ACSI, USAINTA, and USASA.⁷⁸

The formation of INSCOM in 1977 also affected USASA Field Station Korea (USASAFSK) which was redesignated as the U.S. Army Field Station Korea (USAFSK) on 1 May 1977 and subordinated to the newly activated 501st MI Group headquartered in Seoul.⁷⁹ In addition to its remote detachments near the Korean DMZ, the field station was assigned four intelligence companies: Headquarters and Service Company, Operations Company, 332nd ASA Operations Company (transferred to 532nd MI BN in 1986), and the 146th ASA Aviation Company (subsequently reorganized as 3rd MI BN).⁸⁰

In the years since the establishment of INSCOM, the field station was redesignated several times. First, on 7 January 1988 U.S. Army Field Station Korea (USAFSK) was redesignated as the 751st MI Battalion.⁸¹ Then, the 751st MI Battalion was redesignated as the 527th MI Battalion on 16 June 2000.⁸² Finally, on 1 October 2009 the 527th MI Battalion was redesignated as the 719th MI Battalion.⁸³

Today, the Kanghwa Do operations site is designated as Detachment J, and is subordinate to the 719th MI Battalion, 501st MI Brigade with only a small cadre of maintenance and support personnel assigned.⁸⁴ Soldiers assigned to the detachment perform daily maintenance and systems checks for the equipment and systems on site as well as site security.⁸⁵ The site continues to be remotely operated from the 501st MI Brigade location at Camp Humphreys.

*Kanghwa-Do Veterans Group
May 2021*

Notes

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16. Finnegan, *Military Intelligence*, 111.
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23. *History of the United States Army Security Agency and Subordinate Units, FY 1951*, 75.

24. *History of the United States Army Security Agency and Subordinate Units, FY 1951*, 75.

25. *History of the United States Army Security Agency and Subordinate Units, FY 1951*, 75.

26. *History of the United States Army Security Agency and Subordinate Units, FY 1952*, 117. Effective 25 Oct 1951, the 60th Signal Service Company was reorganized under TOE 32-500 and redesignated the 330th Communications Reconnaissance Company.

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46. *History of the United States Army Security Agency and Subordinate Units, FY 1957*, 192.
47. *History of the United States Army Security Agency and Subordinate Units, FY 1957*, 192.
48. *History of the United States Army Security Agency and Subordinate Units, FY 1957*, 12. The 255th USASA Detachment was not the only ASA organization to be redesignated at the start of 1957. On 1 January 1957, the Army Security Agency (ASA) became the United States Army Security Agency (USASA) as a result of an Army wide change. The fixed Army Area Unit (AAU) 8600 series ASA Field Stations also acquired new designations as numbered USASA Field Stations.
49. Finnegan, *Military Intelligence*, 129. During 1957 the secretary of defense decided to cut the Army's strength leaving the ASA without sufficient personnel to fill its existing tactical TOE units. The Army Security Agency responded by inactivating all its TOE units and replacing them with mission tailored TD units.
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51. United States Army Security Agency, *History of the United States Army Security Agency and Subordinate Units, FY 1958-1959, Volume I – Administration* (Arlington, VA: CDR USASA, 1961), 161, <https://www.nsa.gov/Portals/70/documents/news-features/declassified-documents/army-security-agency/asa-and-subordinate-units-history-1958-1959-vol-1.pdf>.
52. Also on 15 October 1957, the Group's subordinate 301st ASA Battalion and 330th ASA Company were inactivated and replaced by the 321st USASA Battalion and the 177th USASA Company, respectively.
53. *History of the United States Army Security Agency and Subordinate Units, FY 1958-1959*, 168.
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55. *History of the United States Army Security Agency and Subordinate Units, FY 1958-1959*, 169. The 277th USASA Company's mission included both ELINT and COMINT functions. The COMINT mission was supervised by the 177th USASA Company and the ELINT mission was directed by the 508th USASA Group. The unit reported that COMINT sections were located at each of the platoons. The COMINT sections consisted of one DF position at each platoon, four intercept positions at the 1st platoon, and two intercept positions at the 3d platoon. ELINT functions were performed by both the 1st and the 2d Platoons until 30 April 1959, when the latter ceased ELINT operations. In addition, a mobile ELINT team was maintained by the 1st Platoon.
56. *History of the United States Army Security Agency and Subordinate Units, FY 1958-1959*, 168.
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75. *INSCOM and Its Heritage*, 8, 16.
76. *INSCOM and Its Heritage*, 12, 16.
77. *INSCOM and Its Heritage*, 12, 16.
78. *INSCOM and Its Heritage*, 12.
79. *INSCOM and Its Heritage*, 101.
80. "719TH Military Intelligence Battalion," 501st Military Intelligence Brigade, accessed February 15, 2021, <https://8tharmy.korea.army.mil/501MI/719.html>.
81. "719TH Military Intelligence Battalion."
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84. "Topside Today," Kangwha-Do Veterans (web site), accessed February 17, 2021, <https://www.kangwha-do-veteran.org/topside-today/>.
85. Kurt Van Slooten, "Brigade Leaders Visit Remote Site for Christmas," U.S. Army (web site), accessed February 17, 2021, <https://www.army.mil/article/242071>. The 501st MI Brigade, located at Camp Humphreys, is a direct descendant of the 501st Comm Recon Group, which was first activated on 18 October 1950.

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