

Super-Rangers: The Early Years of Army Special Forces 1944-1953

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## **Abstract**

Jason Gibson: Super-Rangers: The Early Years of Army Special Forces 1944-1953  
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The United States Army Special Forces is an unconventional warfare organization of the United States Army with roots in World War II. Soldiers and civilian policymakers who participated in guerilla warfare during that war saw unconventional warfare as a way to further American interests in situations where a conventional army could not operate effectively. In the postwar national security policy battles, these soldiers and government officials fought for a permanent unconventional warfare unit in the US Army. By 1951 They had successfully argued for the establishment of Army Special Forces Groups utilizing guerilla warfare to fight Soviet Communism in the event of a general war. The problems of understanding and defining unconventional warfare, however, crippled the ability of Army Special Forces to instigate guerilla warfare against the Soviet Union wherever and whenever needed.

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The United States Army Special Forces was an organization born in the debates of early Cold War policy immediately after World War II. The Army created Special Forces in 1952 to train American troops to lead indigenous soldiers in Soviet satellite states in guerrilla conflict against the Soviet Union. Most histories of the organization, however, begin in 1956 with Special Forces troops preparing to aid anti-Communist governments in the Philippines and South Vietnam against the threat of Communist insurgents.<sup>1</sup> These histories forego the critical influence Cold War policy had on the development and future of Special Forces in favor of a focus on Army Special Forces operations in Vietnam. In doing so, they fail to explain the true origins of Special Forces, a unit whose operations were so significant in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

Army Special Forces soldiers were trained to organize and develop indigenous troops as guerrillas to harass, raid, and sabotage larger enemy forces over time to degrade and ultimately destroy their ability to fight. The Army considered guerilla warfare to be part of unconventional warfare, a term that in the 1940s referred to combat that was not on open ground between two opposing forces. Special Forces modeled their tactics for guerilla war on American experiences in World War II. In the Philippines, American forces left behind after the Japanese invasion led

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas K. Adams, *US Special Operations Forces in Action: The Challenge of Unconventional Warfare* (Portland: Frank Cass, 1998) focuses on a general history of all Special Operations Forces from the 1950s to the present day and treats this period briefly. Charles M. Simpson III, *Inside the Green Berets: The First Thirty Years: A History of the U.S. Army Special Forces* (Novato: Presidio Press, 1983) focuses on the tactics Special Forces used and is primarily a personal recollection of a Special Forces officer. Shelby L. Stanton, *Green Berets at War: U.S. Army Special Forces in Southeast Asia 1956-1975* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1986) deals only with Southeast Asia. Only Stanton and Adams have bibliographies, most of which are based on books written not by historians but by field experts in the CIA and Special Forces. Even Alfred H. Paddock's *U.S. Army Special Warfare: Its Origins* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002) has no secondary work focusing on Special Forces before the conflicts in Southeast Asia written by a historian. The majority of secondary sources on Special Forces are written by CIA and Special Forces field experts who focus on Vietnam and describe the 1950s in an introductory fashion.

Philippine soldiers in a guerilla war that lasted until the Americans returned three years later. “Merrill’s Marauders” fought using unconventional tactics such as destroying bridges and attacking isolated Japanese forces in occupied Burma to support the supply link between British India and allied China.

The Office of Strategic Services (OSS) was a military organization President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered into existence in 1942 to collect and analyze intelligence for the Joint Chiefs of Staff and to perform covert operations when required. The Army scorned unconventional warfare and viewed the OSS not as a military organization but as a civilian organization that employed military personnel. The OSS trained and supplied the French Resistance in Occupied France in addition to gathering covert intelligence on German military plans and conducting covert operations in Europe. Some OSS units, called Jedburghs after a town in Scotland where the soldiers trained, operated for several months in France to disrupt German forces before the Normandy invasions in 1944. The OSS performed similar missions in Burma and Southeast Asia.

The Army itself did, however, form specific units for unconventional warfare. The famous “Ranger” battalions, created in 1942 as American commandos along British lines, also destroyed bridges and raided enemy strong-points to support the operations of regular, conventional American forces. Rangers operated very close to the American frontlines, however, never going more than a few dozen miles into enemy territory. During the Normandy invasion, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ranger Battalion scaled the cliffs of Point du Hoc to destroy German artillery batteries threatening American troops on the beach. Neither Rangers nor Marauders trained or used indigenous troops in their operations, and only the Marauders operated independently of conventional units for long periods of time. Another form of unconventional warfare was the

psychological warfare units in Europe. The Psychological Warfare Branch in Europe headed by Brigadier General Robert McClure used leaflets, pamphlets, and loudspeakers to weaken the enemy's morale and even convince soldiers to surrender. None of these units led directly to guerilla warfare and Army Special Forces.

After World War II the Army demobilized millions of personnel including those organized into unconventional warfare units. The Army, which eschewed unconventional warfare as an effective tactic, largely phased out these unconventional units. Though many soldiers who participated in these units recognized a need for them in the future, these soldiers were a small minority made smaller after demobilization. The OSS, which handled much of the military's covert intelligence program, was disbanded and its functions distributed among the State and War Departments. While both Departments were quick to retain the OSS covert intelligence capability, they dissolved its covert operations branch which included the Jedburghs. The Rangers, "Merrill's Marauders," and American guerrilla forces in the Philippines were simply disbanded and their personnel dispersed into the Army. The Psychological Warfare Branch focused primarily on "Denazification," the program to rid German society of Nazi thinking and ideology and remove Nazi party members from influential positions in occupied Germany after the war.

With the beginning of the Cold War in the last half of the 1940s, American officials began to see the need for an unconventional warfare capability to combat Soviet expansion, particularly in Europe where Soviet forces continued to occupy many countries in Eastern Europe. In Greece, with Soviet help, Communists undertook a guerilla campaign to wrest control of the country away from the British supported monarchy. In the Far East, the fall of China in 1949 convinced American policy makers that East Asia was under Communist threat. American

military and foreign policy planners began to focus on how to deal with that threat while avoiding another world war that could perhaps devastate the United States.

In response to these developments, The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was formed in 1947 to adequately and efficiently coordinate all information that the United States could use to fight the immense Communist threat. The National Security Council (NSC), the highest advisory council to the President, was formed in that same year to facilitate coordination between political, military and financial policymakers towards a single goal.

By 1950 the Truman Administration reached the conclusion that the United States would have to do everything possible to “contain” the Soviet Union until it collapsed on its own. The Truman Administration decided to use any “method short of war” to halt that expansion.<sup>2</sup> The United States would train and support allies against Communist insurgency while building up its own military forces in preparation for a massive Soviet invasion of Europe.

The Army, whose mission in the postwar world had been heavily contested, suddenly had the job of resisting Communist forces when they “probed” their boundaries. It received the funds and men to fight Communist forces around the world. The Army began rebuilding and preparing its forces to fight the immense Red Army in Europe, and its proxy armies in places like North Korea. At the same time many of the soldiers and civilians who had experience with unconventional warfare during World War II felt that guerilla warfare had an important place in the new policy of “all means short of war.” These men, like Brigadier General Robert McClure Chief, Psychological Warfare Division 8<sup>th</sup> Army during the Korean War and head of the Psychological Warfare Board in Europe during World War II; Colonel Aaron Bank, who participated in many OSS Jedburgh units from France to Southeast Asia; and Lieutenant Colonel

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<sup>2</sup> Executive Secretary, *NSC 68: U.S. Objectives and Programs for National Security*, Documents of the National Security Council (Washington: University Publications of America, 1980), text-fiche, 0544, Reel II.

Russell Volckmann, who led American guerrilla forces in the Philippines, were convinced that the Army should train units to fight a guerrilla war using indigenous forces against the Soviet Union much as the Soviets had done during World War II when tens of thousands of Soviet guerillas harassed German forces behind the lines, tying down thousands of German forces and contributing to the German inability to successfully occupy and utilize Soviet territory.

The problem was that these men and their allies were the only group in the Army who spoke out on the values of guerrilla war. The majority of Army officers still saw unconventional warfare as peripheral to regular warfare, and did not see its value in a time of great budgetary constraints. With the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 and the removal of many budgetary restraints from 1951-53, however, this group of men was able to gain enough support for the establishment of a Psychological Warfare School and Army Special Forces at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, which would participate in a plan developed in the Truman Administration called “retardation.” The plan stated that Special Forces would cooperate with CIA covert operations groups to instigate a massive guerilla war against the Soviet Union whenever possible. The Truman Administration saw the Soviet problem as a global military problem that had a primarily military solution. When President Eisenhower came to power in 1953, however, he believed that the United States did not have the resources to combat the Soviet Union using only military means without destroying democratic freedoms in the process. In limiting military forces to nuclear and conventional warfare in the “New Look” Policy of 1953, the Army could no longer support Special Forces as the ghost leader of a massive secret guerrilla army. When in 1953 President Dwight D. Eisenhower felt that trying to fight Communism everywhere would lead to bankruptcy and defeat, Army Special Forces as a concept was largely abandoned.



The debate over unconventional warfare after World War II originated in discussions over creating a central intelligence organization for the United States government. Debates over the future of national intelligence in the United States determined the National Security Council's (NSC) understanding of unconventional warfare, and thus the future of Army Special Forces. Beginning in 1944, Major General William H. Donovan, head of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), proposed several ideas concerning the future of a peacetime national intelligence agency in the United States with the same tasks as the OSS.<sup>3</sup> In his initial document, which became known as the "Donovan Plan," he advocated a peacetime national intelligence agency reporting directly to the President. The Secretaries of State, War, and Navy would have no control over the agency, though they could comment on its reports. The Joint Chiefs of Staff contested their exclusion from a future central intelligence agency. The Joint Intelligence Committee, an agency of the Joint Chiefs of Staff which oversaw military intelligence, created two counter-proposals as a response to the Donovan Plan.<sup>4</sup> The proposals differed primarily from Donovan's in granting significant control to the military Secretaries. Public distaste for Americans engaging in morally ambiguous covert activities in peacetime and the death of President Roosevelt, however, ended the possibility of a compromise until after the war.<sup>5</sup>

The debate that erupted over the Donovan Plan continued well into 1945.<sup>6</sup> In August, the question of maintaining a national intelligence agency could no longer be put off. Harry S. Truman, the new President, was keen to liquidate as many wartime special agencies as possible

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<sup>3</sup> Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1945-1950, Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment*, Founding of the National Intelligence Structure, August 1945-January 1946, Introduction (Washington, DC, 1996). [http://www.state.gov/www/about\\_state/history/intel/intro.html](http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/intel/intro.html).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> State Dept., *Foreign Relations*, [http://www.state.gov/www/about\\_state/history/intel/intro.html](http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/intel/intro.html).

in order to support his domestic programs and balance the federal budget.<sup>7</sup> In the wake of World War II there appeared no reason to keep up a large military establishment. The OSS was disbanded, and its functions distributed to other agencies of the government.<sup>8</sup> The War Department received responsibility for “black” propaganda, or the use of covert propaganda both true and false against an enemy to undermine the morale of hostile forces and to convince an occupied country’s population to resist its conquerors. This was opposed to “white” propaganda, in which open, ostensibly truthful information would be used to strengthen the will of American civilians and show enemy civilians the truth of the benefits of American society. The War Department also received the special operations branch of the OSS, which organized the resistance movements in Europe. Brigadier General John Magruder, Director of the new Strategic Services Unit in 1945-6, an office created as a home for the OSS functions of covert intelligence and covert operations in the Army, quickly disbanded any subversive operations capability.<sup>9</sup> The Army still supported Psychological warfare and intelligence gathering, but eschewed subversive operations in any form. The State Department received the research and analysis branch of the OSS which had collected and analyzed overt intelligence during World War II.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile the debate over the future of national intelligence continued towards a resolution when President Truman gave Secretary of State James Byrnes the authority to develop a national intelligence agency.<sup>11</sup> The Bureau of the Budget had by this point become a strong

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<sup>7</sup> Michael J. Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945-1954* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 115.

<sup>8</sup> Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1945-1950, Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment*, Psychological and Political Warfare, Introduction (Washington, DC, 1996)  
[http://www.state.gov/www/about\\_state/history/intel/intro7.html](http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/intel/intro7.html).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> State Dept., *Foreign Relations*, [http://www.state.gov/www/about\\_state/history/intel/intro7.html](http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/intel/intro7.html).

player in the debate over a future national intelligence agency.<sup>12</sup> Having consulted for the service intelligence organizations, the Bureau of the Budget advocated the establishment of a centralized national intelligence agency in the State Department, despite the reluctance of State Department officials to house such an agency.<sup>13</sup>

By 1947, however, it was becoming clear in the Truman Administration that the future intelligence agency would act under the control of the State, War, and Navy departments while possessing its own budget.<sup>14</sup> It would be the nation's central intelligence agency and take responsibility for secret intelligence, "white" and "black" propaganda, and subversive operations, though the council that organized the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was initially as resistant to subversive operations as the Army.<sup>15</sup> At the same time a growing interest in the State, War, and Navy Departments in psychological warfare as opposed to subversive operations provided a new avenue for covert political action.<sup>16</sup> At first, psychological warfare was considered a tactic for wartime only. But rising concern over the success of Communist political parties in Western Europe brought about a desire to attempt peacetime psychological operations.<sup>17</sup> These operations would use leaflets, radio broadcasts, speeches, and pamphlets to discredit Communist parties during elections. In the latter part of 1947 a State-Army-Navy-Air Coordinating Committee (SANACC) meeting decided that peacetime psychological warfare should be performed only under the State Department, using both black and white propaganda.<sup>18</sup> The black propaganda program would operate with the advice of the Director of Central

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Department of State, "Memorandum From the General Counsel of the Central Intelligence Agency (Houston) to Director of Central Intelligence Hillenkoetter," *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1945-1950*, Document 241 [http://www.state.gov/www/about\\_state/history/intel/241\\_249.html](http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/intel/241_249.html).

<sup>16</sup> State Dept., *Foreign Relations*, [http://www.state.gov/www/about\\_state/history/intel/intro7.html](http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/intel/intro7.html).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> State Dept., "Report by an Ad Hoc Subcommittee of the State-Army-Navy-Air Force Coordinating Committee," *Foreign Relations*, Document 249, [http://www.state.gov/www/about\\_state/history/intel/241\\_249.html](http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/intel/241_249.html).

Intelligence and a military representative of the JCS. Secretary of State George Marshall, however, did not want the Voice of America, a “white” propaganda program of radio broadcasts into the Soviet Union and its satellites, to engage in anything but truth.<sup>19</sup> The service branches were also unwilling to take on subversive operations of any kind.<sup>20</sup> This reluctance resulted in the separation of white propaganda from black propaganda and subversive action in general.<sup>21</sup>

By the beginning of 1948 Secretary of Defense James Forrestal and George Kennan, head of the Policy Planning Staff in the State Department, expressed suspicion in the lack of outside control over CIA subversive operations.<sup>22</sup> A decision by the NSC in 1947 attempted to end the debate by directly assigning the Director of Central Intelligence the power and responsibility to initiate and conduct subversive operations in the interests of the United States.<sup>23</sup> Forrestal and Kennan, however, continued to suspect the CIA and especially Director of Central Intelligence Admiral Roscoe Hillenkoetter of being unable to effectively mount subversive psychological and covert operations.<sup>24</sup> This matter was brought up in the next NSC meeting on June 3, 1948, and referred to the staff for a draft proposal.<sup>25</sup> Kennan was unwilling to accept anything less than State Department and indirectly his control over covert operations.<sup>26</sup> In the end he and Forrestal relented and on June 17, 1948 the NSC established an Office of Special Projects in the CIA that

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<sup>19</sup> State Dept., *Foreign Relations*, [http://www.state.gov/www/about\\_state/history/intel/intro.html](http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/intel/intro.html).

<sup>20</sup> State Dept., “Memorandum of Discussion at the 2d Meeting of the National Security Council,” *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1945-1950*, Document 250  
[http://www.state.gov/www/about\\_state/history/intel/250\\_259.html](http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/intel/250_259.html).

<sup>21</sup> Executive Secretary, *NSC 4: Office of Special Projects*, Documents of the National Security Council (Washington: University Publications of America, 1980), text-fiche, 0249, Reel I; Executive Secretary, *NSC 10/2: Office of Special Projects*, Documents of the National Security Council (Washington: University Publications of America, 1980), text-fiche, 0249, Reel I.

<sup>22</sup> State Dept., *Foreign Relations*, [http://www.state.gov/www/about\\_state/history/intel/intro7.html](http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/intel/intro7.html).

<sup>23</sup> Executive Secretary, *NSC 4*, Reel I.

<sup>24</sup> State Dept., *Foreign Relations*, [http://www.state.gov/www/about\\_state/history/intel/intro7.html](http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/intel/intro7.html).

<sup>25</sup> State Dept., “Memorandum for the President of Discussion at the 12th Meeting of the National Security Council,” *Foreign Relations*, Document 283 (Washington, DC, 1996),  
[http://www.state.gov/www/about\\_state/history/intel/280\\_289.html](http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/intel/280_289.html).

<sup>26</sup> State Dept., “Memorandum From the Director of the Policy Planning Staff (Kennan) to the Under Secretary of State (Lovett),” *Foreign Relations*, Document 286 (Washington, DC, 1996),  
[http://www.state.gov/www/about\\_state/history/intel/280\\_289.html](http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/intel/280_289.html).

would handle subversive operations under the authority and responsibility of the Director of Central Intelligence, who himself would be subject to the oversight of the NSC.<sup>27</sup> Even this compromise did not stop the debates, however, as the CIA did not agree with the separation of subversive operations from secret intelligence in its own “quasi-autonomous” office within the organization.<sup>28</sup>

Thus the CIA, as the official covert operations branch of the American government, would determine what subversive operations the United States would initiate in the future. All long term subversive operations, of which guerrilla warfare was one, could only succeed with the support of the CIA. Only the CIA officially had the personnel trained and experienced in covert action. Only the CIA had the long term intelligence needed to understand potential adversaries. In 1949 The Joint Chiefs of Staff had decided to use CIA unconventional warfare resources rather than its own during wartime, and created the Joint Subsidiary Plans Division (JSPD) to liaise with the CIA.<sup>29</sup> While the Army may have held control over subversive operations during wartime, the establishment of the CIA as a vocal, independent agency in the bureaucratic debates of the late 1940s meant that external control would most likely be light at best.

Debates over what agency would be responsible for subversive operations and secret intelligence continued in the National Security Council for years despite several NSC documents attempting to settle the conflict. From 1948 on, however, the definition of political warfare -- the use of psychological and subversive operations against an enemy -- was settled. By the time NSC

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<sup>27</sup> Executive Secretary, *NSC 10/2: Office of Special Projects*, Documents of the National Security Council (Washington: University Publications of America, 1980), text-fiche, 0249, Reel I.

<sup>28</sup> State Dept., *Foreign Relations*, [http://www.state.gov/www/about\\_state/history/intel/intro7.html](http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/intel/intro7.html).

<sup>29</sup> Colonel Aaron Bank, *From OSS to Green Berets: the Birth of Special Forces* (Novato: Presidio Press, 1986), 149-150.

68 was promulgated on 14 April 1950 all methods short of war would be used to combat the alarming growth of Soviet power including subversive operations and psychological warfare.<sup>30</sup> Since the OSS had run these operations during World War II, and OSS had been separate from the Army, the Army had no real experience with subversive operations.<sup>31</sup> Even though the Army had officially been given the subversive operations portfolio when the OSS had disbanded at the end of the war, Brigadier General Macgruder had quickly dissolved it.

Nor did the Army have the funds or the interest in unconventional warfare during the late 1940s. From the end of the Second World War to 1949, the Truman administration attempted to rein in spending and balance the federal budget, something President Truman had promised for the fiscal year 1950.<sup>32</sup> His priorities were domestic programs to extend the New Deal, and Truman was willing to sacrifice the military budget to keep his pledge. For the fiscal year 1951 budget, Bureau of Budget chief Frank Pace reduced the military budget projection from \$15 billion to \$13.5 billion.<sup>33</sup> Pace led the change for a small, balanced federal budget, which he argued was the first step to national security. One of his allies happened to be the Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson, who simply refused to accept calls for increasing the budget from the service secretaries.<sup>34</sup> Pace even considered reducing foreign military aid.<sup>35</sup>

In the end, however, the President reversed his decision on a balanced budget. Johnson's heavy handed treatment of the military budget forced the Joint Chiefs of Staff to work around him in their preparation of a proposal for the future of the military, JIC 502, on 20 January

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<sup>30</sup> Steven L. Rearden, *History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense: The Formative Years 1947-1950*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1984), 7.

<sup>31</sup> Alfred H. Paddock, *U.S. Army Special Warfare: Its Origins* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 36.

<sup>32</sup> Benjamin O. Fordham, *Building the Cold War Consensus: The Political Economy of U.S. National Security Policy, 1949-1951*. (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 30.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

1950.<sup>36</sup> Secretary of State Dean Acheson and the new Director of Policy Planning in the State Department, Paul Nitze, who had desired a much larger military budget since 1947, used JIC 502 as the basis for drafting NSC 68.<sup>37</sup> NSC 68 provided the basis for the future of American foreign policy during the Cold War. The NSC argued that in light of the eventual Soviet development of nuclear weapons, the United States would have to decide how to combat the growing Communist power.<sup>38</sup> The NSC accepted George Kennan's argument in 1946 that the Soviet Union would avoid war against a powerful United States to avoid destabilizing its own internal control, but would not hesitate to attack any perceived weakness in the non-Communist world whether through its armed forces or its unconventional warfare capability.<sup>39</sup> The United States would therefore have to develop a powerful military able to contest Soviet attacks in any part of the world, as well as use "means short of war" to keep Soviet power from expanding during peace.<sup>40</sup> When the National Security Council accepted NSC 68 in 1950, Acheson and Nitze were able to get Frank Pace successfully moved from head of the Bureau of Budget to Secretary of the Army immediately after NSC 68 had been presented.<sup>41</sup> By 1950, President Truman had tentatively accepted an increased military budget.

But the Korean War truly convinced the American government that the Soviet Union was prepared to use force to expand Communism. In 1950 North Korean forces attacked South Korea with the support of the Soviet Union and Communist China. According to NSC 68, the Truman Administration led a United Nations "police action" to support the South Koreans against

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<sup>36</sup> Gregory Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin: America's Strategy to Subvert the Soviet Bloc, 1947-1956* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 50.

<sup>37</sup> Fordham, *Consensus*, 47.

<sup>38</sup> Executive Secretary, *U.S. Objectives and Programs for National Security*, Documents of the National Security Council (Washington: University Publications of America, 1980), text-fiche, 0475, Reel II.

<sup>39</sup> George Kennan to Secretary of State James Byrnes, 22 February 1946 "The Long Telegram," Telegraph, Moscow, <http://www.ntanet.net/KENNAN.html>. accessed March 8, 2008.

<sup>40</sup> Executive Secretary, *National Security*, Reel II.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 51-52.

Communist aggression through the use of United States armed forces. The end result was an Army that in the span of six years had been forced to constrict and expand in quick succession. By 1947 military personnel had dropped from a 12 million man peak in 1945 to a 1.5 million man low.<sup>42</sup> Only 683,837 soldiers remained in the Army from a high of 8 million. Every one of the Army's 10 divisions by 1947 was understrength.<sup>43</sup> In 1951, the Army was well into the Korean conflict and numbers had risen once more to 1.5 million, and in 1952 approached 1.6 million.<sup>44</sup> For Fiscal Year 1952, Armed Forces expenditures reached 42.8 billion, a more than threefold increase from the low of 1949.<sup>45</sup> It was simply impossible for the Army to handle this immense contraction and expansion without strict priority levels. Millions of soldiers had to be processed and transported around the world after World War II. Four years later one million more had to go through the same process in reverse. They all had to be fed, clothed, and paid, and the whole process had to be documented. Innovative projects such as the establishment of an unconventional warfare capability were understandably a low priority in the face of reestablishing critical conventional forces for defense against the North Korean invasion of South Korea.

There were several attempts at forming some sort of subversive action force in the Army, including several papers on the subject despite the official decision to rely on the CIA for subversive operations.<sup>46</sup> There were a number of individuals within the Army who participated in many of the key unconventional battles of World War II. After the Japanese seized the Philippine archipelago in 1942, for example, Lieutenant Colonel Russell Volckmann trained a force of

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<sup>42</sup> Kenneth W. Condit, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, Volume II: 1947-1949*, (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1996), 11.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>46</sup> Paddock, *Special Warfare*, 64.



Filipinos to fight a guerrilla war against the occupation that lasted until MacArthur's return to Luzon in 1944.<sup>47</sup>

Colonel Aaron Bank participated in a number of American unconventional episodes from the Jedburgh missions in German occupied France to the first hints of American interest in French Indochina in 1945.<sup>48</sup> In France, teams consisting of American soldiers called Jedburghs supported the French resistance against the German occupiers, helping to tie down German troops and destroy roads and railroads. In Indochina in 1945, Bank fought the Japanese alongside Vietnamese and French guerrillas.<sup>49</sup> These men, along with others participating at the time, became skilled in unconventional operations. They were scattered, however, throughout the Army, since the Army was prepared after 1945 to form unconventional units such as the Rangers when needed. But these were not guerrilla forces per se. Volckmann's operation in the Philippines had been entirely his own creation, though General Douglas MacArthur supported them with supplies.<sup>50</sup> The Jedburgh teams in Europe were OSS and unofficial, even if the Army participated in its activities.<sup>51</sup> The Army looked upon these operations as sideshows, even if helpful, to conventional war.

Such was the case when the Army helped combat the civil war that broke out in Greece in 1947. Until then, the British attempted to aid the anti-communist forces in the civil war that began the moment German forces pulled out of the country in 1944.<sup>52</sup> When the British lacked the resources needed to secure the Greek government and armed forces in the long term against the communist led guerrillas operating in the north of the country, the United States quickly

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<sup>47</sup> Mitrovich, *Kremlin*, 131.

<sup>48</sup> Bank, *Green Berets*, vii.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>50</sup> Mitrovich, *Kremlin*, 131.

<sup>51</sup> Bank, *Green Berets*, 2.

<sup>52</sup> Rearden, *Secretary of Defense*, 148.

reacted to the British announcement in 1947.<sup>53</sup> President Truman in his “Special Message to the Congress on Greece and Turkey” outlined a program of aid of \$400 million for the support of these two countries against Communist aggression.<sup>54</sup> Truman stated that the Soviet Union would attempt to destabilize the two countries in order to secure direct access to the Mediterranean Sea. Secretary of Defense James Forrestal, though initially unconcerned with the Greek situation, became involved when communist successes in the north exposed the weakness of the Greek military.<sup>55</sup> He set up a Joint U.S. Military Advisory and Planning Group (JUSMAPG) to train the Greek army at first as a conventional force along American lines.<sup>56</sup> Greek forces, however, unused to the substantial amount of fire support common in American forces and thus lacking knowledge of its limits, relied on artillery and air power to deal with the insurgents before moving in.<sup>57</sup> This allowed the insurgents to simply retreat when ordnance began falling on their positions.

To counter the problem, American advisors under General James A. Van Fleet switched to unconventional training, removing much of the tanks and heavy artillery that was of limited use in mountainous territory.<sup>58</sup> The National Security Council debated sending actual American troops into Greece, but decided the financial cost of supporting American troops and the possibility of antagonizing the Soviet Union would not be worth the effort.<sup>59</sup> Greek troops were trained to either use the population to their benefit as informants or isolate them as spies, and to harry the enemy with men rather than cumbersome firepower, even though at first Greek

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>54</sup> President Harry S. Truman, “Special Message to the Congress on Greece and Turkey: The Truman Doctrine,” Official File 56; Truman Papers, Truman Library (March 12, 1947).

<sup>55</sup> Rearden, *Secretary of Defense*, 150.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>57</sup> Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine 1942-1976* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2006), 48.

<sup>58</sup> Mitrovich, *Kremlin*, 52.

<sup>59</sup> Rearden, *Secretary of Defense*, 154.

commanders did not follow their training.<sup>60</sup> When Yugoslavia defected from the Soviet sphere as a result of Tito's estrangement from Stalin, it was no longer a sanctuary for the Greek guerrillas,, thus thwarting their ability to retreat from the conventional army.<sup>61</sup> When guerrilla troops made the decision to switch from unconventional to conventional warfare since they lacked a secure base, they were unable to withstand the attacks of a trained Greek army.<sup>62</sup> The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that American funds and training of the Greek army were key to defeating the Communist guerrillas, however, and thus felt reassured in the American capacity to defeat guerrilla wars.

On the other side of the world, the Philippines were the scene of another Communist guerilla conflict born from the ashes of World War II.<sup>63</sup> Communist-Nationalists, once more veterans of partisan warfare against an Axis occupier, in 1945 effectively attacked a corrupt government in much the same fashion as in Greece.<sup>64</sup> American forces, present since the Philippines had been invaded in 1944, had a reputation and history that allowed for a much more favorable relationship between American advisors and Philippine armed services.<sup>65</sup> American soldiers therefore often participated in operations against Communist guerrillas, and American advisors such as Lieutenant Colonel Russell Volckmann were usually well versed in Philippine military affairs.<sup>66</sup> Helped by friendship with the local population and the presence of an effective commander, the future Philippine President Ramon Magsaysay, the Americans were able to defeat the Communist guerrillas in much the same fashion as they had done in Greece.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Mitrovich, *Kremlin*, 52.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>62</sup> Rearden, *Secretary of Defense*, 160.

<sup>63</sup> Mitrovich, *Kremlin*, 62-3.

<sup>64</sup> Condit, *Joint Chiefs of Staff*, 220.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 220-222.

<sup>66</sup> Breuer, William B. *MacArthur's Undercover War: Spies, Sabotuers, Guerrillas, and Secret Missions*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 1995.

<sup>67</sup> Birtle, *Counterinsurgency Doctrine*, 63-64.

Greece and the Philippines showed the Army's approach to handling guerrilla warfare on the periphery of the Soviet sphere using Military Assistance and Advisory Groups (MAAGs). Both guerrilla uprisings were treated as conventional conflicts. American advisors taught conventional tactics top-down to Philippine or Greek military forces in the belief that aggressive leadership that took the offensive would defeat guerrilla opposition.<sup>68</sup> American advisors did not directly train divisions or regiments. The United States Army did not train indigenous military formations in a guerrilla conflict for the purposes of fighting a guerrilla war. Because the NSC believed guerrilla conflict to flourish in poor economic and political conditions, the problem was not the military's to solve.<sup>69</sup> The Army did not see any reason to connect subversive action and unconventional warfare.

Brigadier General Robert McClure was perhaps the best individual in the Army to advocate that the Army should develop an unconventional war capability. During World War II, he led the Psychological Warfare Division of the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force (PWD/SHAEF) under General Dwight D. Eisenhower, established in early 1944.<sup>70</sup> He knew OSS chief Major General William Donovan well, and the two agreed about a connection between unconventional and psychological warfare.<sup>71</sup> After the war, General McClure became director of Information Control Division in Germany, an organization in the Army responsible for American propaganda in Germany. Though he wanted psychological warfare to have its own staff section at the theater level, McClure constantly argued for the placement of psychological

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<sup>68</sup> Condit, *Joint Chiefs of Staff*, 220.

<sup>69</sup> Mitrovich, *Kremlin*, 58; Condit, *Joint Chiefs of Staff*, 221.

<sup>70</sup> Paddock, *Special Warfare*, 12.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

warfare capabilities in the Operations and Plans Division of the Army rather than Intelligence in order to emphasize that psychological operations were an essential part of conventional military operations rather than an auxiliary and marginal branch of intelligence.<sup>72</sup>

Throughout the five years after the war, General McClure constantly pushed for the recognition of psychological warfare as an important part of the Army's fighting capability. In 1948, he wrote to General Albert Wedemeyer, Chief of Army Plans and Operations, detailing his position on the future of psychological warfare.<sup>73</sup> Wedemeyer, recognizing McClure as the expert on psychological warfare within the Army, was impressed with his plans. Several high level officers and civilian Army officials also knew and respected McClure, including the Secretaries of the Army Gordon Gray (1949-1950) and Frank Pace Jr. (1950-1953). Both men strongly advocated psychological warfare. After his time as Secretary of the Army, Gray became head of the Psychological Strategy Board.<sup>74</sup> Pace eventually authorized the creation of the Psychological Warfare School at Fort Bragg, the home of Army Special Forces.<sup>75</sup> McClure had also during the Korean War headed the psychological warfare program as the Chief, Psychological Warfare Division, 8<sup>th</sup> Army - a position created at the insistence of Secretary Pace and the chief of Staff and Operations (G-3), Major General Charles Bolte.<sup>76</sup> Bolte had even written a study on the need for Special Forces operation within the Army in 1951, stating that the Army needed a counter against the Soviet partisan forces so effectively employed in World War II.<sup>77</sup> Both men were convinced that the psychological warfare program in the Army needed an

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>73</sup> Paddock, *Special Warfare*, 54.

<sup>74</sup> Truman Library Truman Papers: Psychological Strategy Board Files.

<sup>75</sup> Department of the Army Office of the Adjutant General, *Establishment of Psychological Warfare School*, 22 October 1952, Document 2326.1952.004, U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School Archives, Fayetteville, NC.

<sup>76</sup> Paddock, *Special Warfare*, 91.

<sup>77</sup> U.S. Department of the Army. General Staff, G-3. *Special Forces Operations*, 1951.

advocate on the Department of Army Special Staff.<sup>78</sup> Pace himself constantly wrote of the successes of psychological warfare in the Army Department semiannual reports, usually focusing on the Leaflet and Loudspeaker Divisions' exploits in Korea.<sup>79</sup> The Leaflet and Loudspeaker Divisions used air-dropped and manually distributed pamphlets as well as loudspeakers mounted on trucks to lower North Korean morale.

McClure saw the connection between unconventional warfare and psychological warfare in the OSS and considered it the optimal arrangement. Since unconventional warfare typically occurred far behind enemy lines, the use of psychological warfare was essential in influencing the minds of the indigenous population. When he became Chief, Psychological Warfare Division, he successfully asked that responsibility for unconventional warfare be placed in his office.<sup>80</sup> He therefore had the authority to form an unconventional warfare group within the Army, and promptly used it. McClure gathered up several Army officers who had participated in unconventional warfare actions during World War II, including Bank and Volckmann, and set them to work to formulate the basis for an unconventional warfare capability within the Army.<sup>81</sup> The product of their research was the study "Special Forces Ranger Units," which was sent to Army Field Forces and quickly accepted.<sup>82</sup> None of the men had ever been Rangers, though two, Lieutenant Colonels Melvin Russell Blair and Marvin Waters, served with "Merrill's Marauders," a regiment that fought Japanese forces in Burma during World War II. The group relied primarily on Lieutenant Colonel Volckmann's counter guerrilla manual called FM 31-20, "Operations Against Guerrilla Forces," published in February 1951.

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<sup>78</sup> Paddock, *Special Warfare*, 92.

<sup>79</sup> United States Department of Defense, *Semiannual report of the Secretary of Defense and the semiannual reports of the Secretary of the Army, Secretary of the Navy, Secretary of the Air Force* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1951), 92-94.

<sup>80</sup> Paddock, *Special Warfare*, 119.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 119-120.

<sup>82</sup> Bank, *Green Berets*, 154.

This field manual was based on Volckmann's experiences in the Philippines and captured Nazi documents detailing Soviet guerrilla operations in Nazi-controlled areas.<sup>83</sup> There were probably influences from Mao Zedong's writings about his campaigns in China as well, since the Army researched his methods as early as 1950.<sup>84</sup> FM 31-20 centered on the concepts of guerrilla warfare as a political and economic strategy, destroying the "will to win" of a government, and sustained low-intensity combat actions over a long period of time to exhaust a stronger foe either unprepared for such tactics or unable to deal with them.<sup>85</sup> FM 31-20 emphasized the power of a sustained guerrilla campaign, using widespread attacks on supplies and operations with troops trained to operate in the enemy's environment to capitalize on the inability of an enemy to protect all important targets at all times. The manual also stated explicitly that guerrilla warfare would not aim primarily to destroy conventional forces, but to weaken them. At the last stage conventional forces would be used to occupy territory and destroy the enemy's ability to resist.<sup>86</sup>

Both guerrilla and counter guerrilla forces required very high morale and support of the population through which they moved. Volckmann used the concept of "nets" to describe the nebulous areas in which Special Forces personnel would operate.<sup>87</sup> A "net" referred to groups of indigenous persons organized to support "Special Warfare" operations. The "intelligence net" supplied knowledge about events occurring in an area, using both information from the counterinsurgent sources and from the populace. A "security net" protected the counterinsurgent force, relying on the same sources, although more the latter. A "supply net" gathered and distributed supplies within an area in question. Other nets served other needs, but each required the help of the populace to function properly. After the "nets" were operating, guerrilla forces led

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<sup>83</sup> Mitrovich, *Kremlin*, 134.

<sup>84</sup> Robert Payne, *Mao Tsê-tung, Ruler of Red China*, (New York: Government Printing Office, 1950).

<sup>85</sup> Department of the Army, *FM 31-20: Operations Against Guerrilla Forces*, February 1951.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

and trained by American operators would act to achieve an objective. Because these nets were the lifeblood of a guerilla operation, the goal of the counterguerrilla was to separate the populace from guerrilla forces.

FM 31-20 would provide the doctrinal basis for the Special Forces. In 1951, however, the manual was simply the counterguerrilla doctrine for the United States. Army Field Forces under pressure from Secretary of the Army Frank Pace and Major General Bolte, however, had agreed on the Special Forces concept, and made them distinct from any Ranger units already in existence.<sup>88</sup> Though General McClure had gathered together the men and knowledge necessary to create an unconventional warfare unit, he had neither a home base for them to train or a place for them in the Army's administrative structure. Fortuitously In 1951 Ranger companies were deactivated in the Korean theater and were not planned to be placed in the European theater where Army forces were building up in the new NATO structure.<sup>89</sup> The commanders in chief for both areas decided that the Rangers were of little use in any action behind enemy lines due differences in language and ethnic barriers.<sup>90</sup> Using this lack of capability McClure and Bank argued that the Special Forces could train a large guerrilla army behind Soviet lines for use against the Soviet rear during a possible conflict.<sup>91</sup>

This idea fit into a new strategy of subversive action to combat a Soviet invasion of Western Europe. In April 1951, the Office of Policy Coordination (OPC) in the CIA, with support from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, formulated a subversive operations plan against the Soviet Union that became known as "retardation."<sup>92</sup> It specified the means by which CIA "black"

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<sup>88</sup> Bank, *Green Berets*, 155.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 157.

<sup>92</sup> Department of State, Douglas Keane and Michael Warner, eds., "Paper Prepared in the Office of Policy Coordination of the Central Intelligence Agency," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950-1955: The Intelligence Community 1950-1955*, Document 61 (Washington DC: Government Printing Press, 2007), 121.



propaganda, economic warfare, and unconventional operations including guerrilla warfare would be organized for use by the Army during wartime. In a supposed conflict with the Soviet Union, Western Europe would be overrun and atomic weapons would be used by both sides.<sup>93</sup> The paper argued that Soviet subversive activities would rise to an unparalleled level to destabilize European countries as completely as possible immediately before invasion.<sup>94</sup> CIA- and Army-trained refugees from Eastern European states as soldiers under the Lodge Bill of 1950 would provide the majority of guerrilla troops, who would infiltrate Soviet-controlled territory to engage in guerrilla operations.<sup>95</sup> The Lodge Bill of 1950 allowed for the enlistment of up to 2500 noncitizens in the Army for five years, for which they would receive permanent residency. Subversive operations were to be employed in both peace and war, though the differences in operations between the two would be in degree rather than kind. Propaganda, economic warfare, and every possible subversive activity including guerrilla warfare would be used in peace as soon as possible. In war, all missions would serve to retard the Soviet advance.<sup>96</sup> The paper detailed subversive operations during phases of the conflict as well as specific directions for forces operating in particular geographic regions including the Far East, the Middle East, Western Europe, and Eastern Europe.<sup>97</sup>

McClure and his allies in the Army were particularly excited by the “retardation” plan, which placed psychological and guerrilla warfare at a high priority.<sup>98</sup> As much as the “retardation” plan allowed McClure to successfully acquire the Ranger slots that had become open when commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army in Korea, General Walton H. Walker, disbanded his

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 123.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 126-130.

<sup>98</sup> State Dept., Keane and Warner, “Memorandum From Robert P. Joyce of the Policy Planning Staff to the Deputy Under Secretary of State (Matthews),” *Foreign Relations*, Document 142, 388.

Ranger battalions, it also doomed Special Forces to its eventual fate. If and when the idea of retardation was discarded, so would the purpose of military participation in what was considered to be a CIA function. The Special Forces would then be an elite organization without a mission.

In August 1950 McClure began to search for a home for psychological and unconventional warfare in the Army. McClure prepared a Tables of Organization and Equipment (TO&E) for the projected center, and Colonel Bank prepared one for the planned special warfare units.<sup>99</sup> Due a high demand on manpower and budgetary restraints, Army Field Forces recommended keeping manpower levels as low as possible.<sup>100</sup> All of the former Ranger spaces were requested. Both McClure and Bank briefed Army Field Forces on the proposed center, and countered reservations from the CIA concerning the formation of a subversive operations force within the Army by planning cooperation with the CIA in covert operations.<sup>101</sup> Mutual suspicion from both sides, however, continued far beyond 1951. It did not help that McClure requested CIA confidential intelligence information for use in the “retardation” strategy, which the CIA was reluctant to share in the interests of protecting its sources.<sup>102</sup>

By September 1951 McClure received approval from Army Field Forces for a base, though it took some time for Fort Bragg to be chosen. The Infantry Center at Fort Benning and the Third Army, which controlled Bragg, resisted a diversion of resources for an organization that did not directly support their activities.<sup>103</sup> Neither saw the value of Special Forces, something devoted not to military but subversive operations, especially in a time of strained resources for the Korean War and the buildup of Army forces in Europe for NATO, which began in 1950. General McClure was able to address these concerns in a meeting with the head of the

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<sup>99</sup> Bank, *Green Berets*, 158-160.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>101</sup> Paddock, *Special Warfare*, 129.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>103</sup> Paddock, *Special Warfare*, 137.

Third Army, General John Hodge, and on 29 May 1952 Fort Bragg became the home of the Psychological Warfare School and the new Special Forces. On the 25 September 1953, only a year later, 10<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group, the first unconventional warfare unit from the new school, received its orders to move to Germany, as a part of the retardation plan.<sup>104</sup> Half of its personnel were left behind to form 77<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group, which would continue to train for the time being and deploy at a later date.

With the activation of Special Forces, FM 31-20 and the “retardation” concept gained an operational force. The Tenth Special Forces Group led by Colonel Bank was trained for guerrilla warfare in Eastern Europe and the prospective use of Lodge Bill troops.<sup>105</sup> It took until 1953, however, for the troop strength of the 10<sup>th</sup> Group to pass 1500 men.

The Tenth Group was well placed to take advantage of the military provisions in the “retardation” plan put forth by the Office of Policy Coordination in the CIA with the support of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Initially, however, there was confusion regarding the separation of Special Forces from the Psychological Warfare Division. At the Psychological Warfare School at Bragg, Special Forces learned and were expected to be a part of psychological warfare.<sup>106</sup> This conformed to the belief at the national level that the two went together as they did in the CIA. The problem in the Army was that Special Forces was seen as a subordinate part of the Psychological Warfare Division, rather than its own independent unit with its own capabilities and missions. Of course, Colonel Bank and General McClure argued to the contrary, but the fact

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<sup>104</sup> *Movement Orders to Germany*, Document 2211.1953.001, U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School Archives, Fayetteville, NC.

<sup>105</sup> Paddock, *Special Warfare*, 145-146.

<sup>106</sup> Paddock, *Special Warfare*, 147.

was that administratively and conceptually the Psychological Warfare Division and Special Forces were linked.<sup>107</sup> The two operated together as part of the “retardation” plan against the Soviet Union. It was therefore an almost insurmountable issue.

A more important problem for Special Forces appeared, however. The “retardation” concept, the basis upon which Special Forces had support in the NSC, was falling into disfavor.<sup>108</sup> By the middle of 1952, the State Department grew to have grave misgivings about the whole concept. Robert P. Joyce, head of the Policy Planning Staff, sent a letter to the Undersecretary of State questioning the ability of the CIA to operate a massive subversive guerrilla force in Soviet territory using current available resources, much less those needed in war.<sup>109</sup> As early as 1951 Frank Wisner, head of the Directorate of Plans for the CIA and thus in charge of subversive operations, questioned supplying large active unconventional forces.<sup>110</sup> Little in the way of supplying these forces had been accomplished in the intermittent period. Joyce pointed out the inability to hide numerous guerrilla bases along the Iron Curtain. The visible nature of the preparations for these guerrilla camps would undermine the covert character of guerrilla operations in the first place.<sup>111</sup>

By August 1, 1952 the Psychological Warfare Board, the head of psychological operations for the NSC, had also decided that insufficient effort had been put into psychological warfare.<sup>112</sup> “Retardation” as a way of combating Soviet power did not work with current

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> State Dept., Keane and Warner, “Memorandum From Robert J. Hooker of the Policy Planning Staff to the Director of the Policy Planning Staff (Nitze),” *Foreign Relations*, Document 59, 111.

<sup>109</sup> State Dept., Keane and Warner, “Memorandum From Robert P. Joyce of the Policy Planning Staff to the Under Secretary of State (Bruce),” *Foreign Relations*, Document 111, 271.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 272.

<sup>112</sup> State Dept., Keane and Warner, “Report by the Psychological Strategy Board,” *Foreign Relations*, Document 125, 305.

resources.<sup>113</sup> The Psychological Warfare Board also argued that the military and nationalistic tone of some psychological operations had a deleterious effect on the success of psychological warfare in general. In spite of budget constraints, the Psychological Warfare Board advocated a further increase in funds for psychological operations behind the Iron Curtain to combat the strengthening Soviet control over its satellite countries.<sup>114</sup> On 2 September 1952 the NSC reported to President Truman that intelligence about the Soviet sphere was insignificant.<sup>115</sup> There was almost no information on the Soviet military or Soviet politics. By December 1952, Robert Joyce represented most when he referred to the “retardation” plan as “wishful thinking” sustained primarily by General McClure and his associates in the Department of the Army.<sup>116</sup> There was simply not enough information on Soviet activities behind the Iron Curtain to ensure the success of a long term unconventional war in hostile territory.

Without “retardation,” Special Forces lost enough of its mission to jeopardize its existence as a separate organization of the Army. It had trained and been deployed under the assumption that hostilities would require the formation of guerrilla forces to delay and harass the Red Army’s invasion of Western Europe. McClure and Bank had argued that this differentiated them from Rangers and justified the investment in training elite Special Forces soldiers. The Army disbanded the Ranger battalions due to their limited ability to operate behind enemy lines in countries with foreign cultures and languages. Without “retardation,” therefore, the Special Forces soldier became a super-Ranger, just as Colonel Bank had feared in 1951.<sup>117</sup> Ironically, this helped differentiate Special Forces from the Psychological Warfare Division. But Special

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 308.

<sup>115</sup> State Dept., Keane and Warner, “Report From the National Security Council to President Truman,” *Foreign Relations*, Document 128, 327.

<sup>116</sup> State Dept., Keane and Warner, “Memorandum From Robert P. Joyce of the Policy Planning Staff to the Deputy Under Secretary of State (Matthews),” *Foreign Relations*, Document 142, 387-388.

<sup>117</sup> Bank, *Green Berets*, 154.

Forces had no organizational ancestry within the Army to fall back on when its purpose was in question. The Psychological Warfare Division, on the other hand, could rely on the acceptance of its functions within the Army at large, a position won in World War II and Korea through the persistence of McClure.<sup>118</sup>

In 1953 the death of Stalin offered the last chance for the “retardation” plan to prove its effectiveness. Its advocates argued that Stalin’s death would lead to instability behind the Iron Curtain that unconventional forces could take advantage of. When that instability failed to seriously threaten Soviet power, however, the NSC in 1953 reappraised future mission of psychological warfare.<sup>119</sup> The debate was not solved during the final days of the Truman Administration, and President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s discussions over the future military budget delayed a decision from the NSC until September 1953.<sup>120</sup>

President Eisenhower viewed national security policy as a part of American policy in general, and thus subject to domestic and budgetary concerns.<sup>121</sup> This was contrary to the position adopted in the Truman administration that national security policy drove general American policy as a separate entity. This position led the Truman administration to devote the majority of the federal budget to defense during the Korean War without considering the economic and domestic consequences. By 1952, the United States was facing economic overstrain in the attempt to build a Cold War military to fight the worldwide Communist threat.<sup>122</sup> Eisenhower felt the United States had to be more selective in deciding where exactly to

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<sup>118</sup> Paddock, *Special Warfare*, 149.

<sup>119</sup> Mitrovich, *Kremlin*, 95.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 134-136.

<sup>121</sup> Saki Dockrill, *Eisenhower’s New Look National Security Policy, 1953-1961* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 25.

<sup>122</sup> Dockrill, *New Look*, 15.

best combat Communist expansion.<sup>123</sup> Funding a massive guerilla war across the Iron Curtain was not selective.

In the 30<sup>th</sup> of September “Review of Basic National Security Policy” subversive action against the Soviet Union was still planned.<sup>124</sup> But a second policy discussion, expressed in NSC 162/2 on 30 October 1953, argued that Soviet control over its satellites could only be broken voluntarily or through war, not through the actions of the United States.<sup>125</sup> This argument was in total contradiction to the peacetime aims of a policy of “retardation,” which sought to destabilize the Soviet Union through American efforts. NSC 162/2 expressed President Eisenhower’s conviction that the defense budget was both unsustainable at its current level and unable to provide for the current American policy of trying to fight the Soviet Union worldwide.<sup>126</sup> The Psychological Strategy Board’s call for more funds for both covert intelligence and larger psychological operations did not fit into the new trend of cost-cutting. There was no place for Army Special Forces in the new policy except as replacements for the already eliminated Ranger units, which was unacceptable to the highest Army officers, including Chief of Staff General J. Lawton Collins.<sup>127</sup>

The lack of support for Special Forces pervaded the Army. By 1953 the policy of using Ranger-trained soldiers began to take its toll on Colonel Bank’s and Volckmann’s vision of an Army counterguerrilla operation. Because there was no training in the Army for counterguerrilla operations prior to the establishment of the Psychological Warfare School at Fort Bragg, the best

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>124</sup> Executive Secretary, *NSC 162/2: Basic National Security Policy*, Documents of the National Security Council (Washington: University Publications of America, 1980), text-fiche, 1062, Reel III.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>127</sup> Bank, *Green Berets*, 173.

possible soldiers for the job were often considered to be former Rangers.<sup>128</sup> While this meant that a Special Forces soldier had proven his ability to operate behind enemy lines, it did not prove his ability to wage unconventional war with indigenous troops. The Operations Research Office (ORO) at Johns Hopkins University, often contracted for external evaluation of Army practices, performed a study in 1953, just before the 10<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group went to Germany. Special Forces troops were found to be quite effective at Ranger operations such as sabotage, but somewhat unskilled in interacting with indigenous forces in unconventional operations.<sup>129</sup> Some Special Forces personnel in interviews indicated a distinct preference for Ranger operations; others were indifferent to the type of mission assigned. Many of the men interviewed were more concerned with receiving the increased pay commensurate with parachute training than participating in guerrilla operations.<sup>130</sup>

Thus even by 1953, when the first Special Forces Group was activated and deployed, Bank and Volckmann made concessions to the general Army view of special operations in the soldiers targeted for recruitment. Many Special Forces officers accepted the notion that their troops would be used more for Ranger-type operations than for the purpose they were designed and trained.<sup>131</sup> It did not help that Special Forces personnel would often leave the unit soon after receiving training that made them eligible for additional pay, thus taking advantage of the status of the Psychological Warfare Center as a service school rather than remaining as part of Special Forces units. In the short term, these problems could have been worked out through continued training in Europe and the eventual acceptance of Special Forces in the Army as unconventional

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<sup>128</sup> Department of the Army, *Selection Process for Special Forces Volunteers* 25 Apr 1952. 25 April 1952, Document 2211.1952.001, U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School Archives, Fayetteville, NC.

Chase, Chevy, Md., *A Critique of the US Army Special Forces Tests and Field Exercises*, (Operations Research Office, Johns Hopkins University, 1954), 2-3.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 2.



warfare developed an official lineage. In only four years after their founding, Special Forces was strong enough to become the senior organization at Fort Bragg over the older and more accepted Psychological Divisions.<sup>132</sup> The continued presence in, and training for, Special Forces would supersede any Ranger training that soldiers would have had.<sup>133</sup> In the long term, however, the shift in the bureaucratic debates that allowed for the establishment of a Special Forces Group would end any chance of Ranger operations and training being separated from the Special Forces any time soon.

In response to Eisenhower's New Look policy of massive retaliation against the Soviet Union using nuclear weapons and a technologically advanced strategic reserve, the Army began quickly phasing out non-nuclear units like Special Forces. In September 1953, nineteen Special Forces Operational Detachments were deactivated.<sup>134</sup> Only two, 10<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group in Europe and 77<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group at Fort Bragg, soon to be sent to East Asia, remained. In 10<sup>th</sup> Special Forces, 122 officers and 731 enlisted men remained. The Group's Headquarters and Headquarters Company were deactivated. In 77<sup>th</sup> Special Forces, 168 officers and 1237 soldiers remained. In total, 2257 men were left in Special Forces out of 3500, about the same number of Rangers slots that existed at the time of its disbandment during the Korean War.<sup>135</sup> FM 31-20 55, the field manual through which Special Forces doctrine was disseminated, placed Special Forces on a tactical rather than strategic level under a theater commander.<sup>136</sup> This limited the independence of Special Forces, since Special Forces Groups would have to operate perhaps

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<sup>132</sup> Department of the Army Office of the Adjutant General, *Establishment of Psychological Warfare School*, 22 October 1952, Document 2326.1952.004, U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School Archives, Fayetteville, NC.

<sup>133</sup> Bank, *Green Berets*, 172.

<sup>134</sup> Department of the Army Office of the Adjutant General, *Inactivation of SF Units*, 16 September 1953, Document 2231.1953.001, U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School Archives, Fayetteville, NC.

<sup>135</sup> Bank, *Green Berets*, 158.

<sup>136</sup> Tomas K. Adams, *US Special Operations Forces in Action: the Challenge of Unconventional Warfare* (Portland: Frank Cass Publishers, 1998), 46.

hundreds of miles behind enemy lines to destabilize hostile forces that may have little to do with a specific American division.

By 1956, 77<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group was reorganized into a strategic reserve.<sup>137</sup> As a strategic reserve, it would take six months to a year for 77<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group to become ready for combat operations, which precluded its mission of being able to support the Army immediately after a declaration of war. All of its units except for the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, one Quartermaster Detachment, and one team were placed at reduced strength. The total remaining troop strength was 119 officers and 850 men, a 32% drop in personnel from 1953. With such low numbers, Special Forces units could not operate behind enemy lines until they were reinforced. This limited their ability to create an effective guerrilla army. Many of the potential guerrilla soldiers would have already been mobilized into the enemy army, and enemy security would have been on high alert by the time Special Forces arrived in hostile territory.<sup>138</sup> Thus, the removal of the larger of the two remaining Special Forces Groups to a strategic reserve indicated the end of Army participation in the “retardation” plan, just as NSC 162/2 had recommended.

By 1956 training had also moved much closer to that of a more combat oriented force like the Rangers rather than a force to train indigenous soldiers in guerrilla war.<sup>139</sup> Troops were still expected to do so, but increasingly the units’ training hours were devoted to atomic warfare, operations in harsh terrain and at night, first aid, the use of weapons, and other Ranger-type activities. In the training directives, leading guerrillas -- the time spent learning how to turn

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<sup>137</sup> *Reorganization of Units, 77<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group* 14 December 1956, Document 2231.1956.001, U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School Archives, Fayetteville, NC.

<sup>138</sup> Bank, *Green Berets*, 188.

<sup>139</sup> Headquarters 10<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group Airborne, *10<sup>th</sup> SFG (A) Training Memorandum (Europe) Number 7*, 30 October 1956, Document 2211.1956.003, U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School Archives, Fayetteville, NC.

indigenous forces into effective combatants -- was last in every case.<sup>140</sup> Guerrilla forces were to be used, but more in a peripheral role as support for Special Forces missions rather than as the central purpose of Special Forces actions. In the entire training memorandum, guerrilla forces were mentioned only three times in quick succession, and as combat forces rather than as auxiliary security and communications personnel for the “nets” into which all indigenous persons would be organized.<sup>141</sup>

By the end of 1956 the emasculation of the Special Forces was largely complete. Tenth Special Forces Group was attached to the Third Army in Europe without any headquarters or headquarters company. The Army moved 77<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group into the strategic reserve. General McClure was no longer head of the Psychological Warfare Center, and at any rate he no longer championed the Special Forces due to its increasing independence from the Psychological Division.<sup>142</sup> Colonels Volckmann and Bank were also no longer directly involved in Special Forces. While the Psychological Warfare School remained a service school, it now operated much like the Ranger School at Fort Benning: as a place where soldiers could learn a specialty, but not one where they would be prepared to serve in separate Army units.

The establishment of Army Special Forces in 1952 depended on the assumption in national security policy that massive subversive action using guerrilla forces was essential to successfully combat a Soviet invasion in Europe. Without that assumption, the conventional American military forces had little reason to support an unconventional warfare capability in peacetime, especially with the tight budgets after the Korean War. Special Forces were viewed as

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Paddock, *Special Warfare*, 155.

super-Rangers, an elite unit in an army that disliked elite units and one that seemed peripheral to the larger Army's mission. Without serious support in the officer corps, Special Forces was woefully vulnerable, and fell accordingly.

As Alfred H. Paddock argued in *U.S. Army Special Warfare: Its Origins*, the beginning of special warfare in the United States can be found in the myriad unconventional warfare units that fought in World War II, but the beginning of Special Forces could only be loosely tied to the Jedburgh missions of the Operational Groups of the OSS.<sup>143</sup> Those units created a cadre of men in the Army who had substantial experience in unconventional warfare. As the officers and soldiers of formations like the Operational Groups adjusted to the postwar world, they saw a need for the skills they had developed in the jungles of Southeast Asia and the fields and mountains of Eastern Europe. Until the funding crisis that gripped the Army since 1945, however, that need could not be addressed.

It took the Korean War and the resurgence of interest and funds in the Army to provide an opportunity for Special Warfare. Even so, only a small minority of officers were in any way convinced of the need for the *military* to participate in what had become by then a civilian pursuit located at the CIA: subversive operations. The CIA, having inherited much of the OSS, was civilian and even though many military personnel participated in OSS operations, many considered its functions not to be military. Few officers had any desire to challenge that interpretation. The ones who did, usually military officers who had served in the OSS, lacked the influence to survive the Army. Accordingly, any plan for a permanent unconventional military organization was either denied or allowed to fade away.

The fortuitous connection between an already established branch of the military and the advocates of deep-penetration behind enemy lines saved the idea of unconventional military

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<sup>143</sup> Paddock, *Special Warfare*, 2.

operations. While the Rangers had by this point in the history of the Army become a mainstay of action behind enemy lines, they were focused purely on conventional military operations, designed to facilitate the movements of regular forces close to their mission objectives. Rangers could not operate very far beyond the forward positions of Army units. The idea of Special Forces was to create a massive guerrilla army in the rear of an enemy that could fight cripple its ability to fight effectively. This objective required months of preparation rather than days or weeks. To an uninformed officer, however, the Rangers and Special Forces resembled one another. It did not help that the Special Forces were originally sold as super-Rangers. The Rangers were deactivated when they were deemed no longer useful. When Eisenhower's national security reappraisal in 1953 abandoned the concept of "retardation," Special Forces were nearly liquidated as well.

After 1956, however, national security policy began to rediscover insurgency. Counterinsurgency warfare, up to this point a part of psychological warfare, became an acceptable if uncommon topic among Army officers and the bureaucrats surrounding the National Security Council.<sup>144</sup> It was in that atmosphere that Army Special Forces began to take the shape it would assume in the Vietnam conflict. It was also in that atmosphere that the transition of the Psychological Warfare School to the Special Warfare Center occurred. Thus even when Army Special Forces began to evolve into the form it would eventually take, it still did so at the direction of national security policymakers.

In the case of Army Special Forces, there was a definite tendency to focus more on its eventual deployment in 1956 to Southeast Asia than on its beginnings in 1952. There is logic in this decision. Focusing on the individuals who founded Army Special Forces starts their story in

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<sup>144</sup> Mitrovich, *Kremlin*, 158.

1945. If one were to focus on the Army Special Forces and their visible impact on military affairs alone, then the best place to begin is during the crisis in Southeast Asia.

The problem with the 1956 starting point is its ignorance of why Special Forces was treated in a certain fashion for so long. In 1956 Special Forces seemed more like two dying Ranger units than a viable, active function in the Army. Their actions in Southeast Asia for the next ten years take on a different light when viewed from 1945 rather than 1956. The battles between the CIA and military unconventional operations seem more of a long-standing bureaucratic turf battle than a rivalry that began in the jungles of Southeast Asia. Without understanding the debates surrounding the formation of a special warfare capability in the United States, it is difficult to understand why Special Forces was used in the way that it was, as well as why it developed in the way that it did; the Special Forces that went into Southeast Asia were the an evolution of the soldiers that trained to “retard” Soviet power in 1952.

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7<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group 1953-1963: Stack 2, Section 4, Shelf 2, Box 1.

10<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group -1996: Stack 3, Section 2, Shelf 1, Box 1.

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