YP Kim – 2022 NSA Hall of Honor Inductee
Author: Greg Nedved

The 2022 Cryptologic Hall of Honor induction ceremony is approaching. In honor of Youn P. (YP) Kim’s selection and in recognition of Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, CCH would like to share some career highlights on this multi-talented linguist, interpreter, translator, and analyst.

YP Kim began his army career with the Signal Corps in 1941. During World War II, Kim left his footprints at three notable stateside army communications intelligence (COMINT) locations: Ft. Monmouth, NJ; Vint Hill Farms Station, VA; and Arlington Hall Station, VA. He received his initial cryptologic training at Fort Monmouth. At Vint Hill, he ran the entire foreign language program (six languages total). While there, Kim also performed Japanese language cryptanalysis (Kim had learned Japanese while living in Japanese-controlled Korea). At Arlington Hall, he taught Japanese.

His unique skill set made him a hot commodity. As World War II was ending, he worked in San Francisco, CA, searching for German spies in South America. His next stop was postwar Japan, where his targets included the Japanese Communist Party and the black market. Moving next to South Korea, he did Korean language translation for the US military government, which ran occupied South Korea, 1945-1948. Finally, he taught Korean at the Army Language School (Monterey, CA). While there, he penned a Korean language instruction book. On the verge of the Korean War (1950-1953), he was one of two US Army Korean linguists, the other being Dick Chun.

When the Korean War broke out, Kim was quickly ordered to Japan to provide badly needed Korean language support. Now working for ASA (Army Security Agency) Pacific, he provided direct language support for COMINT that was disseminated to US and United Nations forces defending South Korea. In this role, he contributed to some of the war’s notable COMINT successes, including, for example, support to the risky amphibious landing at Inchon. Kim’s translations, providing North Korean reactions to the landings, allowed US forces to press their advantage. Later on, Kim’s superior linguistic skills helped save the trapped US 7th Army from total annihilation by much larger Chinese invading forces.

It is hard to imagine anyone contributing more in the language field during the Korean War than YP Kim. He interrogated North Korean prisoners of war (POWs) who had cryptographic or communications experience for information to support US COMINT operations. He advised tactical low-level voice intercept personnel, who needed to operate near the enemy to obtain superior intercept results. He surveyed PY Do, an island off North Korea, and recommended it for direction-finding purposes. Finally—and as a sign of his versatility—he worked on Chinese cryptosystems, specifically, the Ming repagination system used by Chinese artillery. The culmination of Kim’s Korean War service, however, was serving as the lead interpreter for the United States (Navy and Army) during negotiations at Panmunjom to end the war. This included reviewing the final armistice agreement.

Major YP Kim, USA waiting to receive an award from DIRNSA Lieutenant General Ralph Canine, USA in May 1953. NSA/CSS Archives Accession 50988, A-141-001.
He continued to work for ASA after the war. With an established reputation, Kim acted again as lead interpreter—this time for the State Department at the 1954 Geneva conference on Korea. He remained an indispensable talent for many years, being the first call whenever Korean interpreters were requested.

After retiring from the army as a lieutenant colonel in 1961, Kim continued working as an NSA civilian. When the North Koreans seized the USS Pueblo in 1968, it became imperative to determine whether the US vessel had been in international waters. Given the gravity of the crisis, Kim personally reviewed the transcripts for NSA, which dispatched him to the United Nations to provide the linguistic evidence that the Pueblo had not violated North Korean territorial waters.

Kim provided expert crypto-linguistic service in three crucial languages (Japanese, Korean, and Chinese) during World War II, the Korean War, and the USS Pueblo crisis. This crypto-linguistic service included cryptanalysis, language instruction, language management, translation, and interpretation. During the Korean War, his direct crypto-linguistic support to United Nations Commander-in-Chief, General Douglas MacArthur, was critical in the success of the Inchon landing and the extraction of the trapped 7th Army. During conferences when Korean language expertise was of paramount need, he served as the lead interpreter for the American side repeatedly. Kim was essentially the face of the US Korean language problem for 20+ years. He retired in the early 1970s as NSA’s senior Korean language advisor and passed away in 2001.

Sources:

NSA-OH-02-82 (Oral history of YP Kim)

NSA OH-1986-36 (Oral history of Dick Chun)