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DAILY ENTERPRISE



(U) A Personal View of Direct Support in the Korean War - HISTORY TODAY: April 10, 2019

FROM: (U) Center for Cryptologic History (CCH)

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(U) Robert R. Williams enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in 1950, attended Russian language school at Syracuse University, and, after training was deployed to Korea. In an oral history interview in 1999, he recalled his duty at a special collection site on Cho-do, an island in the Yellow Sea about two-and-a-half miles from the shoreline of North Korea.

(U) During the Korean War, to provide direct and real-time support to U.S. pilots operating over enemy territory, the Air Force established an intercept site on Cho-do. The island already had an air-sea rescue facility and a radar installation that would broadcast data directly to the pilots as they engaged in operations. The SIGINT collectors would monitor North Korean, Chinese, and Soviet communications and have the data radioed immediately to the pilots, masked as data from radar intercept. Read about this program in the [December 18, 2017 History Today article](#) and the [October 24, 2016 History Today article](#).

(U) When Williams arrived in Korea, he was assigned to SIGINT operations in Seoul but soon was reassigned to Cho-do, one of a dozen SIGINT personnel. He worked in direct support of F-86 pilots engaging Russian pilots in aerial combat; he worked next to a team doing the same for pilots flying against the Chinese. They had to keep the exact nature of their work secret from the other 200 Americans on the island.

(U) Cho-do was well within range of North Korean artillery, and all the U.S. personnel qualified for combat pay. This required being under enemy fire at least one week a month. Williams estimated that during his eight months on the island, it was shelled eight or nine days a month, with evening air raids by "Bed Check Charlie," so he qualified for combat pay his entire tour of duty. The enemy attacks were aimed primarily at the radar antennas, and at least once they were partially disabled as shells severed the cables. He recalled that one American was killed about 100 feet from his tent, but he himself was never wounded.

(U) One night a flight of B-29 bombers operating over North Korea was hit heavily by North Korea's air defense system. One damaged bomber came back over the Yellow Sea, and Cho-do's inhabitants could see several men bailing out as the plane ditched into the water. They never knew what happened to most of them, but one of them "floated up on our island almost frozen to death."

(U) Robert Williams was assigned to NSA at Arlington Hall Station in July 1953, about a month before the Korean War ended. After returning from Korea, he earned a commission and retired from the Air Force as a lieutenant colonel.

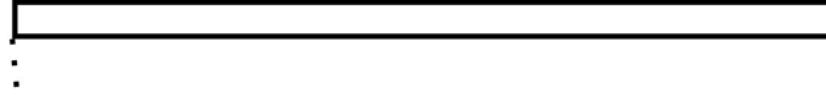
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(U) *The author of this article is David Hatch.*

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