WORKING WITH WHAT YOU HAVE

The Challenges of Guerrilla Warfare on the Korean East Coast, 1951-1953

by Jared M. Tracy
“There [are] no two suns in the sky,” First Lieutenant (LT) William S. Harrison, Task Force (TF) KIRKLAND’s first commander, reportedly told his Korean counterpart, Major (MAJ) Park Chang Am, before a group of friendly Korean guerrillas in mid-1951. LT Harrison wanted to establish without question that the unit was under American control, that he would not share command, and that only motivated Koreans could serve in the unit.¹

However, as time would tell, low morale, desertions, shortages of American personnel, and supply problems prevented the unit from mounting an effective guerrilla warfare campaign on the Korean East Coast south of Wonsan. This article describes the personnel, organization, and missions of TF KIRKLAND from April 1951 to July 1953, and the factors that impacted its effectiveness.² Eighth U.S. Army’s (EUSA) decision to establish organizations to direct operational guerrilla units such as TF KIRKLAND emerged from the conventional situation in Korea.

In June 1950, the North Korean People’s Army (NKPA) invaded the Republic of Korea (ROK), and nearly achieved a complete takeover of the South. Led by the U.S. military, United Nations (UN) forces intervened and held the perimeter at Pusan. In September, X Corps opened a second front at Inch’on, allowing the combined UN forces to push the NKPA from the ROK and advance northward to the Sino-Korean border. But from October to November 1950, sizeable Chinese Communist Forces crossed the Yalu River and attacked. This counteroffensive compelled UN forces to withdraw south from P’yongyang and Seoul, and the X Corps, since reassigned to northeast Korea, to evacuate through the East Coast North Korean port at Hungnam. UN troops prevented a second Communist takeover of the ROK and rolled enemy forces back. By May 1951 the war had basically stalemated along the 38th Parallel.

In January 1951, EUSA intelligence reported that anti-Communist Koreans, many from North Korea’s Hwanghae Province, were engaging the NKPA. A large number of them had fled to off-shore islands along the West Coast. EUSA established a guerrilla command to organize, train, and direct them. In February 1951, Koreans assigned to WILLIAM ABLE BASE (later called LEOPARD BASE) began conducting raids and reconnaissance missions on the mainland. A year later, WOLFPACK BASE split off and augmented the West Coast guerrilla warfare campaign.³ The intent of the EUSA, and later Far East Command (FEC), was to incorporate the operations of the anti-Communist guerrillas into the UN offensive effort.

(L) Located on the seaward side of Nan-do, this guerrilla camp is nearly indistinguishable from the surrounding rocky surface that characterized the entire island. (R) This aerial view of East Coast mountains typified the topography of TF KIRKLAND’s area of operations between Wonsan and Sokch’-orí. KIRKLAND had too few personnel and was too ill-equipped to cover the entirety of this nearly 100-mile mountainous expanse, so it operated generally in and around the Kojo area.
The EUSA wanted to set up a similar organization to run guerrilla operations on the East Coast. However, the situation there differed greatly from the West Coast. First, there were fewer islands to operate from and fewer anti-Communist guerrillas. In addition, the ROK Army, not the EUSA, was the main conventional force on the East Coast. This resulted in a marked disparity in the resourcing of the West versus the East Coast guerrilla units. Despite these important differences, in April 1951 EUSA activated TF KIRKLAND at Chumunjin to collect intelligence, locate downed U.S. pilots, identify targets for naval gunfire, and attack enemy supply routes.

The unit organized with two elements, KIRKLAND Rear and KIRKLAND Forward. KIRKLAND Rear operated in Chumunjin, seven miles south of the 38th Parallel, on the coast in the Kangwŏn-do region in northeastern South Korea.
The Sea of Japan as seen from the area of Chumunjin.

1LT Kingston M. Winget with guerrillas near Chumunjin, 1951. Commissioned as an Infantry Officer in May 1946, Winget served with the 24th and 8th Infantry Regiments in the interwar period. Arriving in Korea in January 1951, Winget was the 3rd Platoon Leader in C Company, 1/23rd Infantry Regiment when he participated in the Battle of Chipyong-ni. He had various duties in TF KIRKLAND from April to December 1951.

sergeant at KIRKLAND Rear, then at Sokch’o-ri north of Chumunjin on the mainland. In 1952, the unit averaged only four U.S. officers and six enlisted soldiers. The total number of Americans in KIRKLAND at any one time peaked at around thirty-five in 1953. Recruiting standards for the unit were not formalized. 1LT Ulatoski remembered that many of “the enlisted men [who served in KIRKLAND] were . . . Rangers or airborne,” except for those who served in combat service support roles.¹¹

Unlike on the West Coast, no partisans occupied the islands off the East Coast. Luckily, a solution presented itself early on. EUSA had inherited from the ROK Army a group of poorly trained Koreans, sometimes called the Miryang Guerrilla ‘Battalion.’¹² According to Bok, most of them were North Koreans who fled Hungnam aboard UN boats the previous winter and had received minimal training from the ROK Army. The ROK Army distrusted the North Koreans and so did not invest much time, resources, and manpower on them. EUSA promptly transferred these strays to KIRKLAND under Harrison, who sent around twenty to KIRKLAND Rear and the rest to Nan-do. Harrison did not have to worry about arming them as they already had small arms and hand grenades, but he had difficulty supplying them with adequate food and potable water.¹³ Despite these logistical problems, operational planning began.

At 0645 hours on 2 June 1951, the USS Begor (APD-127), commanded by U.S. Navy Lieutenant Commander (LCDR) Archie C. Kuntze and under the operational control of Commander, TF 95, anchored at Muk-ho, Korea. At 0830 hours, COL McGee and 1LT Harrison met on board with LCDR Kuntze and LCDR J. F. Chace, the officer in charge of an Underwater Demolition Team (UDT). There, McGee proposed a plan to insert 205 guerrillas with seven tons of equipment on the southern beaches of Kojo Bay to gather intelligence and raid enemy garrisons in the area. The plan required naval support.¹⁴
The USS Begor (APD-127) patrolled the Korean coast from December 1950 to August 1951 in support of UN troops ashore. The Begor also transported Underwater Demolition Teams, one of which set explosive charges around Hungnam following mass evacuations. Pictured above are the resulting explosions on 24 December 1950 with the Begor in the foreground. (R) MAJ Alfred R. Coccumelli, commander of TF KIRKLAND, and 1LT Joseph R. Ulatoski, XO of KIRKLAND Forward. Coccumelli had great difficulty resupplying the raiding/coast-watching team occupying Song-do, and he sent Ulatoski to determine the available resources and organize the guerrillas into a viable fighting force. The supply problems persisted and most of the guerrillas deserted Song-do within weeks of Ulatoski’s arrival.

McGee, Harrison, Kuntze, and Chace identified four major problems: (1) several ship-to-shore round trips were needed to deliver personnel and supplies; (2) the Begor had to remain 6,000 yards from shore to stay out of mined waters; (3) the NKPA had heavy defenses in (and frequently patrolled) the area; and (4) KIRKLAND would lose the element of surprise after the landing of the first wave. Thus, the plan devolved to occupying the small island of Song-do (also called Sol-som), “using force if necessary, and all personnel and equipment [would be] landed there.” Song-do was a tear-drop shaped, steep sided, tree-covered island approximately nine hundred meters long, three hundred meters wide, and nine hundred meters from the mainland. Its location allowed guerrillas to infiltrate the mainland in teams using smaller craft. In addition, it provided them with a good vantage point to see coastal targets and to allow them to direct naval gunfire.

At 1500 hours, 2 June 1951, the Begor departed Muk-ho and anchored 4,500 meters from Song-do. Two LCPRs (Landing Craft, Personnel [Ramp]) headed for the island. The first carried LCDR Chace, 1LT Harrison, twenty-one UDT personnel, two enlisted radiomen from KIRKLAND, and twelve Korean guerrillas. The second carried COL McGee and thirty-three Koreans. To LCDR Kuntze, the Koreans “appeared very much undisciplined, with little respect for their officers. In addition, a number were intoxicated and saki [sic] was noted in several canteens in lieu of water.”

After several hours’ observation, scout swimmers from the UDT concluded that while the island had no enemy defenders, it also had no suitable beach for landing the LCPRs. 1LT Harrison, the two radiomen, and the forty-five Koreans went ashore on rubber boats, and the LCPRs (including COL McGee and the UDT personnel) headed back to the Begor. Radio communication was established with the landing party at 0400 hours on 3 June. After three round trips using LCPRs and a LCVP (Landing Craft, Vehicle and Personnel), they completed the delivery of personnel and seven tons of equipment by 0430 hours on 4 June. An LCPR took 1LT Harrison and the remaining UDT personnel off Song-do the next day. With two sampans at their disposal, the guerrillas on Song-do could begin infiltrating the mainland.

Operations had barely begun when command of KIRKLAND transferred from 1LT Harrison to MAJ Alfred R. Coccumelli. Harrison, who left KIRKLAND on 30 June, earned praise for commanding “disorganized guerrilla bands in east Korea, swiftly [unifying] them into a cohesive force . . . to perform attrition and intelligence missions.” With 1LT Winget still at KIRKLAND Rear, Coccumelli...
welcomed a new officer as XO of KIRKLAND Forward, 1LT Joseph R. Ulatoski.

Still recovering from combat wounds sustained while serving as XO in the 5th Ranger Infantry Company (Airborne), Ulatoski joined KIRKLAND in July. In addition to having served with the 5th Rangers, Ulatoski before the war had assisted the G-2, XXIV Corps in infiltrating agents into North Korea. These assignments, coupled with the fact that he “got along real well with the Koreans,” made him a natural fit as a leader in KIRKLAND. Ulatoski later stated that “had I not had two years of previous experience working with the Koreans (1946-1948), I would have been almost totally ineffective and virtually useless for several months.”

Corporal (CPL) Cyril A. Tritz, a post-WWII member of the Army of Occupation (25th ID) in Japan and recent veteran of the 4th Ranger Infantry Company, also joined the unit.

In July, MAJ Coccumelli sent 1LT Ulatoski and, a short time later, CPL Tritz to Song-do to work with the thirty-to forty-man guerrilla team there. Under MAJ Han, that team had done some small inland raids and had reported information about the enemy to Nan-do for the past month as it endured terrible living conditions on the island. On Song-do, guerrillas had little food or potable water and swarms of mosquitoes and rodents added to their problems. Resupply of the team was rare as the trip from Nan-do to Song-do took several hours by sampan, and then only if winds and currents were favorable. As Ulatoski recounted, sea conditions “frequently dictated the pace of operations.”

1LT Ulatoski and CPL Tritz met with the group and immediately grasped its supply problems, but could do nothing about it. “Han and his people were obviously disaffected . . . and in dire need of some sort of supplies and support.” MAJ Han and Ulatoski quickly built a good rapport and the pace of operations increased markedly. However, after a while, the relationship deteriorated because the anticipated increased support failed to materialize. Unfortunately, Ulatoski was limited by what the base at Nan-do could procure and send. Morale among the guerrillas steadily worsened.

In addition, the NKPA sent small probing elements by sampan to Song-do. In response, Han and his team emplaced mines, manned lookout points, and fortified positions around the island. According to 1LT Ulatoski, “We got hit a couple of times [while on Song-do], just probes, no major attacks . . . [During] the raids we Americans took up a position away from the action to avoid getting shot up by either side.”

Ulatoski and Bok recalled one probe beginning at 0200 hours sometime in early August. The exchange of fire between the Communists and guerrillas over a period of hours left three NKPA soldiers dead on the beach. The KIRKLAND team sustained no casualties.

After a couple of weeks, 1LT Ulatoski noticed that MAJ Han “seemed to become more distant and demanding about supplies, and wanted money to start paying the members of his group. We were doing all that we could and were unable to provide him [with] any more supplies . . . [W]e certainly could not provide money for him to pay his personnel.” Following the arrival of a large unidentified motorized sampan, MAJ Han informed Ulatoski at gun point that “he’s taking his people and leaving.” They departed on that sampan and the smaller sampans as well, leaving 1LT Ulatoski, CPL Tritz, Bok, and about seven North Korean refugees stranded on the island. Ulatoski remembered calling MAJ Coccumelli on Nan-do and reminding him, “[W]e're hanging out here.” Coccumelli replied, “Well, hang out for a couple of days and I’ll see if I can get some help over to you.” The lieutenant told him that he and the others may have to evacuate because surviving on the island, much less defending it, seemed impossible without reinforcements and supplies.

A more serious assault on Song-do seemed imminent. “We put people at various points along the coast so that [we] would be alerted if anything [threatening] was noted.” Concerned about their vulnerability, Ulatoski radioed Nan-do and demanded, “Get us a boat over here, get us some way that we can get the hell off of here if we are attacked.” MAJ Coccumelli arranged for the delivery of a 40-foot motor launch that the Navy had provided to KIRKLAND. When it arrived, it was moored in a makeshift harbor on the seaward side of Song-do.

Shortly after midnight one morning in early August 1951, the sounds of a loud explosion, small arms fire, and screaming erupted on the north side of the island. “Almost immediately,” Ulatoski recalled, “the same thing happened on the south side of the island.” Enemy soldiers had “apparently got[ten] on the island without anyone observing them . . . How they got there I have no idea. Who didn’t see them? Who didn’t fire? Who didn’t yell?” It was clear to the KIRKLAND personnel that the “volume of fire coming in was more than just a little routine probe.” The NKPA threatened to overrun the defenders. Covering their movement with a heavy volume of small arms fire, 1LT Ulatoski, CPL Tritz, and Bok made it to the motor launch.
Douglas AD-4 Skyraiders from the USS Valley Forge (CV-45) fire 5-inch rockets on North Korean positions in October 1950. LTJG Ettinger was on such a mission on 13 December 1951 when his aircraft was hit by ground fire and he was forced to bail out. (L) Aviation Cadet Harry E. Ettinger stands beside his Boeing Stearman N2S at the Naval Air Station in Corpus Christi, Texas, April 1946.

They and the remaining refugees evacuated the island and, with CPL. Tritz having lit a timed fuse, blew a pre-wired weapons and ammunition cache behind them. Ensuing naval barrages destroyed the remaining Communists on the island. This enabled naval intelligence and friendly Korean soldiers to reoccupy Song-do some time later.32

In the fall of 1951, MAJ Coccumelli suffered a heart attack, was evacuated, and never returned to KIRKLAND.33 Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Samuel W. Koster from the U.S. Army guerrilla command visited Nan-do to inspect the unit and to inform Ulatoski of his plan to replace Coccumelli with another major. The ILT replied, “Why not leave me in command? Hell, I’ve got enough points to go home, but if you’ll leave me in command, I’ll stay.” LTC Koster acceded, and he also sent a second lieutenant (2LT) whom Ulatoski soon relieved because some guerrillas refused to go on any more missions with him. On 22 December 1951, the commander welcomed a new lieutenant as his XO, ILT Albert W. C. Naylor-Foote.34

Born in Manchester, England, Naylor-Foote had seen service in China, Burma, India, and French Indo-China during World War II. He served in the British and Indian Armies from April 1941 through April 1945. He received a commission as a 2LT in the U.S. Army in April 1945, after which he served in such units as the Military Intelligence Service X (MIS-X), the Air Ground Aid Service [AGAS], and the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). He completed parachute training at the OSS Parachute School in Kunming, China, in July 1945. Promoted to 1LT in September, he retained a reserve commission in the Military Intelligence (MI) Branch after the war. In August 1950, he completed the MI Course at the Army General School, Fort Riley, Kansas. In addition to his colorful military record, he was, according to official Army records, fluent in several foreign languages.35

Throughout late 1951, the unit forwarded information that it had uncovered through island observation and mainland operations to Combined Command, Reconnaissance Activities, Korea (CCRAK), the FEC coordinating agency for guerrilla warfare. One CCRAK report dated 28 December 1951 listed some of TF KIRKLAND’s findings: a 120mm gun position, twenty North Korean troops stockpiling ammunition, a battalion-sized element traveling southward along a trail, fifty enemy soldiers digging entrenchments, and an anti-aircraft artillery piece.36 Occasionally, intelligence collection included very vague and non-specific information about American prisoners of war (POWs) on the mainland.

In early 1952, TF KIRKLAND attempted to rescue downed U.S. Navy pilot Lieutenant junior grade (LTJG) Harry E. Ettinger. During a close air support mission on 13 December 1951, Ettinger’s AD-4 Skyraider was struck by 37mm anti-aircraft fire and he was forced to abandon the aircraft. On the ground, Ettinger was captured by villagers, turned over to NKPA soldiers, and transported as a POW to the main North Korean interrogation center at P’yongyang. In late January 1952, Ettinger’s captors escorted him to the vicinity of Wonsan, possibly as bait for rescue aircraft. KIRKLAND Forward would soon attempt to rescue Ettinger using one of its guerrilla teams already operating on the mainland.37

For several months, KIRKLAND had teams relaying information to Nan-do from the mountains on the mainland. (MAJ Coccumelli’s unexpected departure, the frequent turnover of personnel, and radio failures made it difficult for Ulatoski and others to track the teams’ names, dispositions, and locations.) 1LT Naylor-Foote recalled that the teams had not been resupplied “for the entire time that they had been operating on the mainland . . . [morale] in the groups was extremely low, the danger of defection was extremely high . . . the major reason [for failing] to remain operational for both groups was the lack of supply and the feeling that they . . . had not obtained adequate support from the island base.”38 1LT Naylor-Foote wanted to resupply the mainland teams and rescue LTJG Ettinger at the same time.

One KIRKLAND guerrilla team (most likely the one codenamed DARBY) informed Nan-do that it had Ettinger in its custody, indicating that it had probably already been compromised and was working with his captors.39 However, KIRKLAND Forward personnel could not have
1. Lift off of a Sikorsky HO3S-1, April 1953. Designed for utility, this helicopter weighed 3,788 pounds and it had a maximum lift capacity of 4,985 pounds. It could accommodate one crew member, three passengers, and 145 pounds of baggage, and had a 300-pound hoist capacity. With a range of 275 miles and a ceiling of 14,800 feet, its maximum speed was about 100 miles per hour.

2. Chief Petty Officer Duane W. Thorin. Assigned to the USS Rochester (CA-124) in late 1951, Thorin flew a Sikorsky HO3S-1 helicopter in the attempt to rescue LTJG Harry E. Ettinger in February 1952.

3. Accompanied by TF KIRKLAND XO 1LT Albert W.C. Naylor-Foote, U.S. Navy pilot CPO Duane Thorin descends in a Sikorsky HO3S-1 to pick up LTJG Harry E. Ettinger, 7 February 1952. (Mariano Santillan)

4. CPO Duane Thorin returns to freedom, August 1953.

5. Major General (MG) Randolph M. Pate, commander of the 1st Marine Division and later the Commandant of the Marine Corps (1956-59), welcomes LTJG Harry E. Ettinger to freedom, September 1953. Ettinger had been held captive since December 1951.

6. Commissioned in December 1946, the USS Rochester (CA-124) had three tours in Korea between 1951 and 1953. The cruiser monitored the Korean coast, provided naval gunfire support for ground units, and served as a helicopter base. The Sikorsky used to reach LTJG Ettinger originated from the Rochester.
known this. Ulatoski confirmed Ettinger’s identity and status by radio and developed initial plans to extract him. After one unsuccessful rescue attempt of his own, ILT Ulatoski coordinated with the Navy to use a Sikorsky H03S-1 helicopter from the USS *Rochester* (CA-124), piloted by Chief Petty Officer (CPO) Duane Thorin, to pick up Ettinger at a prearranged location. Naylor-Foote implored Ulatoski to let him lead the mission personally, which the commander agreed to due to his confidence in the XO’s military credentials.40

On 7 February 1952, the day of the planned extraction, Ettinger stood in a clearing in a valley where he “tramped a triangle in the snow” in front of an old wooden building and lit a signal fire. Soon he saw “ADs and Corsairs [from the USS *Valley Forge* (CV-45)] and a helicopter coming in from the east.” CPO Thorin and ILT Naylor-Foote easily spotted him from the air. Nothing seemed unusual, other than the large fire which the XO feared would attract attention. Thorin descended to make the pickup. In frail physical condition, Ettinger ran to the helicopter. Naylor-Foote pulled him on board by his collar. For reasons unknown, the helicopter flew only a short distance before dropping and crashing on its side.41

None of the passengers sustained injury in the crash. Thorin informed naval aircraft overhead of the situation. Naylor-Foote called for help from DARBY, believing that it was nearby. Yet, before receiving any friendly assistance, a North Korean patrol captured the Americans. CPO Thorin remained a prisoner until August 1953, and LTJG Ettinger and ILT Naylor-Foote remained captive until early September 1953.42

Soon after this event, both CCRAK and KIRKLAND Forward lost contact with DARBY, BIG BOY, and the other teams on the mainland. Both organizations suspected that the teams had been compromised. Bok later recalled that “[MAJ Coccumelli]’s agents had turned out to [be] Communist agents.”43 Upon learning of CCRAK’s suspicion that KIRKLAND teams were compromised, Ulatoski said, “I consciously made a decision [to] let them ‘die on the vine.’ It wasn’t just BIG BOY; [all of] our operations had been compromised.” The KIRKLAND commander did not want to risk anyone’s life trying to locate them and bring them back.44 TF KIRKLAND’s ability to conduct inland raids diminished significantly following these events.45 Because of desertions, casualties, the failed rescue attempt of LTJG Ettinger, and the compromised teams on the mainland, “we were pretty much [out] of business” as far as guerrilla assets under the direct control of KIRKLAND, according to ILT Ulatoski.46

As KIRKLAND focused on refitting and training, CCRAK had directed the unit to train and equip Korean paratroopers.47 Newly promoted Captain (CPT) Ulatoski and 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team veteran SGT Curtis D. Terry supervised that training. According to Ulatoski, “We trained them all on the island, everything but their jump . . . [We] took them up to the top of the island where we had leveled off this helicopter landing strip and let them practice their drags and getting out the parachutes. [Terry] rigged up another suspended harness . . . so that they could practice slipping their parachutes. We took them down to Sokch’o-ri . . . and we all jumped out of [an airplane] and reported back that we have twenty paratroopers.” This training was one of Ulatoski’s final tasks in KIRKLAND.48

In mid-1952, two officers reported to the unit: Captain (CPT) Shelby D. Minton, a Signal Corps officer and CPT Ulatoski’s successor in command, and ILT Malcolm C. Ward, ILT Naylor-Foote’s replacement as XO. During WWII, Ward served in the OSS and the 1/507th Parachute Infantry Regiment. He left active duty in December 1945 and worked in marketing and advertising. Returning to active duty in December 1950, Ward served with the 8th Infantry Division and in the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment before arriving at KIRKLAND in February 1952.49 After a brief operational lull, the arrival of new personnel, and the onset of more favorable weather, KIRKLAND resumed its missions.

NKPA attacks on Song-do, the island that KIRKLAND personnel had earlier evacuated and had since been
re-occupied by friendly forces, continued. On 2 September 1952, the enemy fired sixty-two artillery rounds at the island, killing one Korean and wounding another. Friendly warships fired retaliatory rounds at a supply road under observation by the guerrillas on Song-do. Subsequent reports claimed that the naval barrage had destroyed one bunker and one mortar position, killed fifteen NKPA soldiers, and wounded twenty-five. KIRKLAND had other concerns in September. According to a unit status report, Typhoon Karen impeded landings on the mainland and destroyed many unit supplies including two sampans, five squad tents, twenty-five bags of wheat, thirty bags of rice, and one thousand packs of Korean cigarettes.

On 27 September 1952, a twelve-man raiding team from KIRKLAND went inland to capture enemy personnel, but automatic weapons fire forced it to withdraw. The next day, a ten-man patrol led by 2LT James S. McGhee and SGT T. J. Phillips attacked an enemy force near an inland supply route. McGhee called naval gunfire on the enemy position to no effect. NKPA small arms fire intensified and forced the team to withdraw, but it sustained no casualties.

Shortly after midnight on 6 October, 2LT McGhee, Private First Class (PFC) Joseph T. Morgan, and seven guerrillas conducted a reconnaissance patrol and seized some intelligence documents. The next day, McGhee, PFC Robert F. Norris, and seven guerrillas picked up friendly agents in the same vicinity. The NKPA fired upon the escaping guerrillas, but hit no one. In response, guerrillas on Song-do directed naval gunfire at the enemy positions. KIRKLAND then had a brief respite from operations for additional training, but on 12 October, McGhee and one guerrilla landed ashore to assess the damage of naval bombardments on and around the Kojo peninsula. The two-man team made it only 2,000 meters inland before being seen by the enemy. In the ensuing firefight, the two men killed at least four enemy soldiers, but McGhee’s partner was killed.

LTC Anthony J. Scannon assumed command of the unit in early October. Commissioned in July 1942, Scannon had served in the 10th Armored Division during WWII, the 758th and 64th Heavy Tank Battalions in the late 1940s, and in various military intelligence assignments prior to joining the guerrilla command. He remained in command until 16 June 1953.

In late 1952, TF KIRKLAND briefly changed designation to TF SCANNON before becoming the 3rd Partisan Infantry Regiment (PIR) of the UN Partisan Forces, Korea (UNPFK) on 21 November 1952. Headquartered in Sokch’o-ri, the 3rd PIR’s East Coast guerrilla units consisted of four companies named STORM, KIRKLAND, TORCHLIGHT, and AVANLEE.

The enlarged unit organization and increase in guerrilla authorizations compelled assigned U.S. Army personnel to widen the recruiting net and, as before, allow any willing Korean into the ranks of the 3rd PIR. According to Ulatoski, “There was not any sort of vetting system for any Korean associated with KIRKLAND. What you saw was what you had, and what you had was what you worked with.” Many guerrillas had less than patriotic motivations to serve. Some just wanted a continual flow of pay, rations, or supplies. Others were mercenaries or bandits with no dedication to any country or cause. Still others wanted to avoid conscription into the regular ROK Army.

In November 1952, LTC Scannon noted that “it appears that we are not dealing with a group of fervent patriots or even brigands, but a group, particularly the newer recruits, who have accepted duty with the irregular forces as a lesser evil to being drafted into the ROK Army.” The unit had 275 Korean personnel in October 1952, 3,416 in February 1953, and over 4,500 in April.

The increase in guerrilla personnel was intended to strengthen the unit and make it more operationally effective, but it only aggravated the existing problems of supply shortages, low morale, and desertions. Indeed, desertions remained endemic throughout the unit’s existence. Some guerrillas escaped from the islands on sampans or by swimming. Others seized the opportunity to desert during a mainland operation. Guerrillas working in Chumunjin or Sokch’o-ri could easily abandon the unit. One source argues that the East Coast guerrilla unit “never seemed to overcome its problems of low morale and desertion long enough to mount an effective special operations campaign.”

Moreover, by the spring of 1953, operations had become extremely impractical because the NKPA had heavily reinforced the coast. This compounded the fact that Armistice talks had already made the U.S. less inclined to use Korean guerrillas for missions behind the lines. In addition, Ulatoski remembered, “It became very apparent, almost immediately after peace talks started, that the fervor of our North Koreans to return to help liberate their homeland markedly diminished.” Due to these factors, the unit operated less frequently and productively than some of the West Coast guerrilla units.

On 13 April 1953, the order came to stop recruiting for guerrilla units, and in June all such units had to evacuate.
islands above the 38th Parallel. UN/U.S.-sponsored guerrilla operations above the 38th Parallel ended with the formal ceasefire. Incorporating UN guerrillas into the ROK Army structure began. By March 1954, the ROK Army had inducted most of the Koreans who had previously served in the PIRs, formally ending the UN guerrilla warfare effort.

Between 1951 and 1953, the unit known as TF KIRKLAND, TF SCANNON, and the 3rd PIR did not have any appreciable effect on the East Coast for many reasons. First, the small number of U.S. Army personnel assigned to the unit negatively impacted the guerrillas’ training, resourcing, transportation, and support. According to 1LT Ulatoski, of the few American personnel assigned to the unit, though “excellent in quality and [knowledge of] their weapons, equipment, and tactics, none had ever operated with indigenous personnel, few had worked with an interpreter, and none had cultural training. This necessitated considerable ‘on the job training’ which, in turn, reduced effectiveness.”

Second, the ROK Army, the main conventional force along the East Coast, did not pick up the slack in the absence of sufficient resourcing from EUSA. KIRKLAND had to rely heavily on the other services (both U.S. and combined) and the limited availability of naval and air assets. Supply problems, low morale, and desertions continually hindered operational effectiveness and unit cohesion. As Ulatoski recalled, “The paucity of rudimentary supplies was one of several, if not the major, detriments to development of more effective guerrilla operations. This was highlighted by a period where the U.S. Army and the ROK Army cut off supplies to guerrilla elements . . . . This adversely affected all our Koreans and required innovative actions until resupply commenced.”

The unit did have a few successes, especially when it provided the Navy with enemy targets to shoot or drop bombs on. 1LT Naylor-Foote recalled, “By tying in with the Navy and furnishing them with [information], we felt that we would further the overall objectives which we understood to exist.” Ulatoski concurred: “We were able to supply the Navy with [gunfire] targets, probably our best contribution.” However, its internal problems, along with political and military considerations outside of its control, prevented the unit from having a significant impact on the war effort along the East Coast.

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17 WO AOG S3-98, Military Record and Report of Separation Certificate of Service for William S. Harrison, no date (ca. February 1946), HPFC; DD 214, Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty for William S. Harrison, no date, HPFC. Harrison earlier earned the Silver Star for having supported a “guerrilla type battalion” with an amphibious landing near Changsa-dong “behind enemy lines” on 14 September 1950. Initially “an active guerrilla commander” of the unit and led its counterattacks until additional landing craft arrived. Silver Star Citation for William S. Harrison, 12 September 1978 (for actions on 14 September 1950), HPFC.

18 Legion of Merit Citation (LOM) for William S. Harrison, no date, HPFC, hereafter Harrison LOM Citation.

19 ILT Harrison to ILT Winget, no date, folder “Miscellaneous Correspondence,” 8240th AU Files, cited in “UN Partisan Warfare in Korea,” 32; DA 638, Record of Recognition, Achievement or Meritorious Achievement for Service for ILT Kingston M. Winget, 3 December 1951, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Resume of Military Service of Captain Kingston M. Winget, 4 April 1955, copy in USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC.


21 According to Ulatoski, when MAJ Cocumelli assumed command of KIRKLAND at Nan-do, he discovered “a group of 40-50 heterogeneous North Koreans who had been very loosely organized into what was called a partisan unit, but . . . did not have any sort of real leadership and only [had] a basic organization.” Cocumelli and Ulatoski both had been “under the impression that there was a battalion, a considerable force of organized partisans on Nan-do.” Ulatoski letter, annex #1.

22 Bok letter, 1-4, 7.

In contrast to statements by Ettinger and Naylor-Foote, Ulatoski recalled that BIG BOY, not DARBY, had called Nan-do to inform KIRKLAND that it had the prisoner in its custody. This seemingly minor discrepancy demonstrated the confusion about the names, locations, and dispositions of teams operating on the mainland.


LTC Anthony J. Scannon to MAJ Stanfield, 11 November 1952, Folder “Correspondence Incoming,” 8240th AU Files, cited in “UN Partisan Warfare in Korea,” 76.
