One important aspect of the Korean War was the U.S. Army’s effort to integrate the large numbers of anti-Communist guerrillas into its campaign. Scholarly research on these operations has been scant and what is known comes largely from the memoirs of the participants. Consequently, certain inaccuracies and ‘mythology’ have become a part of the history of unconventional warfare in Korea, a subject that contains many relevant lessons for today’s Army. The next two issues of Veritas will present a detailed picture of the Eighth Army’s creation of a guerrilla command and explain the various entities that were involved in unconventional warfare during the war. This issue will, with some exceptions, restrict itself to the early history of the origins of the North Korean anti-Communist guerrilla movement that began in 1945 through the first six months of guerrilla command operations in 1951. The guerrillas, while a force provider for the U.S. Eighth Army (EUSA), were also a dilemma.

The Soviet Union’s eleventh hour declaration of war against Japan on 8 August 1945 gave the Communists a part in the post-war demobilization of the Japanese Army in China and Korea. This role provided a foothold in North Korea sufficient to establish a Communist regime north of the 38th Parallel. After a brief period of internal conflict, Soviet-supported Kim Il Sung emerged as the leader of the North Korean Communist Party. During his consolidation of power, Kim alienated many who fell under his rule. Thousands of North Koreans fled south. This exodus was
eventually halted. By early 1950, those opposed to the Communist regime were forced to hide in the mountains. Anti-Communist sentiment was particularly strong among the people of Hwanghae and Pyongan Provinces on the southwest coast of North Korea.

The North Korean People’s Army (NKPA) attack against South Korea in June 1950 removed many of its Army units from the provinces and allowed the anti-Communists some freedom to organize. The UN landing at Inch’on in September 1950 routed the NKPA, sending it into headlong retreat, opening the way for anti-Communist elements in North Korea to regain control of their villages. This democratic freedom was short-lived, when the massive incursion by the Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) in November 1950 again pushed the UN forces south of Seoul. It was during the CCF offensive that many anti-Communist resisters sought refuge on the border islands off the western coast.

With as many as twenty-five thousand guerrillas postured on the North Korean flank, a desperate Eighth Army seized the opportunity to potentially tie up substantial numbers of enemy troops along the coast. The fact that the guerrillas were poorly-trained and equipped was the dilemma for the EUSA G-3 (Operations). To turn this problem into an asset, Eighth Army in January 1951 went to its veteran troubleshooter, Colonel (COL) John H. McGee, G-3 Miscellaneous Division.

A World War II veteran of the Southwest Pacific Theater and limited guerrilla operations in the Philippines, COL McGee was no stranger to difficult assignments. He had formed the Eighth Army Rangers, created a Ranger Training Center, organized the GHQ Raider Company and established the United Nations Reception Center to integrate the military forces of other nations into the war effort. COL McGee was the architect of the EUSA’s counter-guerrilla effort to destroy enemy guerrillas, deserters and by-passed soldiers who continued to harass UN troops behind friendly lines. These experiences provided McGee with a keen appreciation of guerrilla operations. His approach was to form an EUSA organization that utilized existing guerrilla formations to accomplish three specific missions.

His first priority was to train the guerrilla bands to effectively conduct raids and sabotage operations against North Korean units stationed along the western coast.
Task Force KIRKLAND operated on the east coast of North Korea between the 38th Parallel and the city of Wonsan. Training the guerrillas on individual and crew-served weapons was integral to KIRKLAND's mission.