The Mayor of P’yongyang

The Three Wars of COL Charles R. Munske

by Troy J. Sacquety
very tired Colonel (COL) Charles R. Munske sat dejected on a concrete step on the afternoon of 4 December 1950. Smoking a cigar, he brooded over recent events. During the past five weeks he had labored to mend a broken P’ongyang, North Korea, captured by United Nations forces on 19 October 1950. In a herculean effort, COL Munske and his small Civil Affairs team had restored basic services. However, with advancing Communist Chinese forces just four miles away, the booming of not-so-distant artillery told Munske that his efforts would not see fruition. Therefore, he had just ordered the destruction of the very facilities the team had so painfully worked to rebuild. After burning what papers he could not take with him, Munske “sat there smoking a good cigar trying to think what to do next. I figured the best thing was to leave . . . there was nothing between us and the Chinese excepting the British Tank Corps, so I decided there was no reason for us to stay.” This marked the end of the civil affairs/military government effort in the only Communist capital ever occupied by U.S. and allied forces. So, who was COL Munske?

The man in charge of that occupation was a veteran of both World Wars I and II. Involved with Civil Affairs and Military Government (CA/MG) in the Pacific Theater since 1944, Munske was one of the most experienced officers in that field in the Far East. As such, he merits status as a Civil Affairs icon. Furthermore, his determined efforts were an exemplar of the impact that a dedicated and innovative CA officer can make, even with limited resources. This biography details his life and his contributions to Civil Affairs. Unfortunately, the lack of records regarding the early years of Munske’s life and career does not allow more details.

Birth — World War I

Charles Robert Henry Munske was born on 12 July 1897 in Brooklyn, New York, to immigrant parents. His father was born in Altoona, Germany, and his mother in Wurttemberg. As the son of a former sailor and small business owner, Munske grew up with a close group of friends from youth groups sponsored by the Bushwick Avenue Congregational Church in Brooklyn.

Munske’s long military career began just a few months after war broke out in Europe in August 1914. On 14 December, he enlisted as a private in the 11th Company, 13th Coast Defense Command, New York National Guard. This began nearly thirty years of service in the Coast Artillery Corps (CAC). On 6 April 1917, in response to Germany’s unrestricted submarine warfare campaign and the sinking of several American ships, the United States declared war on the German Empire.

National Guard Sergeant (SGT) Munske mustered into Federal Service on 16 July 1917. He served as a gun commander, first at Fort Hamilton and then at Iona Island, New York. A year later he deployed overseas with the 70th Artillery, CAC, arriving in France on 22 July 1918. Though assigned to the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF), the 70th CAC spent the war training at Angers, France, and did not see combat before the Armistice on 11 November 1918.

Munske’s big contribution came after the Armistice. As a fluent German speaker, he became an interpreter for the ‘Engineer Operations Division of War Damages in Allied Countries’ section of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace in Paris. The section assessed reparation payments due the Allies for damages suffered during the German occupation of their territory. His efforts helped support claims made after the Treaty of Versailles (28 June 1919). Service on the Commission was Munske’s first exposure to CA/MG activities.

On 19 March 1919, SGT Munske then transferred to the 102nd Field Artillery Regiment, 26th Infantry Division (ID), the famed ‘Yankee Division,’ because the 70th CAC had already returned to the United States. Soon after, he sailed home with elements of the 26th ID on the converted troopship USS Mongolia (ID-1615), reaching Boston Harbor on 10 April 1919. Then, like many AEF veterans, he attempted to settle back into his pre-war life.
Once back home, the first thing Munske did was to take classes in finance, accounting, and law at the New York University and Pace Institute. This helped him secure a job in 1920 as an accountant with the U.S. Rubber Company (now known as Uniroyal). In addition, Munske applied for and received a commission on 7 June 1920 as a Second Lieutenant in the New York National Guard. He advanced to First Lieutenant in May 1921. As a National Guard officer, he devoted the next eighteen years to serving on weekends, primarily in the 245th Coast Artillery Regiment (Harbor Defense). But, he also found time for his personal life. On 15 September 1923 at the 13th Regiment National Guard Armory in Brooklyn, Munske married Anna Haderer, whom he had known most of his life. The couple had their first child, Phyllis A., in 1925. Munske made Captain (CPT) in February 1926, but would hold that rank for the next fifteen years, as was typical of service in the interwar years.

Munske’s work provided his first experience with the Far East. In 1928, the U.S. Rubber Company sent him on a nearly year-long business trip to review plantation operations in Sumatra and Malaya. During the assignment, he learned to speak Malay and visited China, Japan, and the Philippines. When Munske returned to the U.S., he was promoted to comptroller. Munske and his wife had two more children, Joyce (Judy) B., in 1929 and Richard E., in 1933. A skilled worker with a keen eye for detail, Munske was employed throughout the Great Depression. Then, world events once again intervened.
World War II

In 1940, after twenty years with U.S. Rubber, Munske took a one-year leave of absence to join the active Army. An experienced Coast Artillery officer, CPT Munske quickly advanced in rank as the U.S. Army mobilized for WWII. On 21 February 1941, while assigned to Battery G, 245th Coast Artillery, he was promoted to major (MAJ). Two months after the 7 December 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, MAJ Munske was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) on 1 February 1942. For the next two years, he served primarily in the 53rd CAC, Eastern Defense Command, at Camp Pendleton, Virginia; Tampa Bay, Florida; Fort Screven, Georgia; Fort Bragg, North Carolina; Fort Moultrie, South Carolina; and Fort Monroe, Virginia. At this stage of his career, and with WWII drawing to a close, Munske was denied promotion due to an excess number of colonels in the Southern Sector, Eastern Defense Command. Despite that, CAC would not release him to the Office of Strategic Services (OSS).

Seemingly stuck in the States as a Coast Artillery officer, LTC Munske made a career shift in late 1944 “in order to get overseas.” Munske volunteered for Military Government. He left Fort Moultrie, Charleston, South Carolina, to attend the School of Military Government at the University of Virginia (UVA) in Charlottesville, Virginia, from 6 November to 16 December 1944.

Set up in May 1942, the UVA program was the U.S. Army’s first professional CA training course. After a short leave, the senior LTC next attended Harvard’s Civil Affairs Training School (CATS), oriented towards the Far East, from 1 January to 29 June 1945. Munske then reported to the Civil Affairs Staging Area (CASA) at The Presidio, California, to command the 8th MG Group. A joint facility, CASA trained soldiers and sailors to conduct CA in areas formerly controlled by the Japanese Empire. When LTC Munske learned that the 8th MG Group was not going to be activated, he volunteered as an individual officer replacement and left for the Philippines at the end of August 1945.

This decision opened the door for CA opportunities in Asia. After serving on the Army Forces, Pacific (AFPAC) staff, he left for Japan in November 1945 to be the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-5 (Military Government), 98th ID, headquartered in Osaka. He and his staff formulated staff plans and policies as well as enacted them. Thus LTC Munske became the de facto “Military Governor of Osaka.”
In Japan, LTC Munske witnessed the devastation that allied air power wrought on the cities. He wrote home to his wife; “Osaka is in ruins, the bombing here was methodical. They got everything and went after more . . . they just leveled off about 80% of the city, and that means plenty of work for [Military Government].” The destruction meant that LTC Munske was constantly in motion. As he described it, his days were filled with “What can we do here, what is it we must have there, and so and so on, just one thing after another hour after hour.”

As befitting his job description, much of Munske’s time was spent working as an administrator, including the difficult task of jump-starting local industry. To do this most effectively, he learned the language and culture, and attended meetings and social events to interact with the local population. The pace was exhausting. He wrote home that “I have a couple hundred officers under me scattered all over and between visitors in the office and phone calls from the field my days are completely filled, without any time left over.” LTC Munske noted that “no one knows of the tremendous amount of work that a military government officer does, and if a private concern made them work this way they would all quit.”

“I attempted on many occasions to return to civilian life, but was continued on active duty at the request of the Secretary of War because of my success as a military government officer in the Orient.” — from a letter to Roberta Munske, Japan 1945

The Munske family in Japan, 1947. From left to right, Charles, Judy, Richard, Phyllis, and Anna. Soon after this photograph was taken, Judy was stricken with polio and confined to a wheelchair for the rest of her life.
Pre-Korea

Munske’s service with the 98th ID ended on 31 January 1946, when he became the Military Government Section Chief at I Corps. For his work benefitting more than six million people in the Osaka Fu, Mie, Wakayama, and Nara prefectures, Munske was awarded the Legion of Merit and the Army Commendation Ribbon. This was for his “supervision of welfare activities, the reopening of banking institutions, the reconstruction of housing, the reconversion of industry, supervision of agriculture, fishing, commerce, [and] education.” “His broad knowledge of Japanese customs and culture, his diligent research, conscientious effort, and long hours were to a large extent responsible for the successful solution of the problems with which he was faced.”

Clearly, Munske’s efforts were appreciated. He received a promotion on 6 July 1946. At that time, he was considering a return to the U.S. Rubber Company, but his promotion and attendance at the School of Government of Occupied Areas at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, kept him on active duty.

When Munske returned to Fukuoka, Japan, with his family it was as a LTC due to the postwar reduction in force (RIF). His primary duty was to reestablish industry, primarily the steel and coal industries. He dealt with an 18 June 1948 coal mine explosion at Katsuta and increased rice production in his region 125% in excess of the established quota.

Unfortunately, Judy, his youngest daughter, contracted polio in college. Munske and his family returned to Fort Lewis, Washington, for her ‘iron lung’ ventilator treatment. At the end of 1948, LTC Munske returned to Japan without his family to temporarily serve as the Executive Officer and Deputy Commander for the Hokkaido Military Government District before being assigned to Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

There, he commanded the 28th Civil Affairs Company (now the 82nd Civil Affairs Battalion, Fort Stewart, Georgia). He later joined the 95th Military Government Group as a CA plans officer. That unit is now the 95th CA Brigade, Fort Bragg, North Carolina. In early 1950, while still assigned to the 95th, LTC Munske became the J-5 of Task Force 100, which was involved in Operation PORTREX (25 February to 11 March 1950), an amphibious assault exercise in Puerto Rico. His rater, Colonel Adolphus Worrell Roffe, was impressed with Munske’s performance on the exercise. COL Roffe reported that Munske “has an excellent knowledge of administrative details, and the ability to separate essentials from the non-essentials in getting a job done.”

Then, while still assigned to the 95th Military Government Group, he worked as the S-5 of V Corps on Fort Bragg. In this capacity, LTC Munske supported Exercise SWARMER. Based at Fort Bragg and running from 24 April to 8 May 1950, SWARMER used lessons learned from the Berlin Airlift (1948-1949) to test the ability of an airborne operation and airlift to counter a mock invasion of the United States. It was then that North Korea invaded South Korea on 25 June 1950, getting Munske into his third war and another CA phase.

Korea

The war restores his Colonelcy. COL Munske arrived in Korea in October 1950, soon after the Army’s breakout of the Pusan Perimeter. As the South Koreans and UN forces raced towards the North Korean capital, Munske was assigned to the UN Public Health and Welfare Detachment as head of the Pyongan Namdo (P’yongyang) Civil Assistance Team. Munske chased behind the victorious UN forces to P’yongyang, which fell to the UN forces on 19 October 1950.
Munske organized the CA team for the captured city of Chinnamp'o, which was the port facility for P’yangyang. Then, he entered the capital city itself. One of his most immediate problems was to pay city workers, like the police, who had continued on the job. He collected money from looted banks to pay them. He wrote home that “I visited a couple of banks yesterday. I wish I could describe the havoc as I saw it . . . every vault was dynamited and blown up. Money scattered all over the floors. In one place the Russian manager set the money in the vaults on fire, and it is still burning.” Without facilities, fire prevention became a major problem.

Munske described his time as ‘the mayor of P’yangyang,’ “These are really hectic days trying to establish law and order in this city. Just this minute someone came into my room and said ‘Look out of the window’ and the whole sky is red with fire. A really big one is burning somewhere [sic] in the city. There is no way of stopping fires here since we have no fire engines. The Commies took them all north with them, and [even] if we had some we have no water in the city since the Commies destroyed the entire water system.” Over the course of the next month, COL Munske and his team created a small fire brigade and reestablished a rudimentary water system to extinguish fires.

COL Munske and his fourteen-man military/civilian team accomplished minor miracles. Working with the personnel of occupying commands, which included the soon-to-be 10th Special Forces Group commander, LTC Aaron Bank, G5, 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team, to get government running. They collected trash, immunized 3,500 people against typhus and another 4,000 against smallpox, reorganized the police force, organized a primitive health care system and set up insecticidal dusting stations to control the spread of lice and flea-borne infectious diseases. They repaired two power plants, got the streetcars and telephones working, and began repairs on the railroad bridge over the Taedong River. Unbeknownst to Munske and his personnel in P’yangyang and Chinnamp’o, all of this work was already undermined by events to the north.

By late October 1950, the UN forces had pushed the North Korean Army nearly to the banks of the Yalu River and the northern border with China. In the race for the borders, entire units of ‘volunteer’ Communist Chinese forces infiltrated behind the UN forces. The surrounded UN forces were forced to escape south. By the beginning of December, Communist forces were on the outskirts of P’ongyang. Munske ordered the CA teams to withdraw. Looking back on the situation days later, he wrote, “It was enough excitement to last me for a while. I wish however, that we could have stayed in P’ongyang for we were really doing a swell job of getting things going. Now the whole city has been burnt down and it is going to be much harder to get things going if we ever go back.”

Following the evacuations of P’ongyang, Munske became the Executive Officer of the Kyongsang-Namdo (Pusan) Provincial Civil Assistance Team where he supported the refugee population in and around Pusan. After allied forces again pushed the Communists north in March 1951, COL Munske was sent to rebuild Seoul with the Kyonggi-Do Province (Seoul) Civil Assistance Team. Based in Seoul, COL Munske expanded his efforts to Inchon and Suwon. COL Munske entered the area with the advanced elements and, “while still endangered
When COL Munske and his team arrived, P'yongyang did not have a functioning water system or working fire department. Fires, set by North Korean saboteurs, raged unchecked throughout the city. COL Munske helped solve this problem by obtaining several U.S. motorcycle fire engines.

CA Teams in Korea dusted refugees with DDT to kill fleas and lice and to prevent the spread of diseases.

COL Charles Munske’s CA team in P’yongyang.
by sniper fire and land mines, he successfully provided civil relief for 1,500,000 refugees and 500,000 displaced persons." Brigadier General William E. Crist, commander of the United Nations Civil Assistance Command, Korea (UNCACK) called Munske his “most outstanding Team Commander.” COL Munske’s final assignment in Korea (11 June to 10 July 1952) was as Assistant Deputy Commander, UNCAK.

**Stateside Finish**

COL Munske’s career ended in the States as Inspector General of the New York Military District. Concurrently, he was the Legal Assistance Officer and Senior Advisor for Military Government units. He inspected reserve Military Government units and Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC) programs. COL Robert P. Hamilton, commander of the 356th Military Government Area Headquarters, wrote that “Despite [Munske’s] inherent modesty it soon became apparent that his knowledge of the theory and practice of [Military Government] was second to none.”

Twice occupied by the Communists, Seoul’s citizens suffered greatly and families were torn apart. Naturally, COL Munske provided support to thousands of Korean orphans.

The high profile of COL Munske’s work meant that he only dealt with top level military and government leaders. Here you see him with South Korean President Syngman Rhee and his wife Franziska Donner (center front), and U.S. Eighth Army and UN forces Commander, General James Alward Van Fleet (L), on an inspection tour.
Despite his best effort, age caught up to him six months prior to reaching twenty years of active duty service. The Army granted COL Munske a six-month extension on duty, to enable him to retire on 28 February 1958 with a full 20 years of active service after 42 years in the military. His reputation and distinguished overseas service warranted an exception. He retired in Falls Church, Virginia, and passed away on 14 November 1985 at 88.

Career Recognized

Munske was one of only a handful of WWII era soldiers to make Civil Affairs a career. From his first course at the School of Military Government at UVA, and for the next fourteen years he spent in CA, it was considered a secondary field for the Regular Army. Officers serving on active duty did not remain in CA for long if they wanted to advance their careers. COL Munske found his calling, serving with distinction in the Philippines, Japan, Korea and the U.S. Because of his exemplary long-term service in CA, the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade has chosen to name their new headquarters after COL Charles R. Munske, a suitable and well-deserved honor for the ‘Mayor of P’yangyong.’

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Endnotes

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Troy J. Sacquety earned an MA from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and his PhD in Military History from Texas A&M University. Prior to joining the USASOC History Office staff he worked several years for the Central Intelligence Agency. Current research interests include Army and Office of Strategic Services (OSS) special operations during World War II, and U.S. Army Civil Affairs.


2 Application for Appointment and Statement of Preferences for Reserve Officers,” 14 January 1927, Charles R. Munske Service Record, National Archives and Records Administration, National Personnel Records Center (NPRC), St. Louis, MO. (hereafter Munske Service Record).

3 The Coast Artillery Branch, the ‘other CA,’ was created in 1901. Its mission was seacoast defense of the United States. It was disestablished in 1950.
4 The United States later declared war on Austria-Hungary, another member of the Central Powers, on 7 December 1917.

5 “All Military Service of any Description Prior to December 31 1920 (Form 0761),” [May 1927], Munske Service Record.

6 “National Guard, State of New York, Officer’s Personal History and Military Record,” 23 June 1921, Munske Service Record.


8 In France, Munske joined the American Legion during their inaugural meeting in Paris on 15-17 March 1919. SCT Munske was honored by being a representative to the first stateside meeting of the American Legion, held 8-10 May 1919, in Saint Louis, Missouri. See George Seay Wheat, The Story of the American Legion: The Birth of the Legion (New York, New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1919), 263, on internet at https://openlibrary.org/books/OL6618080M/The_story_of_the_American_legion.

9 Munske does not appear to be a high school graduate or to have obtained a college degree.


11 “DA Form 66,” 27 April 1955, Munske Service Record.


14 Headquarters, 98th Infantry Division, Military Government Section, “Promotion,” 15 December 1945, provided by Ms. Roberta Munske.


16 Established in 1942, the School of Military Government at UVA was the first formalized Civil Affairs School.

17 Arthur M. Harper, Headquarters, 98th Infantry Division, Office of the Commanding General, “Promotion of Commissioned Officer,” 12 January 1946, original copy provided by Roberta Munske. Munske’s orders for command of the 8th Military Government Group were revoked at the end of hostilities.

18 MG Arthur M. Harper, 98th Infantry Division to Commanding General, Eight Army, “Promotion of Commissioned Officer, 12 January 1946, provided by Ms. Roberta Munske.


28 “DA Form 66,” 27 April 1955, Munske Service Record.


32 The Berlin Airlift was enacted by the Western Allies in response to the Soviet blockading of allied-occupied Berlin. The Airlift successfully used strategic airlift to supply Berlin when the Soviets cut land access.


36 Although not on the CA Team, LTC Aaron Bank, the future commander of the 10th Special Forces Group, who was then serving as the S-5 of the 187th Infantry Regiment (Airborne), coordinated with COL Munske.

37 For more on COL Munske’s efforts in P’yongyang, see Charles H. Briscoe, “The UN Occupation of P’yongyang” Veritas Journal of Army Special Operations History 6 (1: 2010): 63-82.


39 All of these cities had been twice occupied by the Communists and had suffered greatly in the fighting.

40 Headquarters Far East Command, “Citation for the Legion of Merit (Oak-Leaf Cluster),” [1952], Munske Service Record.

41 “Officer Efficiency Report,” 1 July 1952, Munske Service Record.


44 COL Munske is interred at Arlington National Cemetery.

45 CA did not become a basic branch in the Reserves until 17 August 1955 and did not achieve that status in the Regular Army until 16 October 2006.