DAILY ENTERPRISE

(U) Tactical SIGINT in the Korean War - HISTORY TODAY: May 2, 2019
FROM: (U) Center for Cryptologic History (CCH)
Run Date(s): 05/02/2019

(U) Recent *History Today articles* have described how tactical SIGINT operations supported U.S. combat troops in the Korean War. This is how the program began.

(U) The Korean War broke out on June 25, 1950, when communist North Korea invaded South Korea. The United States intervened almost immediately on South Korea's side. Early American support was inadequate and fragmented, so the North Koreans occupied two-thirds of the Korean Peninsula. In September, U.S. forces built up and almost destroyed the North Korean People's Army (NKPA): South Korean and U.S. troops, aided by contingents from United Nations members, occupied about two-thirds of the Peninsula northward. At this point, in October and November, the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) intervened and pushed the US/UN forces back down the peninsula.

(U) By early 1951, the battle line had stabilized along the "waist" of the peninsula. Both sides dug in and fortified positions; the remaining two years of the war were characterized by limited offensives for limited objectives.

(U) In the first year of the war, SIGINT about the communist side had been plentiful, particularly about the NKPA, since the North Koreans had had little awareness of communications security. This SIGINT generally was strategic in nature, produced for the senior U.S. leadership. As the war transitioned from one of movement to one of position, both the North Koreans and the Chinese adopted stronger encryption, and less high-level SIGINT was available.

(U) The Army Security Agency, the U.S. Army's cryptologic agency, in early 1951 began to develop SIGINT techniques to acquire lower-level, tactical communications. This had been done to support tactical commanders in World War II, and was more necessary than ever in Korea as strategic SIGINT began to dry up.
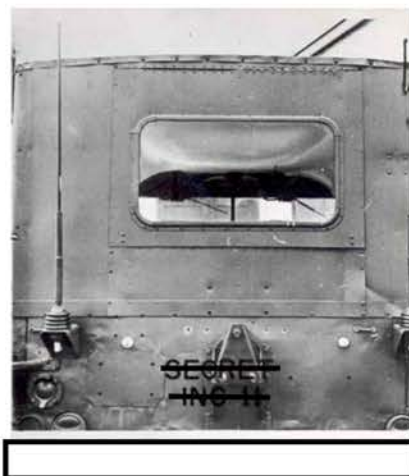
(U) The first sustained tactical SIGINT collection was conducted in July 1951 near Kumhwa, Korea, in the middle of the battle line, a location that was part of what the Army called the Iron Triangle. Although the first operations were against both the NKPA and the PLA, it was soon found that the North Koreans, rebuilding their military after the defeats of 1950, were not using radio communications much. The program targeted the Chinese almost exclusively until January 1952.

(U) Some initial tactical collection was conducted from vehicles driving along the battle line. However, it was found that the jeeps and trucks were too vulnerable to enemy fire. Collection was moved to bunkers near the combat headquarters; this had the added advantage of proximity to the customers and, as most bunkers were on hilltops, collection was better, anyway.

(U) The tactical SIGINT program became known as Low Level Voice Intercept (LLVI) operations. The program was managed by the 303rd Communications Reconnaissance Battalion, which trained teams and assigned and supported them. The test operation in July had been in support of an attack launched by the 24th Infantry Division. At first, LLVI teams were assigned at the Corps level, but, as the program proved itself, LLVI detachments were sent for direct support of the 1st Cavalry, 3rd Infantry, 25th Infantry, and the 1st Commonwealth Division.*

(U) The teams were to consist of one officer, three enlisted men, three Department of the Army civilians, who were American-born Chinese, and three Chinese-speaking Koreans. This allowed around-the-clock coverage; it also provided for, as a wrap-up report put it, "constant supervision over the foreign personnel." The enlisted men were not linguists, but they were given training in Chinese radio procedures and Chinese numerals.

(U) None of the teams produced much of value during the first few weeks of the program. Then, on September 6, an LLVI detachment supporting the 1st Cav intercepted an enemy operational order. This allowed the field commander time to prepare for a Chinese attack — he and his unit successfully repelled a division-size assault, and inflicted an estimated 1,500 casualties on the enemy.

(U) When the commander credited the success of his defense to the LLVI team, the program gained wider acceptance.

* (U) Both Great Britain and Australia had sizeable military units fighting alongside the U.S. in Korea.

**(U) The photograph contains original classificaton markings, but would be considered Unclassified under today's rules.

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

(U) Sources: Several 1952 summaries of the LLVI program in the NSA Archives.

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