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MURDER AT PANMUNJOM: The Role of the Theater Commander In Crisis Resolution

A Research Paper by Colonel Conrad DeLateur

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RESEARCH PROJECT

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MURDER AT PANMUNJOM: THE ROLE OF THE
THEATER COMMANDER IN CRISIS RESOLUTION

BY

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29th SENIOR SEMINAR
ROSSLYN, VIRGINIA
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iii
Chapter	
I. PROLOGUE.....	1
II. CRISIS IN THE MAKING.....	3
III. CRISIS: MURDER AT PANMUNJOM.....	7
IV. FORMULA FOR CRISIS RESOLUTION.....	9
V. CRISIS RESOLUTION: OPERATION PAUL BUNYAN.....	19
VI. CRISIS AFTERMATH.....	22
VII. CONCLUSIONS.....	27
APPENDIX: DIAGRAMS OF JSA AND DMZ.....	31
FOOTNOTES.....	32
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	42

ABSTRACT
of
MURDER AT PANMUNJOM: THE ROLE OF THE
THEATER COMMANDER IN CRISIS RESOLUTION

This Senior Seminar research project examines the role of the theater commander in resolution of an international crisis using the case study approach. The case examined is the crisis created by the murder of two US officers in the Joint Security Area (JSA) near Panmunjom by North Korean soldiers during August 1976. The crisis began on 18 August 1976 with the brutal murder of two USA officers while they were leading a work detail to trim a tree in the JSA and concluded with a combined ROK and US force cutting down that tree, three days later.

The crisis serves as a setting to study the role of General Richard G. Stilwell, the theater commander in Korea during that period. This paper examines and analyzes General Stilwell's initial reactions, his formulation of a plan to resolve the crisis, his recommendations and advice to the civilian leadership in Washington and Seoul, and his role in the successful execution of Operation Paul Bunyan.

This paper concludes that General Stilwell contributed three key elements to resolution of the Panmunjom crisis: first, maintaining the confidence of US and ROK leaders; second, his establishment of an effective chain of command; and third, his cogent directions to his subordinates. Further, the basis for these contributions was General Stilwell's leadership. He clearly demonstrated cognitive ability, moral courage, and presence of mind, which are essential for any theater commander to achieve resolution of a political-military crisis.

Colonel C. A. DeLateur, USMC

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I selected my Senior Seminar research project because of an indelible impression acquired from a 2100 meeting with General Stilwell on 20 August 1976. I left that meeting on the eve of Operation Paul Bunyan convinced that General Stilwell's leadership would be the key factor in the resolution of the Panmunjom crisis. A decade later, this impression formed the basis of my thesis for this paper.

Development of my thesis concerning General Stilwell's vital role as theater commander was only possible through the support of some of the key participants in the Panmunjom crisis. The interviews with Admiral James Holloway and Colonel Zane Finkelstein and the letter from Major General Morris Brady were invaluable; they were candid and responsive. I sincerely appreciate the time and candor of these gentlemen. Particular thanks goes to General Richard G. Stilwell, who freely gave his time for interviews and made his personal papers available to me.

My initial impressions gained during that meeting ten years ago were confirmed during the research for this paper. While I sincerely appreciate the comments of General Stilwell, Admiral Holloway, Major General Brady, and Colonel Finkelstein, the conclusions and errors contained in this paper are solely my responsibility.

C. A. D.
6 March 1987
29th Senior Seminar

SENIOR SEMINAR RESEARCH PROJECT

Murder at Panmunjom: The Role of the Theater Commander in Crisis Resolution

by Colonel Conrad A. DeLateur, USMC

I - PROLOGUE

"Now the general is the protector of the state. If this protection is all-embracing, the state will surely be strong; if defective, the state will certainly be weak."

Sun Tzu, The Art of War

The crisis began on 18 August 1976 in the Joint Security Area (JSA) near Panmunjom with the North Korean lieutenant's blood-chilling order to "Kill them all," and resulted in the brutal, unprovoked murders of two US officers. It ended three days later when a small force of American and South Korean soldiers cut down a lone poplar tree. The stark contrast of the beginning and concluding acts of this crisis, symbolizes the profound divergence between North Korea's draconian regime and our democratic society. This incident also provides a framework to study the role of the theater commander in the resolution of a political-military crisis.

A study of the theater commander's actions during the August 1976 crisis at Panmunjom will reveal his vital role in resolution of that crisis and, further, may suggest the unique characteristics and personality traits most necessary for the flag officers selected to fill these important command positions. At the time of this crisis, the theater commander was General Richard G. Stilwell, who concurrently held three major command billets in the Republic of Korea (ROK) since August 1973, Commander in Chief, United Nations Command (UNC), Commander, U.S. Forces Korea (USFK), and Commanding General, Eighth U.S. Army (EUSA).²

Governments have a wide range of means to achieve their objectives in today's international scene; these include diplomacy, trade, alliances, cultural and economic policies, covert actions, and the use of armed force. These actions are rarely employed in isolation, but rather in combination, as complimentary instruments to accomplish national objectives. Military force with the violence and destruction that can be attendant to it, is often a government's final option to resolve a crisis. As Clausewitz taught, although a nation might use military force to obtain an objective through the violent action

of military force, violence is never the goal per se but rather the achievement of a national objective otherwise unobtainable. A nation's armed forces, by their very existence, can be used as an instrument of policy in time of peace. In peace, as in war, a prudent politician will rely on the military option not as a substitute for diplomatic or economic policy but as an integral part of his nation's foreign policy admixture.³

The decision to commit US forces is an awesome responsibility for our civilian leadership, especially the National Command Authority (NCA); even a simple show of force has the potential for escalation into the unthinkable horror of nuclear conflict. When deciding to employ an armed force, our political leadership must consider not only whether such a commitment will achieve our national objectives, but also the more basic factors such as size, character, capabilities, and leadership of that force. The military leadership of such a force is of paramount importance because once our civilian leaders have decided to commit to forceful action, employment of this force falls squarely on the shoulders of the theater commander. In today's crisis environment, the role of the theater commander, the officer responsible for the effective employment of an armed force as our civilian leadership's answer to a crisis, is crucial.

II - CRISIS IN THE MAKING

"None of the principal plans which are required for a War can be made without an insight into the political relations."

Carl von Clausewitz, On War

General Stilwell was first notified of the appalling incident at JSA, while having lunch at a Kyoto hotel. The call came from his Chief of Staff, Major General J. K. Singlaub, at about 1300, 18 August 1976. General Stilwell was in the second day of a four-day official visit to Japan. Because the phone wasn't secure, Major General Singlaub could only provide his commander with fragmentary information. A terrible melee had occurred at the JSA resulting in the deaths of two US officers. The evacuation of JSA was in progress, UN forces were not in contact with the North Korean forces, and Singlaub saw no indication of any North Korean follow-up action. General Stilwell told his chief of staff that he desired a Military Armistice Commission (MAC) meeting and that he was proceeding to Tokyo. At that point, General Stilwell knew nothing about any provocations for the incident. Nor could he foresee that the events of the next 72 hours would place such demands on him, as theater commander, that he would sleep but one hour. General Stilwell's next information concerning the JSA incident came in a 1700 phone call from his Deputy Commander, LTG J. J. Burns, who called the situation "pretty serious." He provided the CINC more details, but was constrained by the lack of secure communications.¹

As General Stilwell departed Japan for the two-hour flight back to Seoul, he lacked all the facts and circumstances concerning the JSA incident and the present situation in Korea. But he must have intuitively sensed that this crisis that faced him as the theater commander would severely test his lengthy experience as a military leader. This experience included command of a engineer battalion (WW II), the 15th Infantry Regiment (Korean War), Corps of Cadets (West Point), the 1st Armored Division, the XXIV Army Corps (Vietnam), the 6th Army, and finally concurrent command of the United Nations Command, the 8th Army, and the US Forces, Korea. His background also had prepared him for more than just the military aspects of his Korean commands, such as their crucial diplomatic aspects. He had been the military advisor to the first post-WW II Ambassador to Italy, served as the Chief, Far East Division, CIA, and commanded the Military Assistance Command in Thailand.² General Stilwell, who only two days before had announced his retirement, was about to reach into his experience of nearly four decades of military service and three wars for the leadership necessary to achieve an effective and honorable resolution of

this volatile crisis. This essay details how he answered that call and resolved the crisis caused by the brutal murders at Panmunjom.

The general arrived at Kimpo Airport about 2000 (hours) and was met by his chief of staff, his operations officer (Major General J.J. Koehler) and his staff judge advocate (SJA) (Colonel Z. Finkelstein). During the forty-minute drive to his headquarters in Seoul, these officers briefed General Stilwell on the details of this crisis-provoking incident that occurred in the Joint Security Area (JSA).³

The JSA is a small, roughly circular area where, since the 1953 armistice, communist and democratic representatives of the Military Armistice Commission have met for the purpose of trying to prevent resumption of hostilities on the peninsula. Since the end of the Korean War, a condition far from true peace has existed along border. By August 1976, this less dramatic, lower level of conflict had resulted in the deaths of 49 Americans, 1000 South Koreans, and over 600 North Koreans.⁴ Oft termed "Panmunjom," the JSA is a neutral, though not always peaceful, area, 800 meters in diameter, and located astride the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) in the four-kilometer-wide Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) about 50 kilometers northwest of Seoul (see diagram at Appendix). Established under provisions of an October 1953 supplement to the Armistice Agreement, the JSA is designated an area in which personnel assigned or accredited to the Military Armistice Commission (MAC) can travel freely and conduct meetings peacefully. Terms of the supplemental accord permit each side (North Korean and UNC) to maintain, at one time, an on-duty force of five officers and 30 enlisted men inside the JSA with guaranteed freedom of movement and authority to bear nonautomatic weapons. The UNC's personnel form a 166-man unit designated the US Army Support Group-JSA (USASG-JSA) and operate from Camp Kittyhawk, also known as the Advance Camp (five kilometers south of Panmunjom). This all-male organization has three platoons, each consisting of one US and one ROK officer, 26 US enlisted men, and 15 Korean Augmentation to the US Army (KATUSA) soldiers. On a rotating basis, one platoon mans the JSA guard posts and provides security for MAC personnel, work details, and visitors. The second platoon serves as a quick reaction force (QRF) and is positioned 75 meters south of UNC Check Point (CP) 2 (located near of the entrance to JSA) between 1030-1700 hours and the balance of the day at the Advance Camp. The third platoon is off-duty.⁵

Panmunjom has been the focal point for the intense hatred for Americans ingrained in North Koreans from birth. During the period July '53 to July '76, the Korean People's Army (KPA) JSA guards engaged in 25 physical confrontations of sufficient severity to merit formal protest.⁶ UNC personnel had suffered serious injuries as exemplified by a KPA guard's attack on a US Army major in the JSA during June 1975 that left him with a

crushed larynx. The KPA guards threatened and verbally abused the UNC guards almost daily. North Korean (NK) tactics in the JSA included calls for reinforcement when disputes arose, followed by shouted obscenities and threats. The UNC guards were instructed to ignore minor harrassment, such as having their spit-shined boots trampled upon by the KPA guards, and when provoked, not to respond with similar actions. Stringent requirements governed selection of UNC guards in the JSA, for good reason.⁷

In the period just prior to the August crisis, several local, domestic, and international events occurred that had a bearing on the crisis and its outcome. Internationally, North Korea's ruler, Kim Il Sung, was actively pursuing a diplomatic offensive through the "nonaligned" nations to persuade the United Nations to "order" US forces out of Korea. Perhaps he felt this action would cause the armistice to collapse and allow him to reunify the Peninsula under his terms. On 17 August, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) launched a double-barreled political attack on the US. At the U.N., 21 communist nations submitted a resolution to the General Assembly demanding that all new military arms be removed from the ROK, all acts of aggression against the DPRK be stopped, and all provocative actions such as military exercises in South Korea be terminated. The second prong of the attack was aimed at gaining international support at the Nonaligned Nations Conference in Sri Lanka. Kim Il Sung planned to attend; however, the day before the conference he announced that he would not attend because of a "deteriorating situation on the Korean border." On the day after the conference began (17 August), North Korean Premier Pak Song Chul delivered a bombastic tirade against the US, proposing a resolution to condemn "imperialist maneuvers to provoke a war in Korea."⁸

On the US domestic front, President Ford attended the Republican Party Convention in Kansas City where he was facing stiff competition for the Republican Presidential nomination from ex-Governor of California, Ronald Reagan. His Democratic Party challenger, Jimmy Carter, who was leading President Ford by a wide margin in the polls, advocated a \$5-7 billion cut in defense spending that included withdrawal of US ground forces from Korea. On Capital Hill, Congress was concerned about the economic burden of maintaining forces in Korea, the human rights record of ROK President Park Chung Hee, and recent South Korean attempts to interfere with the US political process.⁹

Locally, during 1976 the DMZ remained an area of constant confrontation with the KPA. The UNC charged the KPA with 7,221 armistice violations during that year, yet the North Koreans did not respond to any of the charges, except to deny one air space violation. The forum for presentation of alleged armistice violations is the MAC meeting. This meeting also provides the KPA representatives to the MAC an opportunity to berate the other

side and make the often repeated demand that the US withdraw from the ROK. The last MAC meeting before the 18 August incident, the 378th MAC meeting of 5 August, was no exception to the usual KPA rhetoric.¹⁰

The vegetation that covers the JSA has been routinely and periodically cleared by both sides without incident. Therefore, pruning the foliage of a 40-foot Normandy poplar tree in the JSA near the Bridge of No Return that obstructed the line-of-sight view between UNC Checkpoint (CP) 3 and UNC Observation Post (OP) 5 was not considered a significant or provocative event. In early August, members of the Korean Service Corps (KSC) (civilian labor force administered by the 8th US Army) were instructed by USASG-JSA to survey the tree for possible pruning or cutting.¹¹ On 6 August, KSC workmen accompanied by four UNC security guards returned to the site to fell the tree. A KPA guard inquired what they were doing and when informed told them to leave the tree alone. This type of dialogue between the KPA and the UNC personnel was common. The KPA did not lodge a protest over this matter. Subsequently, the JSA commander, LTC V. Vierra, determined that the visibility could be sufficiently improved by trimming some of the branches instead of cutting down the tree.¹² This incident was of such a routine nature in the daily JSA regime, that General Stilwell was not briefed on it, nor would he have expected to be.¹³ No further contact with KPA on this subject took place until the 18 August incident.

III - CRISIS: MURDER AT PANMUNJOM

"Some wars are the kind that timid young men achieve manhood in, while others are the kind that make tough guys throw up everytime they think of it for ten to fifteen years."

James Park Sloan, War Games

Shortly after 1030, a work party of five KSC personnel accompanied by a ten-man UNC security force that included two US Army officers (Capt Arthur Bonifas and 1st Lt Mark Barrett) and one ROK officer (Capt Kim Moon Hwan) were sent to prune the poplar tree. In light of the KPA guard's 6 August action, LTC Vierra ordered precautionary security measures for this work detail that included positioning the remainder of the JSA Duty Platoon (those not manning other posts) at CP 4 (about 600 meters from the tree), locating the Joint Duty Officer (JDO) so he could observe the work party's activities, locating cameras at the tree, CP 3, and OP 5 to record any unusual events, and instructing Capt Bonifas, the commander of this detail, to call an immediate on-the-spot security officers' meeting should an impasse occur.¹

Shortly after the work party had begun pruning the tree, two NK officers and nine enlisted came to the scene by truck. One of the officers, Lt Pak Chol, who was an eight-year veteran of JSA and had a particularly virulent personality, asked Capt Kim what the men were doing, was informed, and voiced no objections. Work continued until 1047 when Lt Pak, for some unknown reason, instructed Capt Bonifas to halt the work, warning Capt Kim, "If you cut more branches, there will be a big problem (trouble)." Capt Bonifas refused and ordered the work to continue.² Lt Pak then sent for reinforcements, and about 1100 ten more NK guards arrived by truck, followed by several soldiers from two KPA guard posts, raising the NK total to about 30 men. Lt Pak threatened death if the work was not halted. The KSC laborers ceased work but Capt Bonifas ordered the pruning to resume, confiding to Capt Kim he believed these were only threats and that the NK guards were not intending to act. Capt Bonifas then turned to observe the workers and failed to see Lt Pak taking off his watch and the other KPA officer rolling up his sleeves. A UNC guard vainly tried to warn his commander of these sinister movements, just before Lt Pak yelled "Chookyo (kill)" and kicked Capt Bonifas in the groin. This assault signaled the start of an all-out attack by the North Koreans on the UNC security force. The KPA guards moved in with clubs, metal pipes, pick handles, and axes seized from the work party. Capt Bonifas was surrounded, beaten to the ground, and bludgeoned to death with the blunt ends of the axes. Lt Barrett was last seen alive rushing to the aid of a UNC guard being attacked. This

violent melee lasted less than four minutes.³ Heroic actions, such as those of a UNC guard who dispersed many of the North Koreans by driving a truck into them, helped prevent further casualties to UNC security force. The remainder of the JSA Duty Platoon arrived at the poplar tree within a few minutes, only to find the fight had ended, and the North Koreans reassembled on the northern side of the Bridge of No Return.⁴ As the Duty Platoon evacuated personnel from the fight scene, the Quick Reaction Force (QRF) evacuated the rest of the UNC force from the JSA.⁵

The tragic results of this one-sided fight were two US officers killed, one ROK officer wounded, and four US and four ROK enlisted men wounded; these were the first deaths in the JSA since the end of the Korean War.⁶ The JSA security force didn't use their weapons because of the suddenness of the attack, the KPA guards outnumbered them three to one, the loss of both US officers left the detail without leadership, and the KPA guards had AK-47s in their guardpost (GP) 8, which covered all routes of withdrawal from the fight. Any escalation would have decidedly favored the North Koreans.⁷ Although at the time of the melee the cameras located at the UNC guard posts did not deter the incident, they recorded this brutal, unprovoked attack by the KPA guards. Soon the entire world would witness their immoral attack, in graphic detail, to the ~~charge~~ ^{charge} of the North Korea.

IV - FORMULA FOR CRISIS RESOLUTION

"The strength of the group is the strength of the leader - I am the first believer. Leaders must have the quiet confidence, the certainty, of professional preparation and personal conviction that the task can and will be done."

Vince Lombardi

During the drive back to his headquarters, General Stilwell was presented three "military school solution" options: one, do nothing; two, "start WW III"; or three, do something "meaningful." By the time he arrived at his headquarters, the general had resolutely decided what meaningful action he would take to resolve this crisis.¹ He arrived at his headquarters at the US Army Garrison, Yongson (USAGY) about 2040 and convened a meeting 20 minutes later with selected members of his staff, including his deputy, chief of staff, operations officer, intelligence officer, the Chief of the Armistice Commission, SJA, and a representative of the US Embassy (the Ambassador, Richard L. Snieder, was in the US on leave). General Stilwell learned the details of that morning's JSA incident, the current situation, that a MAC meeting had been requested for the next day (1100), and that the appropriate reports had been sent to Washington and Hawaii. The general then directed his staff to draft three communiques: first, a statement of protest to be delivered by the Senior UNC MAC Member, RAdm Mark P. Frudden, at the next day's MAC meeting; second, a letter from Stilwell to his North Korean counterpart, the Supreme Commander of the KPA, Kim Il Sung; and third, a plan to remove the poplar tree.² Then shortly after midnight, he sent an order to his immediate subordinate commander, LTG John Cushman, Commander of I Corps (ROK/US), with copies to MG Morris Brady, who commanded the 2nd Infantry Division (2 ID), and LTC Vierra, who commanded USASG-JSA. This order directed immediate planning for removal of the tree, use of the force necessary to insure successful accomplishment of that removal, and preparation to augment the JSA security forces as necessary.³

After General Stilwell had delivered his initial "marching orders" to his staff and subordinate commanders, he turned his attention to advising Washington and Hawaii (CINCPAC) what actions he was taking to resolve the crisis. Shortly before 0200, 19 August, CINCUNC sent a message to JCS, Secretaries of Defense and State, and CINCPAC outlining his planned responses for his proposed MAC meeting statement, letter to Kim Il Sung, and general operations plan. With regard to his plan, he stated he would be sending a general plan for completing the work his men had attempted yesterday, namely "to remove the obstruction to our surveillance (and consequencely protection) of

our most exposed post in JSA." He concluded by stating his firm conviction that "the job must be done - and quickly."⁴

The unprovoked, despicable murders of two of his young officers was particularly abhorrent to the battle-seasoned general. Driven by their memory, he and his staff labored through the night to produce three messages to be sent to Washington. The messages containing the proposed letter and statement to Kim Il Sung were sent by 0300, 19 August (Thursday). In these messages, Stilwell called the incident "a display of callous disregard not only for the provisions of the Armistice Agreement, but also for human life. This attack was unprovoked but apparently premeditated, [and] constitutes a serious provocation...I remind you [Kim Il Sung] of your obligation...to prevent a recurrence...[and] to promptly punish those involved...and to make adequate reparations to the families of those killed and injured."⁵ General Stilwell remained convinced that any acceptable political resolution to this crisis must include the last two tenets, punishment of the perpetrators and reparations for the victims' families.

The US and ROK heads of state were quick to echo Stilwell's outrage over the JSA murders. In a statement released in Kansas City, President Ford condemned "the vicious and unprovoked murder of two American officers. Total responsibility for the consequences rests with the North Korean Government." The Blue House (South Korea's equivalent to our White House) accused the North Koreans of "premeditated, atrocious provocation" and noted that the ROK Government was "enraged by the unimaginably barbarous and inhumane acts of murder."⁶

The message containing CINCUNC's general operations plan was released at 0530, Thursday morning. In order to maximize available time and personnel and to ensure the commander's guidance was unmistakably clear, General Stilwell personally drafted this plan (in message format).⁷ In this message, he emphatically stated the work, started yesterday, must be completed for two fundamental reasons: first, "to improve the security of UNC CP 3," and second, "and of greater long-term significance, to make unequivocally clear that we will not tolerate erosion or denial of our legitimate rights and authority in the JSA and DMZ as specified in the Armistice Agreement and subsequent agreements." He added that a valid requirement exists to remove the tree's foliage (i.e. to improve line-of-sight observation of CP 3). He further stated his security force commander has the inherent responsibility for the safety of the personnel manning posts. General Stilwell concluded his arguments for removal of the tree with, "...although it is only a damn tree, it involves a major principle,...[the] exercise of our right to take essential measures, which are in no way prejudicial to the KPA security forces, to insure the protection of our forces. We cannot accept the premise that measures to protect our forces must be concurred in by the KPA."⁸

In the remainder of the message, General Stilwell presented his plan's two courses of action, their advantages and disadvantages, and his recommendation. Course of Action #1 had a skilled engineer team, protected by a security force, expeditiously moving to the tree, felling it, and withdrawing, without prior notice to the KPA of the UNC's intentions. The second course of action formally notified the KPA of the UNC's intention to complete the job; a similar notification would be made to the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission (NNSC) and the press. The advantage of the first course of action was, with the element of surprise and sufficient speed, the job could be completed before the KPA could react. The disadvantage was, if the job took longer than anticipated, the KPA could react with force, in force. The advantage of the second course of action was that it placed squarely on the public record the UNC's intent to complete this authorized, non-provocative action. The disadvantage was that the KPA would surely publically dispute the UNC's right and intent, and if they chose, make preparations to frustrate the operation. General Stilwell believed that the first course of action had the "higher probability of success - success being defined as exercise of our rights and removal of the obstruction." He concluded with a statement that epitomizes the dilemma of any military leader that has to balance military objectives with political objectives, "All my military instincts tell me this is the way to proceed. However, I appreciate that broader considerations may support the second course of action."9

Meanwhile the Washington military, diplomatic, and political crisis apparatus had been activated. During the period of the crisis, circumstances had thrust the "second team" in several key positions. The Secretary of Defense (Donald Rumsfeld) was in the hospital and his Deputy (William Clements) was Acting Secretary of Defense. General Brown, Chairman, JCS, was out of town and Admiral Holloway, CNO, was Acting Chairman.10 These two officials by virtue of their "Acting" status, sat as members of the Washington Special Actions Group (WSAG), whose major purpose during a crisis situation was to develop options for the NSC or presidential consideration. Its Chairman, Secretary of State Kissinger, convened the WSAG at 1530, 18 August (Washington, D.C. time). As a result of this meeting, the Group recommended to the President, who subsequently approved, certain military actions: (1) deployment of a F-4 squadron from Okinawa to Korea, (2) preparation for deployment of a F-111 squadron from the US to Korea, (3) preparation for the use of B-52's on training missions from Guam to Korea, (4) preparation for deployment of the Midway from Japan to Korean waters, and (5) an increase in the alert status of US forces in Korea. Also the WSAG agreed the JCS would coordinate with General Stilwell and continue to develop plans for possible offensive actions.11

The role of the Chairman, JCS, and his relationship to the

theater commander during a crisis are critical to its successful resolution. This crisis was no exception. Admiral Holloway felt his role during the crisis was to function as the "broker" between the civilian leadership (NCA) and the theater commander (General Stilwell). These two flag officers had a solid, professional relationship based on mutual respect formed over many years. When Admiral Holloway phoned General Stilwell in Seoul on Thursday morning (0700), theirs was a candid discussion between two professionals each appreciating the demands of the other's job. Admiral Holloway began by summarizing the results of the WSAG meeting, to include the nuances of what was discussed. He outlined his role, as he saw it, during this crisis. He would ensure JCS would translate the wishes of the NCA into messages that would be understood in the field, coordinate the necessary actions on the national front to implement the NCA's wishes, and provide timely directives to the theater commander. He said he was in full agreement with the CINC's plan to complete the JSA task by cutting the tree down, and would support it before the NCA. He assured the general the operation was his (theater commander's) to run. The admiral's initial task was to "sell" General Stilwell's plan to the NCA. He subsequently did this by calling President Ford in Kansas City and explaining the importance of the JSA operation. Admiral Holloway alerted the general that options being voiced within the Washington establishment ranged from doing nothing to exacting retribution by sinking a North Korean ship or destroying a North Korean barracks by artillery fire. Both officers were more concerned about possible adoption, by the NCA, of an option advocating retribution as this would significantly escalate the crisis.¹² The phone conversation concluded by Admiral Holloway alerting General Stilwell that he would be getting instructions to provide his detailed operations plan. He added while there was no question that the job should be completed, it was incumbent upon the military to spell out (for the civilian leadership) how UNC forces would deal with escalation by the KPA and to specify CINCUNC's desired rules of engagement (ROE).¹³

Wash
DC
options

At 0800, 19 August, General Stilwell met with ROK Minister of National Defense (MND) Suh to coordinate a time to move the US and ROK forces to an increased defense condition (DEFCON), to inform him of the F-4 squadron deployment to Korea, and to tell him that the UNC was developing a plan to complete the removal of the tree. Then at 1100, General Stilwell, accompanied by Minister Suh, ROK CJCS Ro, and the US charge d'affairs, went to the Blue House, where the general summarized the results of the earlier meeting for ROK President Park Chung Hee.¹⁴ General Stilwell described President Park as calm, deliberate, and positive throughout the meeting. President Park expressed his deep personal concern over the JSA incident which he found "beyond human reason." He viewed the increased readiness move and deployment of the F-4 squadron as appropriate. He strongly

endorsed General Stilwell's protest to the North Koreans that they punish the murderers, pay reparation, and guarantee non-recurrence; but he recognized that the communists were not likely to be forthcoming. He felt strongly the North Koreans should be "taught a lesson." Emphasizing the need to do this without the use of firearms, he offered General Stilwell 50 of his best ROK Special Forces, skilled in martial arts (Tae Kwon Do). (The general later accepted and used them in the operation.) Stilwell told President Park that the US Government felt strongly about this incident and its views generally paralleled his. He replied that a show of force, by itself, would not impress the North.¹⁵

General Stilwell left the Blue House with President Park's complete confidence in and support for his operation. This support was vital because it meant that the entire ROK military would enthusiastically stand behind the operation with all the resources at their disposal and within the constraints that the general prescribed.¹⁶ A significant part of this support undoubtedly came as a result of the unique relationship General Stilwell had with President Park. President Park genuinely respected General Stilwell as a soldier and a diplomat.¹⁷

At 1100, 19 August, a DEFCON increase was declared in Korea, triggering a set of often practiced military actions by General Stilwell's ROK and US forces. This was the first change in the local DEFCON based on events in Korea since 1953. Shortly thereafter, from the other side of the Pacific, JCS was transmitting the orders necessary to start the "show-of-force" deployments. The first elements (F-4s) of these deployments arrived in Korea at 1820, that day. At 1230, all US personnel were recalled from local leave and liberty. ROK and US forces quickly concentrated on the logistical and operational actions necessary to implement the plan. This shift to an increased readiness level caused an expected reaction from the North Koreans. The same day they went to a "wartime posture," which was essentially defensive in character, and clearly indicated their genuine apprehension over possible UNC military retaliation.¹⁸

DEFCON

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The preparations taken for communications support of the operation by the UNC were particularly important. Although the communications for General Stilwell's wartime command post (CP) at CP TANGO (located nine miles south of Seoul) were activated, he used a FM secure voice net to communicate from his Forward Command Post at Yongson to his forward operational commanders, particularly his task force commander, MG Brady. During the MAC meeting, unique communications were installed between the UNC Forward Command Post and JSA. These included point-to-point telephone circuits to the UNC Joint Duty Officer in the JSA and a one-way receive-only voice circuit from the MAC conference room to CINCUNC.¹⁹ General Stilwell was genuinely concerned about the possibility of Washington or Hawaii wanting to talk to the soldier in the "foxhole" during the operation,

thereby by-passing the legitimate chain of command and his prerogatives as the theater commander. His deputy and SJA, who had been involved with the Mayaguez crisis, reinforced his concerns with stories of the White House talking directly to tactical elements during in that rescue operation. To prevent a similiar recurrence, he established two secure phone lines to CINCPAC and the Pentagon, terminating one in his office and the other in the UNC Forward Command Post. These lines were left in the "open" position and thereby, effectively tied up all the secure phone lines into Korea. A simple, yet effective, method of "hanging up," used by General Stilwell and his staff, was to place a Styrofoam cup over the receiver.²⁰

!!! CINC prevented NCA from field contact.

On the local diplomatic front, the North Koreans rejected the 1000 MAC meeting that the CINC had called to protest the murders. Instead, they countered by calling for a lower-level security officers' meeting, which the UNC side rejected. The UNC then proposed a concurrent MAC/security officers' meeting at 1300. The North Koreans accepted, but for 1600. The 379th MAC Meeting opened with the Senior UNC Representative, RAdm Frudden, presenting a strongly worded protest from CINCUNC to Kim Il Sung. The proposed statement that General Stilwell had sent earlier to Washington had been "coordinated and modified" by the Departments of State and Defense and the NSC staff.²¹ Stilwell's protest contained these three major points: (1) the KPA committed deliberate, hostile acts in the JSA that resulted in the deaths of two UNC officers; (2) this unprecedented incident jeopardizes the MAC; and (3) the Supreme Commander, KPA, should provide assurances for the safety of the UNC personnel in the JSA. The protest also warned the North Koreans that such violent actions would not be tolerated. Despite photographic evidence to the contrary, the Communists asserted that their security guards only took measures to protect themselves from a premeditated attack by an overwhelming UNC force.²²

General Stilwell spent Thursday afternoon visiting his principal commanders that would be involved in the operation and coordinating the operations plan with them. LTG Cushman, CG, I Corps (ROK/US), played a key role because should the North Korean response to the JSA operation escalate into armed conflict, his 12-division combined field army had the mission to stop their attack across the western portion of the DMZ. General Stilwell insured that LTG Cushman was informed of the current situation and that he was present during all the key operational planning sessions.²³ MG Brady, CG, 2d ID, was named the task force commander (Task Force Brady) and charged with overall command of the ground forces during the JSA operation. Task Force Brady contained two subordinate elements, Task Force Vierra, charged with entering the JSA and felling the tree, and Task Force 2/9th Infantry, tasked to reinforce Task Force Vierra, as required.²⁴

Upon returning from meeting with his commanders, General

Stilwell met with his staff and selected officers of the ROK Army (ROKA) headed by General Lew, the Director of the ROK Joint Staff, at about 2200. They reviewed the details of the plan for cutting down the poplar tree in the JSA, appropriately named Operation Paul Bunyan. Here again, the CINC was the principal "action officer" in its drafting. He then left the meeting to dictate the details of this plan for message release.²⁵

CINCUNC's message that left Korea at 2330, 19 August, provided details to JCS of his earlier preliminary plan for removal of the tree near UNC CP 3. The concept of operations for Operation Paul Bunyan, as outlined in the message, read:

"(1) A UNC Task Force will enter JSA at H-hour (0700-0730) on D-day (not before 21 August) to fall the tree and demolish two KPA road barriers, that were illegally installed.

(2) Work will begin without prior notice to the KPA, although notice of our intentions will be communicated to them shortly after work has been started.

(3) Work will be accomplished by skilled engineers, equipped with chain saws and supported by predominately a ROK national force without fire arms."

General Stilwell estimated that the operation would last 45 minutes. He strongly recommended the addition of the destruction of the KPA road barriers to the concept because they are a "clear violation of the (JSA) rules and [this would] change our operation from one of simple reaction."²⁶

The CINC used this message to reinforce his firm belief that the disadvantages of prior notification of the KPA were greater than the advantages. First, the KPA would have the "scope to frustrate" the operation's objective. Second, he concluded that the odds did not favor the KPA "deliberately" opening fire on the UNC forces. He added that his "ROK colleagues are not persuaded that the KPA will not resort to shooting within the JSA."²⁷

The primary concern of Washington lay in CINCUNC's plans to counter KPA intervention and his control of the resulting escalation. Stilwell's message first walked the reader through the operation, step by step. He then listed his backup forces, to include artillery batteries to provide covering fires for withdrawal of JSA forces, if needed, and bringing I Corps (ROK/US) to a higher readiness condition. But then General Stilwell candidly added that the control of escalation is the "gut" question. After covering the range of possible KPA reactions, from doing nothing to a concerted ground attack with the intent of overrunning the JSA, he summarized his plan for control of any KPA reaction with: "We will need good local comm, cool heads, and a thorough understanding of the mission. That mission is to accomplish removal of the obstructions without a shooting battle ensuing. And should the other side start shooting, the mission becomes one of rapid extrication of our forces from close contact, relying primarily on artillery fires." General Stilwell concluded that this outline plan had been put together

Escalation

*not a routine
plan. ad hoc*

under "forced draft," but that he hoped that he would have the flexibility to "make changes to detail while adhering to the concept."28 Based on this plan, General Stilwell directed his operations officer to develop the necessary orders to implement Operation Paul Bunyan.29

Shortly after he released the "Operation Paul Bunyan" message, General Stilwell received a phone call from Admiral Holloway concerning the second WSAG meeting which had just concluded. Although Washington had not yet received the CINC's latest planning message, the proposals from his first message were immediately examined and integrated into the recommendations for the second WSAG meeting. As one official involved in this process noted, "It was General Stilwell's proposal that focused attention on going back into the JSA and reaffirming our rights there." At the latest WSAG meeting, the "show-of-force" deployments and Stilwell's basic concept of operations (the no-notice option) were accepted by the members, subject to the approval of the President. After the meeting, Secretary of State Kissinger flew to Kansas City to brief President Ford. The President approved the deployments but withheld final approval until Stilwell's detailed plan arrived from Korea.30

Admiral Holloway informed General Stilwell that the NCA, because of a desire to defuse the crisis quickly, wanted to execute the operation at 1100, 20 August (Korea time), and asked him if he could do it. The general replied his forces could execute the operation in 12 hours31, but it would be "ragged." The most difficult problem was the required coordination for the movement of the "Paul Bunyan" forces from their bases to the DMZ.32 General Stilwell explained his preference for 0700, 21 August, as outlined in his latest message. Fortunately, Admiral Holloway was able to "sell" General Stilwell's preferred time of execution to the NCA by arguing that it was the theater commander's preference and he best knew the situation.33

Although JCS had issued execute orders for the F-111 deployment (arrived in Korea 1800, 20 August), movement of the Midway task group to the southern approach of the Korea Strait, and the B-52 training mission over South Korea, General Stilwell had not received the execute order from Washington for Operation Paul Bunyan.34 When the CINC's detailed plan arrived in Washington, it was discussed, debated, and approved by the JCS, the Departments of State and Defense, and the NSC staff. Then it was sent to Kansas City for the President's decision. There, on Friday (20 August) morning, President Ford was briefed on the details of Operation Paul Bunyan, with its recommendation for no prior notice to the North Koreans. He approved General Stilwell's plan, believing it was essential to reassert US prerogatives firmly, but without overkill. Relating his reasons to the character of the North Koreans, he stated, "In ... Korea, to gamble with an overkill might broaden very quickly into a full military conflict, but responding with the appropriate amount of

force would be effective in demonstrating US resolve." The President reached his decision about 1015 (EDT), which was immediately flashed to Washington. The execute order was relayed by secure phone to General Stilwell by JCS at 1045 (EDT). When the CINC received this call in Seoul, the time was 2345, Friday night. Operation Paul Bunyan was scheduled to begin at 0700, the following morning.³⁵

On Friday, UNC forces were not idly standing by, waiting for an execute order. General Stilwell had his forces making earnest preparations for Operation Paul Bunyan on the basis that it would be approved. This was reflected in his message to Admiral Holloway sent at 0300, Friday, stating, "We are readying for successful execution of the operation. We are aware of our solemn responsibility to accomplish the mission with minimum jeopardy to our forces." He added that they would be faced with a key decision point at the beginning of the operation if the KPA deployed in strength around the tree. Further, that he and his field commander (MG Brady) "reserve the right to abort at that juncture."³⁶

Of great concern in Seoul and Washington was the ROE for the operation and ensuring adherence to the provisions of the Armistice Agreement. Therefore, the operation was designed to reflect the US as a great nation seeking to maintain its legitimate rights without unduly pressing its advantage in the eyes of the world, i.e., using a scalpel instead of an ax. General Stilwell had his SJA review the operations plan at every stage to ensure its compliance with the terms of the Armistice Agreement.³⁷ Of particular concern to General Stilwell was the ROE for the employment of artillery and aerial rocket fires during the operation. General Stilwell granted his task force commander the authority to initiate these fires, consulting with CINCUNC (unless all communications had been severed) before first use. The ROE for the operation conformed to two basic principles established by General Stilwell, that the "safety of our troops is paramount," and the "force employed to insure the safety of our forces will be the minimum essential."³⁸

During the daylight hours of Friday, the theater commander was as busy as any time since his return from Japan. The morning hours were spent reviewing and coordinating the final preparations for the operation with his ROK and US commanders, at a 1000 meeting at 2d ID headquarters and a 1130 meeting at JSA.³⁹ The 1000 meeting was significant because on this day, General Stilwell placed the operational control (OPCON) of the 2d Division directly under the 8th Army instead of under I Corps. This deviation from the normal operational chain established a direct link between the theater commander and the task force commander. This link facilitated General Stilwell's ability to respond to the NCA and influence the action in the field as required.⁴⁰

General Stilwell's next step was a somber duty. At 1300,

ROE

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2 ID from
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Seoul's Kimpo International Airport was shut down for one hour to provide a quiet setting for a memorial ceremony for the two Americans slain in the JSA. General Stilwell led US and ROK servicemen and civilians in a solemn farewell service for Capt Bonifas and 1st Lt Barrett as their caskets were placed aboard a plane for the final journey home.41

At 1500, the CINC met again with President Park at the Blue House to brief him on the status of US deployments to Korea and that he was proceeding on the assumption Operation Paul Bunyan would be approved by the NCA. President Park told the general that he believed the operation could be accomplished without bloodshed. As General Stilwell left the Blue House, he felt they were in a very small minority of those that shared this belief.42

As the anticipated time for the operation's execution drew near, the concerns of the principal planners increased. In Seoul, General Stilwell called Admiral Holloway stating he needed to know by midnight if the operation was to be executed by 0700 the next morning. He reasoned that certain troop movements must be made under the cover of darkness to insure the advantage of surprise. A delay in notification past midnight would mean a 24-hour delay in execution. Admiral Holloway replied that he would have his answer by midnight.43 Firm in his belief that approval would be forthcoming, General Stilwell ordered, at 2015, First ROK Army (FROKA) and I Corps (ROK/US) forces to move to general outpost (GOP) locations along the DMZ.44 Early Saturday morning, General Stilwell received another call from Washington, informing him that the WSAG wanted to target a KPA barracks for artillery fire should the North Koreans open fire. The general subsequently ascertained that this target was at the extreme range of his artillery and just beyond one of the neutral nations barracks. In relaying this target, the CINC gave specific instructions that it would be attacked only with his express approval.45

A few minutes after General Stilwell received the execute order from JCS, he ordered the UNC forces involved in Operation Paul Bunyan to execute. General Stilwell knew, in less than eight hours, all the world would know how successfully his command had accomplished those instructions.

ie most believed wld be escalation.

before approval to strike next am received, CINCINC ordered FROKA & I Corps to move to GOP locations along DMZ.

- then civilians & WSAG gave him expanded options to escalate ag. NK barracks!

V - CRISIS RESOLUTION: OPERATION PAUL BUNYAN

"There won't be any tribunal to judge your actions at the height of battle; there are only the hopes of the citizenry who are relying upon your integrity and skill. They may well criticize you later amid the relative calm of victory or defeat. But, there is a crucial moment in crisis or battle when those you lead and the citizens of the Nation can only trust you are doing what is right. And you develop that concept through integrity."

General John Vessey, Jr.

In Washington the principals involved in resolution of the crisis began to gather about 1645, Friday (0545, Saturday in Korea), in the Emergency Conference Room in the NMCC.1 Although the personnel were assembling to follow the progress of Operation Paul Bunyan, Admiral Holloway described them as a crowd waiting for a heavyweight fight to start. After reminding them that they were there to represent their agencies and to provide advice as required to the Acting Secretary of Defense and the CJCS, he said all hands contributed to a "text book" command center operation.2

On the other side of the world in Seoul, General Stilwell's Forward Command Post staff had been laboring through the night, tracking pre-operation deployments, coordinating details of the operations order with subordinate commands, and reviewing contingency plans. The JCS-directed augmentation forces for Operation Paul Bunyan, except for the Midway task group, were on station in Korea. The Midway with its 65 planes would sail from Yokosuka at 0800.3 The B-52s from Guam and the F-111s from Idaho, escorted by USAF Korea-based F-4s and ROK F-5s, were assigned flight paths to make their presence visible to the North Koreans, but far enough from the DMZ to prevent provocation.4

The stage was set for the soldiers on the ground to execute Operation Paul Bunyan. After H-hour, the Washington and Seoul Command Centers essentially monitored the progress of the operation, ready to provide information to the JCS and the NCA, and take actions to implement contingency plans in case of North Korean escalation.

One hour before H-hour, the tension generated by its arrival was exacerbated, when General Stilwell's public affairs officer informed him that a Newsweek reporter had just received a call from his New York office telling him to get "north," that something "big" was about to happen. General Stilwell consulted with Admiral Holloway, but they determined despite a "leak or guesswork," that the operation must go forward. CINCUNC added, "We'll know the effect shortly after we enter JSA."5

In CINCUNC's first operational report to JCS, his deputy established the reporting procedures. He reported that at 0650 a 23-vehicle convoy with TF Vierra aboard had left Camp Kattibawk

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for the JSA. He continued, "...we will be a bit freer within the limits of mission necessity by not burdening the man on the ground with too much reporting - he's got another job to do."6 That commander on the ground, LTC Vierra, reported to the overall Task Force Commander, MG Brady, who in turn reported directly to General Stilwell. The in-country secure voice net exactly paralleled the Operation Paul Bunyan chain of command. All secure phone lines into Korea terminated in General Stilwell's CP. This arrangement insured that the "man on the ground" was insulated by two intervening command centers (General Stilwell's and MG Brady's) from reporting directly to Washington or Hawaii and answering questions, such as "How old is the tree?" (actually asked during the operation).7 According to Admiral Holloway, this reporting procedure satisfied Washington's need for timely and accurate information during the operation.8

At 0648 on 21 August, Operation Paul Bunyan began when TF Vierra departed the Advance Camp (Kittyhawk) and entered the JSA at 0700. Simultaneously, 20 helicopters, with a rifle company aboard and escorted by seven gunships, circled between the DMZ and the Imjin River. The lead elements of TF Vierra went directly to the poplar tree. One JSA security platoon (armed with side arms and ax handles) manned the site around the tree and sent its truck to the Bridge of No Return to block NK guards from crossing. The engineers, with chain saws, quickly started cutting the tree limbs. At 0702, the ROK Special Forces (all trained martial arts experts and armed with clubs) entered the JSA, taking positions to augment the JSA platoon and secure the road junction near NK GP 5. A second engineer team wrapped chains around the drop barriers near NK GPs 5 and 6, and unrooted them with a truck. The ROKA Recon company (armed with their organic weapons) moved to an "overwatch" position near NK GP 8. "A" Company, 2/9th Infantry, stopped at UNC CP 2 and awaited further instructions.9

At 0705, a UNC message was passed to the KPA informing them that a "UNC work party would enter JSA at 0700 in order to peacefully finish the work left unfinished by the UNC work detail which was attacked by your guards on 18 August." Also it stated that as long as the UNC work party is not attacked there will be no violence from the UNC side. Simultaneously, the Swiss and Swedish members of the NNSC were notified and asked if they desired to be evacuated. They chose to remain and observe the operation.10

Within minutes, NK forces began to react. Five vehicles brought an estimated 150 KPA personnel, carrying side arms and AK-47s, who silently watched the operation from the west side of the Bridge of No Return. In response to this, the second JSA platoon joined the truck on the bridge's eastern end. "A" Company moved by truck to a position just outside JSA's southern boundry. The KPA guards appeared bewildered and intimidated by the sudden and deliberate actions of the UNC force. No hostile

actions were attempted by the KPA during the operation.¹¹

At 0745, the engineers finished their work, reducing the poplar tree that had been a symbol of North Korean defiance of legitimate rights within the JSA to a barren stump. The job had taken 45 minutes, the exact duration that General Stilwell had estimated in his detailed plan sent to the JCS. Immediately thereafter, TF Vierra began to withdraw, taking all debris from the work with them. By 0826, all Operation Paul Bunyan forces had left the JSA. Afterwards, KPA guards moved about the JSA examining the tree stump, the sites where their drop-barriers had been uprooted, and the damage to their GPs 5 and 8 (inflicted by overzealous ROK Special Forces soldiers kicking in the windows and walls).¹²

Operation Paul Bunyan accomplished its mission without bloodshed. The only weapons fire occurred when MG Brady was flying over Panmunjom to observe any reactions by the KPA. His helicopter was fired upon and received two rounds, as it flew near the DMZ. The helicopter landed safely, without injury or serious damage.¹³

NK fired at MG Brady's TF Co. 1

At the end of the operation, JCS asked General Stilwell to give his personal evaluation as to whether or not guards should be put in UNC GP 3 after Paul Bunyan forces withdrew from the JSA. General Stilwell, reflecting his trust in his subordinate commanders and the reason for the operation, replied: "First, the basic purpose of the operation was to enforce our right of access to and from our designated posts; second, my evaluations in the last 50 minutes suggest that the KPA came to a deliberate decision not to contest the removal of the tree and barriers; and finally, while I'm perfectly ready to discuss this matter in greater detail with my JSA Commander, and will do so, I'm not prone to question his judgment at this juncture prior to consultation." Meanwhile, LTC Vierra had decided not to man GP 3 until he had completely assessed the situation in the JSA. Later in reporting this to JCS; General Stilwell added he would not, for the same reasons he had indicated earlier, question his judgment.¹⁴

General Stilwell received congratulations for a highly successful military operation from the White House (passed through the NMCC), Director of the CIA, Acting Secretary of Defense, and Admiral Holloway. The CINC said he appreciated those sentiments, but they really belong to his soldiers.¹⁵ He then left to fly north for the most rewarding and enjoyable part of Operation Paul Bunyan, to personally thank and congratulate his tired but proud soldiers. General Stilwell still had not slept in almost three days.

VI - CRISIS AFTERMATH

"Battles are won by the infantry, the armor, the artillery, and air teams, by soldiers living in the rains and huddling in the snow. But wars are won by the great strength of a nation--the soldier and the civilian working together."

General Omar Bradley

The success of Operation Paul Bunyan in resolving the crisis created by the JSA murders is best determined by measuring the degree to which the operation's tactical and strategic/political objectives were achieved. The tactical objectives were fairly simple, to cut down the poplar tree and to remove two illegal NK road barriers. The strategic objective, whose success is more difficult to measure, was to demonstrate US/UNC resolve that denial of legitimate rights in the JSA would not be tolerated.

The achievement of the operation's tactical objectives was highly successful by any standard. Operation Paul Bunyan called for the primary ground task force to enter the JSA at 0700, which happened as planned. This force was then to accomplish its objectives in the estimated time of 45 minutes; again this was done on time. Implicit in these objectives was the expeditious withdrawal of the task force; all forces were withdrawn from the JSA within 45 minutes of the work's completion. Of great concern to the leadership at all levels was the possible intervention by the KPA, which could have resulted in bloodshed. The reasons for nonintervention by the KPA during the operation are not readily discernable, but were probably a combination of military and political factors. The speed and surprise achieved by the UNC forces caught the KPA unprepared, and possibly unwilling, to react with violence. Once inside the JSA, the determined, professional actions of the ROK and US soldiers may have intimidated the KPA soldiers and made them reluctant to respond actively. The North Korean Government was embarrassed internationally by this incident, and therefore hesitant to compound their loss of "face" through another incident, especially one for which they were not completely prepared.

The tactical objectives of Operation Paul Bunyan were formulated by General Stilwell upon his return from Japan, steadfastly maintained by him throughout the planning process to the final decision by the President, and skillfully executed by forces under his command. This earned him the well deserved accolades of the Presidents of the US and the ROK, the two nations' top military leadership, and his subordinates. Clearly, the resolution of this crisis was successful if measured by the achievement of the tactical objectives of Operation Paul Bunyan. General Stilwell and his command, with the complete confidence of the ROK Government and support of JCS, responded to the NK

provocation with determined resolve. Their willingness to take necessary risks to reaffirm their rights within the JSA was clearly demonstrated to North Korea and the rest of the world.¹

Soon after completion of Operation Paul Bunyan, its strategic/political effects began to appear. Before noon, a Pyongyang radio broadcast charged that the operation was a "grave provocation," designed to trap the DPRK in the UNC's "war provocation plot."² Within an hour after the JSA operation, the senior NK representative to the Armistice Commission requested a private meeting with RAdm Frudden to convey a message from Kim Il Sung. At the noon meeting, the NK representative read Kim's statement, which in part stated, "... it is regretful that an incident occurred in the Joint Security Area ... we urge your side to prevent the provocation. Our side would never provoke first ...". This was the first use of a personal message by Kim to CINCUNC in the 23-year history of the Korean Armistice. This statement was immediately flashed to Washington. General Stilwell's opinion of Kim's message was that it was totally unacceptable; not only was Kim not accepting responsibility for the incident, he was also blaming it on the UNC for inadequate security arrangements.³

The State Department's analysis of Kim's message, however, considered it somewhat conciliatory, which conflicted with their earlier criteria for an acceptable NK response. That criteria, put forth at the 19 August MAC Meeting, was the North Koreans must accept responsibility for their brutal actions as well as provide assurances that such incidents would not happen again. The Department's Korean working group, however, believed that accepting Kim's reply would cause the media to write off the crisis and undermine the leverage the US had created. They were also concerned that an opportunity to follow through on a part of Kim's message, the separation of forces to prevent future incidents, would be lost. On 22 August, the State Department Press Officer made a statement that the US did not find Kim's statement acceptable. The next day the Washington Post reported the story with the headline, "US Says Message Fails to Admit Guilt in 'Brutal Murders.'" Secretary Kissinger after reading the article, instructed his press office to put out a "more balanced" interpretation of the NK message. That interpretation included a statement that recognized North Korea's expression of regret, saying "we consider this a positive step." Based on that, the Post followed with the headline, "State Department Reverses Stand on N.Korea's Regrets."⁴ This prominent headline effectively ended the Korean tree crisis in the eyes of the media, and as a result the minds of the American public. Unfortunately, formal MAC negotiations over the final political resolution of the crisis had not yet begun.

Kissinger killed the crisis.

Throughout the crisis and its military resolution, the US public reaction, as expressed by the media, was quite favorable towards its government's decisions and military response. Most

of the editorials, however, did not focus on the narrow context of the management of this crisis, but rather on the broader issue of the role of the US forces in Korea. While Congress deplored the deaths of the two US officers and applauded Operation Paul Bunyan, their focus was on human rights in Korea, the War Powers Resolution, and the role of US troops in Korea.⁵

The international media followed the crisis in Korea quite closely. The "Free World" press was generally very supportive of US actions during the crisis. In Japan, one newspaper called Kim's message a "diplomatic defeat for North Korea." North Korea's nearest communist allies, the Soviet Union and the PRC, were quite restrained in their reaction, only lightly chastising the US for its "saber-rattling" actions. The communist displeasure with North Korea's actions at Panmunjom may have been manifest when the North Korean allies withdrew, on 20 September, their UN resolution denouncing the US presence in Korea.⁶

The ROK was generally satisfied with the apparent outcome of the crisis, and particularly pleased with the JSA operation and their participation in it. The immediate deployment of US forces to Korea in support of the JSA operation impressed the South Koreans with the sincerity of the US commitment to the ROK. Some within the senior ranks of the ROK military felt that some form of retribution was a more appropriate action against the KPA, e.g., killing two KPA guards. In the streets, the solid bond between Americans and their Korean hosts grew even stronger. In the bars, "hostesses" even bought US soldiers drinks, at least for a few days. All of South Korea realized that they had witnessed a rare event in which they had played a key part -- North Korea had lost face in the world's eyes.

The final chapter in this crisis was about to be played out, where it had begun, in the Joint Security Area. Negotiations to conclude the crisis were held at the MAC Meetings of 25 and 28 August. Prior to the first meeting, General Stilwell told Washington that Kim's message, while positive in that it responded and was not filled with the usual propagandistic hyperbole, did not acknowledge guilt, provide assurances against repetition, and agree to punish the guilty. He believed unless North Korea's response included these assurances, that "we have broken faith with the ROK armed forces, we will have presented a conciliatory face which the North will not take as good will but the absence of will, and there will be a degree of subconscious resentment among many members of this command." He then recommended these assurances be sought from the NK at the 380th MAC Meeting (25 August): first, the offenders be punished; and second, instructions be issued to their personnel to avoid any physical contact with the JSA security force.⁷

As tensions began to wane, the UNC's Rear Admiral Frudden opened the 380th MAC Meeting by calling for punishment of those responsible for the murders and insisting on assurances for the future safety and freedom of activity of the UNC personnel.

Citing the presence of armed personnel of the two sides in a limited area, Major General Han, the KPA's senior member, proposed each side be restricted to their respective sides of the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) within the JSA. The UNC took the offer under consideration.⁸

General Stilwell felt whatever position the US took on the merits of North Korea's proposal, it would have the effect of diverting attention from the 18 August murders and would imply the JSA security arrangements, not the KPA's actions, were the cause of the crisis. Despite his feelings to the contrary, he accepted the reality of his government's desire and prepared for the next MAC meeting (381st) to gain assurances from the other side for safety of the JSA personnel, their freedom of activity, and no physical contact between the two sides.⁹

On 28 August, the Senior UNC Member opened the 381st MAC Meeting by again insisting on assurances for the safety of the UNC personnel and repeated the CINCUNC demand for punishment of those responsible for the murders. Admiral Frudden then stated he would be willing to discuss new JSA security arrangements if the KPA were to provide the requested guarantees and remove the four KPA guard posts in the UNC side of the JSA. General Han urged the UNC to accept his proposal without preconditions as "assurances and removal of NK guard posts" were implied in his offer. The Senior Member then agreed to have their secretaries meet to implement the new security arrangements.¹⁰

During 31 August through 6 September, the UNC and KPA Secretaries met to coordinate and implement the new security arrangements for the JSA. Throughout these sessions the North Koreans displayed a sincere willingness to resolve the matter with a minimum of delay and publicity. On 6 September, the Senior Members approved the changes to the Military Armistice Agreement that included: (1) jointly establish and mark the MDL through the JSA (first time since 1953), (2) restrict military members from crossing the MDL into the opposing side, (3) require each side to insure the safety of all who legally transit the MDL, and (4) prohibit construction of barriers that obstruct observation of the opposing side.¹¹

An analysis of this final chapter of the crisis resolution reveals that the UNC and US probably extracted all safety assurances for their personnel from North Koreans that could be reasonably expected and, more importantly, these guarantees were included in the Armistice Agreement. Also, the UNC would not likely have received a more explicit apology than Kim's statement of "regret" and would not obtain a promise to punish the KPA murders. The UNC had extracted the closest utterance to an apology that could be expected from the most authoritarian communist dictator in Asia. Finally, the North agreed to remove its four illegal guard posts from the UNC side of the JSA.¹²

As General Stilwell stated, a decade after the crisis, the political results of Operation Paul Bunyan were probably as good

as could have been expected. "We (the US) should have been tougher on the North Koreans, i.e., demanded that they accept responsibility for the murders. Washington wanted to defuse the crisis as quickly as possible; however, the acceptance of Kim's response allowed the North Korean position that the JSA security arrangements were the cause of the incident. As a practical matter this may have been politically expedient, but it discounts the basic principle, the cause of the incident was unprovoked, resulting in the brutal murder of two US officers."13

General Stilwell, in summarizing the results of Operation Paul Bunyan, recently said that it "accomplished its limited mission, [and] was a simple military operation performed with precision and discipline."14 While not totally satisfied with the political results, the General was justifiably proud of his command and its achievement of the tactical objectives of the operation. In commending all those who had a part in Operation Paul Bunyan for their professionalism and courage, General Stilwell said that their performance was "reassuring to those who rely upon us and, of equal moment, gave our adversaries pause."15

VII - CONCLUSIONS

"And therefore the general who in advancing does not seek personal fame, and in withdrawing is not concerned with avoiding punishment, but whose only purpose is to protect the people and promote the best interests of his sovereign, is the precious jewel of the state."

Sun Tzu, The Art of War

General Stilwell's role in the Panmunjom crisis, one of the most successfully resolved crises in the past decade, was significant, by any measure. The criticality of his role can easily be attributed to his position as the theater commander from which he was the nexus of political and military actions. His contribution, however, was a result of much more than just his position or rank. That contribution consisted of three key elements: first, the confidence General Stilwell established in US/ROK civilian and military leaders; second, his establishment of a simple, effective chain of command with parallel communications; and third, his clear, cogent directions to his subordinates.

The confidence in General Stilwell held by the US and ROK leadership stemmed from his solid military and diplomatic experience and reputation as a commander. He was widely respected throughout the Army and in Washington as a "tough" soldier.¹ At the time of the incident he had been the CINC in Korea for three years. Having commanded units at every level from company to army and having served in three wars, General Stilwell brought extensive command experience to his position. As previously mentioned, he possessed an unusual degree of experience in diplomatic affairs for a soldier. The speed and unanimity with which the leaders in Washington approved and adopted General Stilwell's plan reflected their trust in him. The relationship between Admiral Holloway and General Stilwell, based on mutual respect, facilitated the smooth flow of information, advice, and recommendations from the theater commander to the NCA and the decisions and directions back to the CINC. Admiral Holloway "sold" the theater commander's advice and recommendations because of his confidence in the source. General Stilwell executed the decisions of the NCA smoothly because of the background and information that Admiral Holloway provided him. In Korea, the general enjoyed the same trust from the ROK leadership. He actively sought the full participation of the South Koreans in all the critical aspects the operation. He acted as the principal source of information for Washington on President Park's feelings concerning the crisis and plan. President Park's strong faith in General Stilwell's judgment and leadership proved crucial in gaining ROK military support of the

operation.

General Stilwell devised an effective chain of command for Operation Paul Bunyan and matched it with parallel communications. At the national level, this chain ran directly from the NCA to the theater commander in Korea with the Chairman of the JCS inserted into it only as a "broker." The recently passed DOD Reorganization Act provides that the President may direct communications with his combatant commanders through the Chairman, JCS. This Act further directs the Chairman to "obtain and evaluate" information from the combatant commanders, but does not confer any command authority to the Chairman.² This law mirrors the arrangement used by Admiral Holloway and General Stilwell during the Panmunjom crisis. At the theater level, the chain of command for this particular operation ran from the theater commander to the task force commander (MG Brady), then to the commander "on the ground" (LTC Vierra). This chain allowed General Stilwell to be the linchpin, translating the decisions from Washington into effective military actions at the JSA. General Stilwell insured the communications that paralleled this chain of command were without bottlenecks and were not circumvented. The resulting unity of command, centered on the theater commander, provided a clear and effective command hierarchy.

Because of the time constraints to plan, prepare, and execute Operation Paul Bunyan, General Stilwell's ability to give clear, cogent direction and guidance to his staff and subordinate commanders was crucial. The simple, concise "mission-type" orders that he issued ensured a thorough understanding of the operation by his subordinates.

While these three elements combined to make General Stilwell's role in resolution of the Panmunjom crisis vital, his leadership was the solid foundation on which the success of Operation Paul Bunyan was based. The leadership traits necessary for a theater commander to deal effectively with a crisis are understandably unique. As Clausewitz wrote, "Every level of command has its own intellectual standards [and] its own prerequisites for fame and honor." General Stilwell clearly manifested three leadership traits during Operation Paul Bunyan that were instrumental in its successful outcome.

The first of the traits was his cognitive ability. More specifically defined as coup d'oeil, a French term that refers to intuition or the "inward eye." According to Clausewitz, coup d'oeil allows the commander the "quick recognition of a truth that the mind would ordinarily miss or would perceive only after long study and reflection."³ This essential trait facilitates sound tactical and strategic decision making in the confusion and tension of an unfolding crisis. In the half-hour drive from Kimpo to his Seoul headquarters, General Stilwell received a briefing on the JSA incident, made his decision on the course of action to resolve the crisis, and clearly conveyed that decision

to his subordinates upon arrival at his headquarters. The general's lucid intuition, or douç d'oeil, was founded on his extensive military background and command experience. Had he not possessed this unique cognitive ability, Operation Paul Bunyan would have lacked its essential clarity and simplicity.

According to Clausewitz, "Courage is the soldier's first requirement" from private to commander in chief. He added that there are two kinds of courage, "...courage in the face of personal danger and courage to accept responsibility."⁴ Because he is not usually at the front during a crisis, the theater commander finds more need of the second type of courage, moral courage. General Stilwell, having formulated a course of action that he believed would effectively and honorably resolve the crisis, had then to see it through to execution in the face of those who thought it either too forceful or not forceful enough. At times during the planning and decision stages of Operation Paul Bunyan, General Stilwell's plan came under fire from the command authorities of the US and ROK Governments. In spite of this "heat," he resolutely stood by his conviction that the operation reaffirmed the UNC's legitimate rights in the JSA. He believed US action in relation to the challenge should conform to standards of customary international law; that is, an injured nation is justified in taking reprisal action in a degree equivalent to, but not exceeding, the level of the injury.⁵ In spite of this, General Stilwell felt an "eye-for-eye" reprisal would have lead to unnecessary escalation and bloodshed.⁶ His operational concept provided for a honorable, resolute solution to the crisis, while accomplishing the tactical and political objectives.

Having cognitive ability to quickly formulate a solid plan and the moral courage to stand resolutely by it, General Stilwell also possessed the presence of mind to see it through to successful completion. His ability to think effectively, while remaining calm and dispassionate during the pressure of the crisis, clearly inspired his subordinates. This was even more remarkable considering that the General slept only one hour during the three days of the crisis.

When asked the question, "What are the essential leadership traits necessary for a theater commander to successfully deal with a crisis?" he listed "presence of mind, knowledge of his command's capabilities, physical endurance, capability to deal with multiple issues simultaneously, integrity (moral courage), and luck."⁷ Luck, however, could better be described as boldness. As Sir Archibald Wavell opined, "A bold general may be lucky, but no general can be lucky unless he is bold."⁸ General Stilwell concluded that all these traits "add up to radiating to one's subordinates and allies a feeling of confidence that the boss is in command of the situation and will see it through to a successful conclusion."⁹ MG Brady said of his former "boss," "His presence was a generous blend of solid soldiering and the

sophisticated intellectual. He was loved by those who worked for him and trusted by all. His unique style of expression reflected the sincerity of the man and a genuine desire to get the job done for the right reasons."10

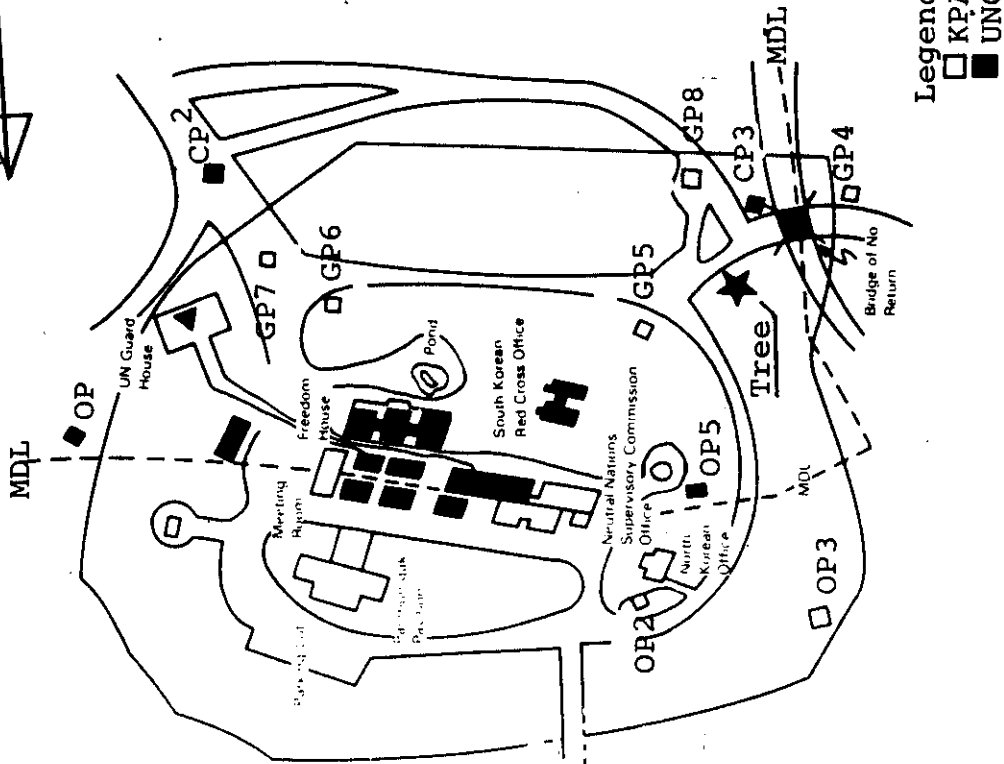
On a personal note, I had occasion to observe General Stilwell on the eve of Operation Paul Bunyan. Assigned as a liaison officer from 1st Radio Battalion to an agency of USFK, I was called to General Stilwell's office at 2100, 20 August 1976. A detachment from my parent battalion was training atop a hill five kilometers east of the JSA. General Stilwell was concerned for the safety of these Marines if the KPA reacted with force to the UNC operation. He calmly listened to my briefing that most of the Marines and their equipment had been withdrawn and the remainder would follow, assisted by the 2d ID, prior to 0700 the next day. Satisfied that the safety of the Marines was protected, he thanked me, and I left. I left with the impression of a man, calmly, resolutely proceeding to accomplish this operation, as if it were a routine task, despite the fact he had the eyes of the world on him and still hadn't received the JCS execute order.

A plaque with a cross section of a poplar tree mounted on it is prominently displayed in the National Military Command Center. It is inscribed with these words:

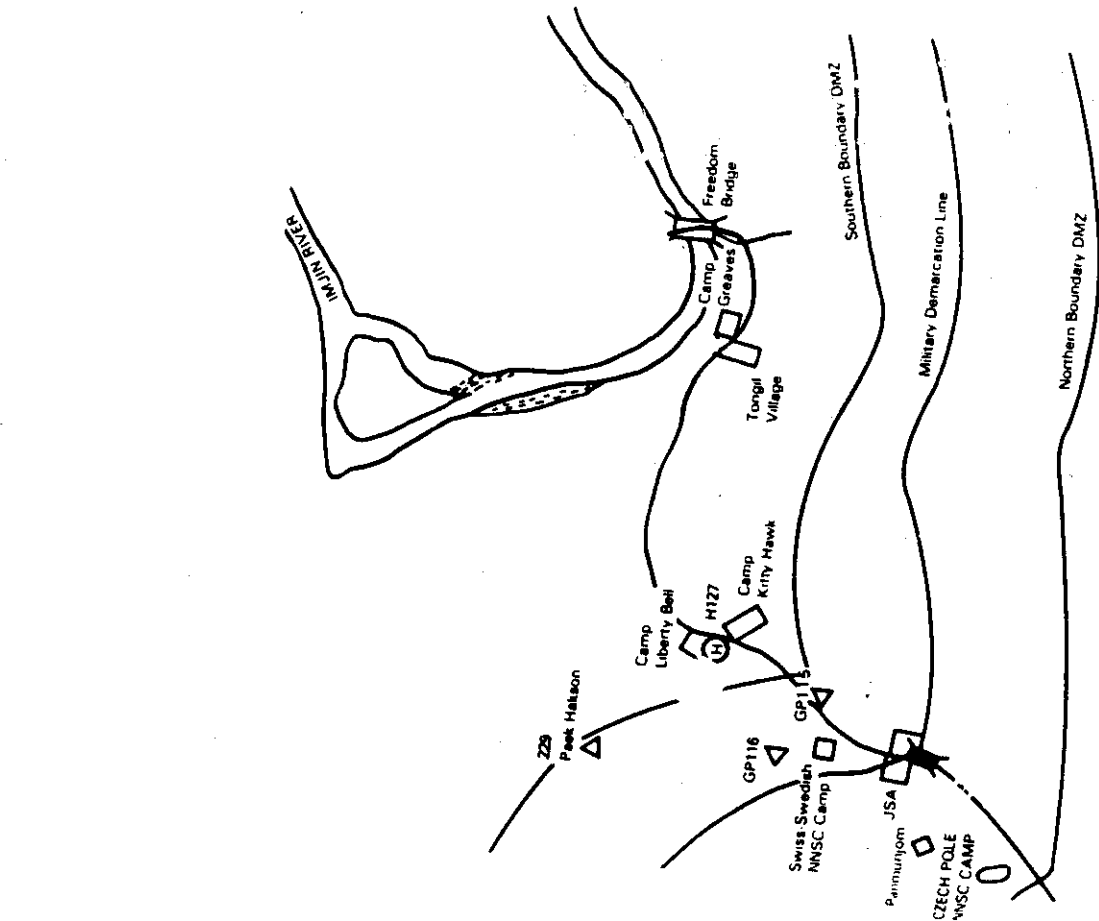
"This wood was taken from a tree at Panmunjom. Beneath its branches two American officers were murdered by North Koreans. Round the World, that tree became a symbol of communist brutality and a challenge to national honor. On 21 August 1976 a group of free men rose up and cut it down." This plaque was presented by the theater commander of those free men, General Richard G. Stilwell, under whose leadership they rose to meet that challenge to our national honor.

APPENDIX

DIAGRAMS OF:



Legend
 □ KPA
 ■ UNC



DEMILITARIZED ZONE (DMZ)

JOINT SECURITY AREA (JSA)

FOOTNOTES

I-PROLOGUE

1

The focus of this paper is the leadership traits required of a commander at the "theater" level. For this reason, the JCS Pub 1 definition of "theater" is too restrictive. "Theater" in the phrase "theater commander" has, therefore, a more generic, encompassing meaning in this paper; the theater commander exercises operational control over major operational commands, whose forces are usually multiservice, often multinational, and exist to perform broad, continuing military missions.

2

General Richard G. Stilwell, "In Korea, 'Single-Minded Emphasis on Deterrence,'" Army, October 1976, p. 70.

3

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II-CRISIS IN THE MAKING

1

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2

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3

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4

Richard G. Head, Frisco W. Short, and Robert C. McFarlane, Crisis Resolution: Presidential Decision Making in the Mayaguez and Korean Confrontations (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1978), p. 5.

5 1976 Annual Historical Report (RCS CINCPAC 5000.4) - Headquarters United Nations Command/United States Forces Korea/Eighth United States Army, by H. M. Katz, Command Historian (Seoul, Korea: 8th US Army), pp. 9-11. (Note: This document is classified; however, the portion [Chap. II] used in this paper as a source document has been declassified. [Chap. II was declassified on 31 Dec 1985]).

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Major Wayne A. Kirkbride, DMZ - A Story of the Panmunjom Axe Murder, (Seoul: Hollym Corporation, 1984), p. 21.

7

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8

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9

Ibid., pp. 152, 156, and 157.

10

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11

Ibid., p. 11.

12 CINCUNC SEOUL KS//SJS// message of 040905Z SEP 76,
Subject: "JSA Incident - 18 Aug 76, paragraph 2.

13

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III-CRISIS: MURDER AT PANMUNJOM

1

CINCUNC SEOUL KS//SJS// message of 040905Z SEP 76,
Subject: "JSA Incident - 18 Aug 76, paragraph 4.

2 Ibid.; paragraphs 6 and 7.

3

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4

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5

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6

Richard G. Head, Frisco W. Short, and Robert C. McFarlane, Crisis Resolution: Presidential Decision Making in the Mayaguez and Korean Confrontations (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1978), p. 170.

7

CINCUNC SEOUL KS//SJS// message of 040905Z SEP 76, Subject: "JSA Incident - 18 Aug 76., paragraph 11.

IV-FORMULA FOR CRISIS RESOLUTION

1

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2

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3

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4

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5

Ibid.

6 Richard G. Head, Frisco W. Short, and Robert C. McFarlane, Crisis Resolution: Presidential Decision Making in the Mayaguez and Korean Confrontations (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1978), pp. 175 and 178.

7

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13

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14

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15

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16

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17

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19

Ibid., p. 18.

20

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21

Richard G. Head, Frisco W. Short, and Robert C. McFarlane, Crisis Resolution: Presidential Decision Making in the Mayaguez and Korean Confrontations (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1978), pp.186-187.

22

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23

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24

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25

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26

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28

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29

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30 Richard G. Head, Frisco W. Short, and Robert C. McFarlane, Crisis Resolution: Presidential Decision Making in the Mayaguez and Korean Confrontations (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1978), pp. 184, 190-191.

31

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32

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35

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36

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45

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V-CRISIS RESOLUTION: OPERATION PAUL BUNYAN

1

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11

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12

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13

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14

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15

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1

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2

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3

Ibid., pp. 197-198.

4 Ibid., pp. 198-202.

5 Ibid., pp. 204-207.

6 Ibid., pp. 211-213.

7 General Richard G. Stilwell, USA (Ret.), Personal Papers and Message File, re: Operation Paul Bunyan.

8 1976 Annual Historical Report (RCS CINCPAC 5000.4) - Headquarters United Nations Command/United States Forces Korea/Eighth United States Army, by H. M. Katz, Command Historian (Seoul, Korea: 8th US Army), p. 8.

9 General Richard G. Stilwell, USA (Ret.), Personal Papers and Message File, re: Operation Paul Bunyan.

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11 Ibid., pp. 23-24.

12 Ibid., p. 23.

13 Interview with General Richard G. Stilwell, USA (Ret.) Stilwell Associates, Rosslyn, Virginia, 23 January 1987.

14 Ibid.

15 1976 Annual Historical Report (RCS CINCPAC 5000.4) - Headquarters United Nations Command/United States Forces Korea/Eighth United States Army, by H. M. Katz, Command Historian (Seoul, Korea: 8th US Army), p. 25.

VII-CONCLUSIONS

1

Richard G. Head, Frisco W. Short, and Robert C. McFarlane, Crisis Resolution: Presidential Decision Making in the Mayaguez and Korean Confrontations (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1978), p. 150.

2

Public Law 99-433(H.R. 3622), Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 (October 1,1986), Sec. 163.

3

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4

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5

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