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Major Duncan C. Lee  
Eric Staight  
Operational Data - Korea

March 19, 1945.

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NOT TO BE ACCESSIONED

Interview with N-13610 on Friday, March 16, 1945

The following notes should be read in conjunction with my memorandum of even date addressed to Commander [redacted] of Document Security. This latter memorandum covers various points of specific interest to Commander [redacted] but these points also have a direct bearing on the following paragraphs.

Subject confirmed the opinions of other interviewees to the effect that a white agent would have little chance of survival in Korea at the present time. He might be able to hide away in some mountain retreat for a time, always providing he could find some means of existence, but he would certainly be completely hamstrung from an operative standpoint.

On the other hand, subject also confirmed the ideas of other interviewees that certain types of Koreans would have a chance of useful survival. When asked to define the most suitable type of Korean, subject specified as follows:

The most important point is to find a Korean who himself had a desire to do the job and who could produce a plan or scheme of his own for the purpose. In other words, subject suggests that the details of the project should, as far as possible, be made to fit the capabilities of the individual rather than attempting to fit the individual into a specific plan of operation. He makes this point because the success or failure of such an operation must depend to a large extent on individual circumstances. The man must have been in Korea recently enough not to have lost his colloquial pronunciation. There are very distinct regional differences in colloquial speech and the Korean who has been in this country too long is more than likely to have lost his local accent which would in itself make him subject to immediate suspicion.

Furthermore the man must have close personal ties in Korea as his survival will depend upon the assistance of relatives and perhaps close friends.

In addition, and perhaps most important of all, subject is of the opinion that the Korean agent must be chosen with strict attention to the intensity of his anti-Japanese sentiments. Subject draws a considerable distinction between the feelings of the Korean who has been in America for a number of years and his compatriot who

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has personally and comparatively recently suffered at Japanese hands. In his own words "The American Korean is bitter enough but theoretically and professionally, which is different from first-hand experience."

In summing up the foregoing, subject points out that a combination of these qualifications will inevitably mean that the scope and extent of the agent's operations will be controlled thereby. In one case it may be possible to make them comprehensive, in another circumstances may limit them considerably, hence his observation that the job should be fitted to the man and not vice versa.

Subject by no means excludes the possibility of using Koreans who have been away from their country for upwards of six or seven years but he feels quite strongly that first efforts should be made to examine the possibility of using some of the recently captured Korean prisoners of war. In his opinion some of these men might well prove the best bets. They have in all probability suffered personally at the hands of the Japanese and they have in any event been living close to the Japanese and are familiar with current records, controls, etc. Moreover they will be comparatively up to date on the present whereabouts and condition of their family and friends and, by the same token, will be sentimentally closer to the latter than those Koreans who have been living in this country for a number of years.

In this connection subject was questioned as to his feelings on the score of the reliability of such men. He is of the opinion that the chances are slight that many of them have become indoctrinated by the Japanese. On the contrary he believes that they are much more likely to be extremely bitter and, in any event, feels that proper questioning would clarify these points.

Questioned as to specific ways and means subject said that inasmuch as some foreknowledge of the assistance which an agent could anticipate would be essential, here again such foreknowledge is most likely to be found with the Korean prisoner of war and of course the plan must largely be based on his appraisal of the extent of such assistance. Assuming that the agent is reasonably convinced that once he reaches the vicinity of his family he can count on aid, then comes the question of the most likely way to avoid detection in reaching the desired locality.

The accompanying memorandum describes how Pearl Harbor travel conditions but also points out the probability that new controls have been introduced and the existing controls tightened so that any extended initial journey should be regarded as unwise. If this is accepted as a premise then the agent must either be landed on the coast or dropped by parachute, and in both instances as close as possible to his home town or village.

If the latter means are used, and subject feels they are preferable due to the greater density of population along the coast, then the higher slopes of a nearby mountain are suggested. Korea is

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very mountainous and the odds are that some such high ground exists not too far from the agent's home territory. The upper slopes are considered advisable both because they are, with few exceptions, unpopulated and because the tendency would be for the higher mountains to be bare of trees.

The agent's identity while in Korea presents of course an important problem. It is possible that he could survive for a time without an official identity, always provided his family and close friends do their part, not only with loyalty but with the necessary discretion. However this would not only be a tremendous strain on all concerned but it would hardly accomplish the desired purpose. The agent must have some freedom of movement and for this purpose subject suggests that the agent assume the identity of another member of the family with whom arrangements could be made to disappear. It is at this point that the absence of photographic or fingerprint identification methods becomes important (always provided of course that such methods have not been introduced since Pearl Harbor. Subject regards this as unlikely.) Armed with sufficiently up to date knowledge of available candidates amongst his immediate family, the agent could at once upon establishing contact make arrangements for one of these relatives to disappear in the mountains and could then assume that man's identity. Naturally this would have to be done quickly and the agent should immediately proceed to the scene of his operations, which should be gone distance removed from his home town. With this accomplished however and with both the agent and his family sufficiently posted, the former could then face the police at his point of operations with a clear-cut and feasible story. An immediate check would be made but inasmuch as only written records are used, such a check should involve no complications.

Comments:

I would add that the subject, [redacted], made a decidedly favorable impression in the course of this interview which, as you will gather, I conducted myself. He is a man of about 50 and above average in intelligence. I gather that he speaks excellent Korean and he has certainly had great experience in the country. He is at present employed at the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, but expressed his willingness to come down to Washington for a few days should you wish to talk to him on this or other subjects connected with Korea. I do not know how well he would fit into a busy office as he is hard of hearing and is, I think, somewhat self-conscious on the point. However on a consultative basis or perhaps as a man who could be used to interview selected Koreans in their own language, you might find him of considerable use. I feel moderately certain that he is not well off so that I think you must be prepared to pay any expenses incurred.

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Survey of Foreign Experts - New York

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Major Duncan C. Lee

March 20, 1945.

Eric Staight

Dear Duncan,

As discussed with you on Monday, I now enclose the new Korean material. This consists of (a) an original and three copies of a memorandum to you on the subject "Operational Data on Korea" dated March 19th and (b) three copies of a memorandum to Commander H. S. Morgan on the subject "Specified Information on Korea" dated March 19th.

Will you be good enough to send two copies each of (a) and (b) to Major Frazee for Colonel Eifler's attention. This is in accordance with a standing agreement with which I know you are familiar.

In the next few days you will also be receiving a special "S" report dealing with certain individuals now in Korea.

Knowing that you are in a considerable hurry for this material I have let it go as first dictated and without the usual polish, but I think you will find it sufficiently clear.

E.W.S.