

Willows Korean Aviation School/Corps

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Introduction

Strict discriminatory immigration laws curtailed Asian and Korean immigration to the United States prior to the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965. As a result, the Korean population in America remained small for some time. According to 1970 census figures, there were only 69,000 documented Koreans living in the United States. The history of Korean immigration to the United States can be divided into four distinct periods: the first wave (1885-1902), the second wave (1903-1924), the third wave (1950-1964), and the fourth wave (1965-Present). The characteristics of each wave of Korean immigration are distinct and unique in terms of political and socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as the motive for emigrating from Korea.

Between 1884 and 1953, many Korean immigrants, students, political exiles came to the U.S.; many sacrificed themselves to support Korean independence movements in the U.S., China, and Korea. A small number of Korean immigrants in Hawaii left the island and went to the U.S. mainland to seek better lives. Most found new homes in cities in California such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, Riverside, Dinuba, Reedley, and Willows. Mainly young, male intellectuals became the leaders of the independence movement abroad which fought against the Japanese occupation of Korea. However, the Korean American community was divided along different strategies to fight Japan. While in the U.S. Park Yong Man was an activist and took a militant approach, Syngman Rhee focused on education and diplomacy, and Ahn Chang Ho emphasized developing patriotic leadership.¹

This group of Korean immigrants, coupled with Koreans who immigrated earlier, can be said to have “suffered more mentally...than the succeeding generations,” for they were a people without a country. For them, life in the U.S. during this time revolved around the independence movement and church.² This Korean American arm of the Korean independence movement was centralized through Christian churches, such as the Korean Methodist Church of San Francisco, which is the oldest Korean American church, and the Korean Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles. The churches served the important function of regularly bringing together the Korean American community, which was spread apart in mostly rural areas, and organizing support for Korean independence. They were centers for educational forums and debates about Korea’s plight, and sponsored talks such as “Jesus Christ and the Future of Korea,” “The Relationship of Korea and Christianity,” and “The Duty of Koreans Abroad.”³ Ministers were often leaders of the Korean National Association. Korean Americans were passionately against Japan’s occupation of their homeland, and displayed this in other ways as well. In Nebraska, Park Yong Man established the Korean Youth Military Academy, specifically to train Korean immigrant men to fight against the Japanese military. Because Koreans were considered “aliens ineligible for citizenship,” they were not allowed to use firearms, and so trained using wooden rifles.⁴

Korean Americans were passionately opposed to Japan’s occupation of their homeland, and displayed their protest through a variety of means. Three Korean immigrant leaders in particular embodied the different strategies that people adopted to fight the Japanese while in the United States. Park Yong Man advocated direct military confrontation, Syngman Rhee focused on diplomacy, and Ahn Chang Ho emphasized education and developing patriotic leadership.⁵ Following Park’s suggestion of armed confrontation was difficult because Koreans in the U.S. were considered “aliens ineligible for citizenship” and were not allowed to use firearms, leaving

them to train using wooden models of rifles.⁶ On the other hand, Syngman Rhee's bid for diplomatic efforts along with Ahn Chang Ho's emphasis on developing educational resources and patriotic leadership held both promise and practicality.⁷

The March 1st *Mansei* Movement of 1919 was a pivotal historical event that ignited Korean independence activism all over the world, including in the United States. Koreans throughout the country demanded "self-determination" and independence from Japanese rule through mass demonstrations. Between March 1919 and December 1920, Korean Americans raised over \$200,000 to support the independence movement in Korea.⁸ One of the most significant examples of Korean immigrant ferocity against occupation of their homeland by Japan occurred in 1908 with the assassination of Durham Stevens, an adviser to the Korean government who was later found to be a shill for the Japanese.⁹ Stevens was labeled a traitor to the Korean people, and a Korean immigrant named Chang In-hwan shot and killed him. While many participated in anti-colonial activities, they also worked to acclimate themselves to life in the U.S.

As previously stated, the purpose of this report is to trace and analyze the Korean independence movement in the U.S. with special focus on the history of the Korean Aviation School in Willows, California. During the early 20th century, only a few nations (Britain, Russia, France, Japan, and the U.S.) established air schools to train combat pilots. It is in this context that Roh Paik-lin, defense secretary of the Korean Provisional Government, Shanghai, decided to establish the Korean Aviation School in the United States. Therefore, the creation of the Korean Aviation School in Willows, California was highly unusual in that it was military policy implemented by the Korean Provisional Government from China which established a training facility for Korean combat pilots on American soil. The Korean Aviation School commenced

operations sometime in March 1920 at Willows, California, a small town located 230 km north of San Francisco.¹⁰

This essay will attempt to reexamine the Korean independence movement in the United States with special focus on the Korean Aviation School in Willows, California. Previous studies primarily focused on well known Korean independence movement activists and leaders such as Syngman Rhee, Ahn Chang Ho, Park Yong Man, and Philip Jaishon. We strongly believe that Kim Chong-lim, the first Korean millionaire known as the “Rice King,” played a prominent role in the establishment and maintenance of the Korean Aviation School. We intend to closely reexamine the roles played by Kim Chong-lim and reevaluate his status and contributions within the context of the early Korean independence movement. Although the existence of the Korean Aviation School is known to some researchers and scholars, it is necessary to reconstruct the histories which define its origin, scope, and its purpose based on new documents, newspaper articles, and interviews. Who was responsible for establishing the Korean Aviation School in Willows, California? For what purposes was the school created, and how many pilots were trained there? What types of training aircraft were purchased by the Korean Aviation School? These questions are but a few of which this study will seek to answer while proceeding within the context of the Korean American independence movement and Korean Diaspora in America.

The Korean Aviation School

“Extraordinary thought leads to extraordinary action and eventually distinguished merits ... Build an army if there are large fields, train a navy if near an ocean, make weapons if there is a machine shop, but since we reside in the United States ... there is a business that is more important and necessary to us ... A pilot training center is the business we must build ... Recruit

young men and train them as pilots.”¹¹

The Korean Aviation School ran for at least a year-and-a-half and trained several young Korean men as pilots.¹² It was part of the dream of establishing an independent Korean air guard by the Korean American community. The Korean Provisional Government in Shanghai appointed at least two Korean pilots from the Korean Aviation School as officers in the later developed Korean Air Force.¹³ Therefore, some scholars believe that the Korean Air Force Academy is actually a continuation of the Korean Aviation School in Willows.¹⁴

There are several reasons why the Korean Aviation School was established in Willows, California: 1) The March 1st Movement and continuation of the independence movement sparked interest in the development of a Korean air combat program, 2) financial support and desire from the Korean American community provided the resources needed for the school’s development, 3) the economic and military impact of World War I cemented air combat’s status as a necessary means of warfare and national defense, 4) the development of the air industry in the United States provided a technological and logistical backdrop for establishing a flight school, and 5) Japan was unable to control and influence Korean activities occurring in the United States. The Korean Aviation School was officially launched in 1920, about a year after the end of World War I.¹⁵ At that time, many former colonies of European powers were trying to gain independence, adding to anti-colonial and anti-Japanese sentiment among Koreans at home and abroad, who prepared to commemorate the first anniversary of the March 1st Movement of 1919.

The Korean Provisional Government in Shanghai appointed Roh Paik-lin as Defense Minister.¹⁶ He was staying in Hawaii in political exile when he heard the news about his appointment. So Roh decided to meet with Syngman Rhee and Philip Jaisohn, traveling to

Seattle and the East Coast before coming to California. Roh met with several leaders of the Korean community in California to discuss and develop strategies to engage in independence-related activities in the United States. With commitment and financial support from Korean Americans such as Kim Chong-lim, Roh decided to establish the Korean Aviation School in California.¹⁷ Although most scholars and researchers previously believed that the Korean Aviation School was established on February 20, 1920, it needs more clarification since the *Willows Daily Journal* reported the news of the Korean Aviation School's opening on February 19, 1920. In addition, *The New Korea* (February 24, 1920) quoted the *Willows Telegram* (February 20, 1920) when it reported the start of the Korean Aviation School.

The *Willows Daily Journal* reported this event with the headline: "KOREANS TO HAVE AVIATION FIELD." According to the article:

"Kim, wealthy Korean rice grower said today, that he is about to establish an aviation field near Willows to train young people to fly. S. M. Chaney, superintendent of schools, recently received a visit from Mrs. Kim, who is highly educated and speaks English like a native. She asked Mr. Chaney if it was possible to rent the Quint school house, as the Koreans wished to establish a school. She said there would be about a hundred young Koreans as pupils. Kim later visited Mr. Chaney and reduced the number of students to 15.... Kim also told Mr. Chaney about the aviation field which is to be established. Kim, the leader in the move to thoroughly Americanize the young Koreans to teach them to fly, recently purchased a home in Willows which he and his family occupy.... It's believed the Koreans, educated here as aviators, will be sent to their own country and at the proper time will be on hand to help take their country from the Japanese."

The articles printed by the *Willows Daily Journal* and the *New Korea* differ and the

stories are written in future tense, implying that the school had not yet open. What is clear is that the school opened sometime between March 1 and March 19, 1920. Several *New Korea* stories reported on the school's plans and functions in a series of articles that culminated with a story about Park Hee Sung and other Korean Aviation School pilots taking to the skies for the first time on March 20, 1920 in an article printed on March 31, 1920.

When Roh arrived in San Francisco on January 15, 1920 he had no plans or thoughts of opening a Korean training center for combat pilots. However, once Roh and Korean American community leaders like Kim Chong-lim met, the idea was planted. Remarkably, Kim and Roh completed preparations for the Willows Korean Air School/Corps, including the purchase of three air craft and a 40-acre airport site, the leasing of a school building, and the recruitment of 15 students, trainers, and technicians by February 19. That they hurried and completed all the necessary preparations within a month attests to the wide range of support the program had from the Korean community. As stated previously, Roh Paik-lin supported policy to achieve Korean independence by military means from the beginning. Roh was impressed by the effectiveness of air combat strategies used during World War I, and when he was appointed as Minister of Defense, he decided to establish a pilot training school.¹⁸ Soon, the Korean Aviation School was recognized as an official institution of the Korean Provisional Government since Roh reported to Prime Minister Lee Dong-hwi, who frequently gave direct orders to Roh.

Both Roh and the Korean immigrant community agreed on the importance of building up an air force to achieve independence for Korea. The Korean community in the United States highly valued the importance of an air force when they saw how successfully the U.S. fleet of fighters and bombers carried out missions during World War I. Before the arrival of Roh Paik-lin, many young Korean Americans talked about building an air force, and some of them began

learning how to fly. The *New Korea* repeatedly wrote about the importance of dominating airspace during wartime. The publication's calls to action served as the initial impetus for the independence movement between 1910 and 1920 until the publication of the *Chosun* and *Dong-A Daily* newspapers in Korea found wider readership than the *New Korea*. As a publication of the Korean National Association (KNA) founded by Dosan Ahn Chang Ho, the *New Korea* was a very influential newspaper with distribution in the U.S., Mexico, Russia, and even Korea.

According to a March 10, 1909 article in the *New Korea*, "In the future, the air balloon will be widely used on reconnaissance missions or as a fighter bomber."¹⁹ Another *New Korea* article (January 29, 1914) also predicted the outbreak of WWI and urged Koreans to explore new paths toward an independent future, publishing photographs of airplanes.²⁰ Between September 8 and October 5, 1916, the periodical also published a special feature story on the "airplane" as a powerful weapon. It appears that the *New Korea* tried to influence young Korean men to learn how to fly in order to contribute to the independence of Korea. Indeed, many young Koreans in the U.S. became interested in learning how to fly.

The Korean American community was in a position to provide critical financial support to Roh's plans to establish an aviation school and train pilots. Some Korean immigrants started to grow rice in northern California and became very successful. In California, farmers began commercial rice farming in 1912.²¹ When WW I broke out two years later, demand for rice grew rapidly and rice growers in California profited from it. A wide plain nearby Willows was known as the Mecca of rice farming. Many Korean immigrants in California became rich by cultivating rice, and they provided monetary resources to the Korean independence movement in the United States. The Korean community in the U.S. raised \$88,000 right after the March 1st Movement in 1919. Of this total, Korean farmers contributed 49%, approximately \$42,955, through

fundraising campaigns. In addition, Korean American community provided 45% of the total budget (\$131,909) of the Korean Provisional Government from May 1919 to December 10, 1920. Four Korean Americans received a "Certificate of Appreciation" from the Korean Provisional Government for their contribution to the independence fund.²² All four of them were rice farmers in California.

Of all the Korean rice farmers in California, Kim Chong-lim was the most successful. Kim Chong-lim (1884-1973) was the first Korean American millionaire, an independence activist, a newspaper publisher, and a volunteer in the Korean American community. Although the Korean immigrant community was sometimes divided between supporters of Syngman Rhee and Ahn Chang Ho, Kim Chong-lim supported and provided financial contributions to both leaders. He was one of the core financiers of Ahn Chang Ho's work, but he also maintained close relations with Rhee, and served as a chair at the national meeting of the Comrade Association in 1946. Kim Chong-lim was considered as one of the most influential donors and leaders of the Korean American community at the time. The fact that more than 400 guests attended his eldest son's wedding ceremony in 1946 attests to his extensive connections within the community.

He became the first Korean American millionaire, having recorded profits of \$280,000 in 1918 and \$520,000 in 1919. Kim knew not only how to make money, but more importantly how to spend the money wisely.²³ He donated \$20,000 to establish the Willows Korean Aviation School, and promised to contribute \$3,000 per month to aid in its upkeep and continued activity. Coincidentally, Kim had already been providing financial support to Han Jang Ho, a young Korean man who was learning how to fly at the Redwood Air School. With donations from Kim Chong-lim and other contributors, Defense Minister Roh and his partners were able to purchase land for airfields, several J-1 airplanes, hire instructors, and see to other necessities. Due to the

large amount of financial support the Korean Aviation School received from Kim the *Willows Daily Journal* reported that “Kim Chong-lim is leading the establishment of the aviation school.”

As the founding of the Korean Aviation School was coming to completion, the number of students began to increase. According to the *New Korea* (March 19, 1920), 24 young men enrolled in the program. The number of students increased from 15 to 24 within a month and grew to 30 by June 22. The *Willows Daily Journal* (March 1, 1920) quoted Roh Paik-lin:

“Korean Aviation School is a continuation of the March 1st Movement of 1919, and Korean pilots will be mobilized to fight against Japan. Roh has also refuted the story that the Korean Aviation School will use 40 acres of land, but instead says an agreement has been reached to secure the use of 3,000 acres. Roh also revealed that he is planning to establish several Air schools in China as well.”

Our research team was able to find that the Korean Aviation School purchased at least three Standard J-1 aircraft with which they trained Korean pilots. Interestingly, Japanese intelligence sources reported that the Korean Aviation School had five airplanes. The Korean Provisional Government in Shanghai had planned to expand the Korean pilot training program into China. However, this plan was never implemented after the Korean Aviation School in Willows was suddenly forced shut down. The first airplane was delivered to the Korean Aviation School on June 22, 1920.

On July 5, 1920, the Korean Aviation School invited more than two hundred Korean immigrants to attend its opening ceremonies. During the event, Oh Rim Ha and a chief instructor named Frank Bryant showed off their flying skills.²⁴ As the Korean Aviation School became more stable, it decided to create a “pilot training manual” in order to officially launch the pilot training center.²⁵ According to the manual, the purpose of training a pilot was “to achieve the

independence of Korea" (part 1 no. 2). Also, the manual asserted that the "Korean Aviation School was established to meet these goals and purposes" (Appendix No. 3). It provided logistical and organizational information as well. For example, it said, "A manager will be appointed, and he is responsible for the maintenance of the Korean Aviation School (Appendix No. 4), and the executive body [Board of Directors] of the Korean Aviation School will select and appoint the manager"

The purpose of the Board of the Korean Aviation School was to provide support to, manage, and control the Korean Aviation School. Kim Chong-lim was elected as the first president of the Board, and Kwak Rim Dae was selected as the manager of the fledgling institution.²⁶ In addition, students of the Korean Aviation School organized the Korean Aviation Club. Han Jang Ho was elected as the first president of this group. The Korean Aviation Club presented the Silver Cup, an honor created by the society for recognition of services, to Kim Chong-lim as a sign of appreciation for his support.²⁷ According to an August 6, 1920 article in the *New Korea*, "32 Korean immigrants and 16 students are living together on 3,000 acres of wild field where they participate in pilot training."²⁸

The Korean Aviation School possessed three-to-five²⁹ J-1 Standard practice aircraft.³⁰ However, the *New Korea* (July 2, 1920) reported that the Korean Aviation School purchased four airplanes in an article entitled, "Four Korean Aircraft." The *New Korea* stated that "pilots are able to practice efficiently with the acquisition of one additional plane on August 5, 1920." In addition, Japanese intelligence reports confirmed the activities of the Korean Aviation School in a document:

"On July 7, 1920, the Korean Aviation School conducted its first graduation ceremony.

Both Roh Paik-lin and Kim Chong-lim declared that 'the airplane is the only method of

fighting against the Japanese military in the future.' There are 25 students practicing and training at the Korean Aviation School now, and it possesses 5 aircraft, each equipped with radio communication devices."

It is known that Japanese intelligence knew of the Korean Aviation School and closely monitored its activities.

The school was clearly a combat training pilot facility under the direction of Defense Minister Roh Paik-lin. However, questions regarding the initials K.A.C., which appear on the school's J-1 airplanes, have been raised. The planes at the school were clearly marked with the initials K.A.C. However, no one knows what it stood for, and the meaning still has not been confirmed to this day. What is clear is that it does not stand for "Korean Aviation Circle"³¹ or "Korean Aviation Club," as previously speculated. According to John Klein (USC), the Korean Provisional Government officially launched the Korean Aviation School, therefore it was not a pilot's club as once believed. Therefore, he proposes that K.A.C. stands for "Korean Aviation Corps," as it signifies the Korean Air Force. In the United States, the Air Force was known as the "Air Service" during World War I, and was later changed to "Army Air Corps" during World War II. The "Air Force" in the United States was established in 1947, well after the end of World War II. Perhaps the Korean community decided to use the term "Korean Aviation Corp" or "Korean Air Corps" since the unit was the equivalent of a Korean Air Force at the time. To add some more information on naming, students of the Korean Aviation School called themselves "aviation cadets," and the Korean immigrant community called the program a "military academy."³²

Regardless of its strong community support and early successes, the Korean Aviation School faced major problems when Kim Chong-lim's rice farm was flooded in October 1920,

devastating his business. In addition, the world-wide demand for rice decreased after World War I. One of the major findings of this research project is that Kim Chong-lim's farm was flooded not from heavy rains in November and December, as previously deduced, but because of rains occurring from October 3-9, 1920. It became impossible to harvest the rice with machines when crops fell due to heavy rains, complicating the gathering. In addition, cold weather further delayed the harvest. Kim Chong-lim faced major economic problems. *The Glenn Transcript* (October 13, 1920) reported:

“...The rains of the past week have done considerable damage to the rice crop. While on the whole the damage is small, in some instances it is falling very heavily on some growers... Kim and Porter are among the unfortunate ones whose crop is thus damaged. They have 1,700 acres of very heavy rice, and it is hopelessly drowned. Every acre of it will have to be hand cut, it is said. They were in town yesterday and let out a contract for the cutting of the entire acreage by hand. They have put on 200 Hindus who are receiving \$4.00 per day and board. When it is considered that cutting with machinery is being done at \$10 per acre, it can easily be figured how hard this firm has been hit by the rain and its accompanying wind.”

Other nearby Korean rice farmers who provided critical financial support to the Korean Aviation School faced similar problems. These events served as a turning point for the Korean immigrant community as its economic center moved from Northern California to Southern California, centering mainly in the Los Angeles area.³³ In addition, the Korean immigrant community also began to shift its economic activities from farming to entrepreneurship.

It appears that Kim Chong-lim contributed around \$50,000 to the Korean Aviation School in 1920, and its worth in today's economy is estimated to be up to \$8 million in current

U.S. dollar value, depending, of course, on exchange rates. According to Kim's youngest son, Kim Du Won, his mother told him that when she was alive his father was planning to retire after that year's harvest.³⁴ This means that Kim Chong-lim knew that the special demand for rice had ended after WWI, and, considering the hardships of that year's harvest, he wanted to retire in 1920. California rice harvests typically began in the first week of October. If Kim Chong-lim was able to harvest his rice just before the heavy rain that flooded his farm came, he may have been able to keep his wealth as well as the Korean Aviation School in the black. Of course, this is strictly speculation.

Several months after the heavy rains that destroyed Kim's farm, Korean Aviation School student Park Hee Sung and two other Korean pilots were wounded when their aircraft crashed during flight license examinations on April 10, 1921. Kim Chong-lim sent a letter to the Korean National Association's North American branch to discuss monetary compensation for the owner of the aircraft who lent his plane to the three Korean pilots. In his letter, Kim also stated that "it is truly regrettable to shut down the Korean Aviation School due to unforeseeable reasons."³⁵

The Korean Aviation Board officially opened its doors on July 28, 1920 and shut down sometime between April 11 and May 5, 1921. It is unclear if closure of the Korean Aviation Board foreshadowed the shut down of the Korean Aviation School. The school had opened by March 1920 or perhaps a bit earlier, but it no longer functioned as an aviation school by December of that same year. However, it remained open in name only until it officially ceased operations in June 1921. It is important to note, however, that almost all the factors surrounding the school's operations remained the same except for the financial status/support of Kim Chong-lim. Kim still owned and cultivated the same size farm as the previous year, and he was a man of strong conviction and determination. Therefore, both Kim Chong-lim and Roh Paik-lin probably

did not give up on the dream of continuing the Korean Aviation School at the time. The *Willows Daily Journal* (June 1, 1921) reported that “they are trying to reopen Korean aviation field in Quint.”³⁶ The *New Korea* (August 25, 1921) also continue to list the names of donors who contributed money to support Korean student pilots.

The Korean Aviation School was unable to continue operating when Kim Chong-lim was unable to recover from the financial damages caused by the floods of October 1920. Graduates of the Willows Korean Aviation School, however, continued to engage in the Korean independence movement on their own by enlisting in the U.S. and Chinese militaries or pursuing activism individually. On July 18, 1921, the Korean Provisional Government appointed Park Hee Sung and Lee Yong Keun, both graduates of the Willows Korean Aviation School, as lieutenants of the Korean Army. One of the reasons why the Korean Provisional Government decided to give the title of “Army Pilot Lieutenant” to these two men was because they did not envision establishing an independent air force unit. This was due to the fact that the U.S., Japan, and powers in Europe had not established separate air force branches of their respective militaries at the time. According to Hong Yun Jung, the Korean Provisional Government intended to establish an independent air force unit, but never succeeded. In August 1943, the Korean Provisional Government tried to create an air combat unit by drafting Air Force Planning Committee Ordinances but failed. In March 1945, the Korean Provisional Government planned to establish the Korean air force jointly with the American military, but they could not follow through with it after Japan declared unconditional surrender to the United States. Therefore, the Korean Provisional Government’s plan to train pilots and establish an air force was delayed until the Korean Air Force was officially launched by the Republic of Korea.³⁷

Aviation Officer of the Korean Provisional Government

Park Hee Sung (1896-1937)³⁸ and Lee Yong Keun (1890-?) graduated from the Korean Aviation School in Willows, California and were appointed as aviation officers by the Korean Provisional Government. When the Korean Aviation School opened sometime in March 1920, Park Hee Sung, along with Chung Myong Ryong, Cho Chong Ik, and 23 other Korean men, began his aviation training.³⁹ When the Korean Aviation School shut down its operation later that same year, Park Hee Sung decided to continue his aviation training at a nearby American aviation school located in Sacramento in January 1921. Lee Yong Keun also enrolled at the same school in March 1921, and they studied aviation together.⁴⁰

During a flight exhibition held by the Korean Aviation School on March 20, 1920, a journalist from the *New Korea* documented the event as the crowds watched these Korean pilots take to the sky for the first time. According to the *New Korea* article dated March 31, 1920:

“Park Hee Sung flew the airplane in which he trained at the Korean Aviation School on March 20, and three Korean pilots-in-training flew in Park’s plane, as well. Their instructor also flew in his own airplane, and both planes showed off their skills in the sky. Several thousand spectators came together and cheered as Park's plane landed safely on the ground. The pilots and many onlookers touched the Korean national flag clearly marked on the plane, and others shook hands with Park. Koreans cheered their new heroes and the Korean Aviation School.”

It appears that Park Hee Sung’s air skills were exceptional. When he later attended the aviation school in Sacramento, his tuition was waived because of his ability. The *New Korea* had also reported that Park Hee Sung was the best student at the Korean Aviation School.⁴¹

Regardless of his skills and notoriety, Park Hee Sung was almost killed in an air

accident.⁴² On April 10, 1921, Park Hee Sung was taking his license examination, but his plane crashed due to a mechanical malfunction. He barely survived. The *New Korea* reported on the incident:

“Park Hee Sung did very well in the beginning; however, when he reached 6,000 feet, his plane fell rapidly and crashed due to mechanical problems. Park's plane was totaled, and the pilot lost consciousness for 30 minutes. He was severely wounded and barely made it through major surgery.”

Both the *Willows Daily Journal* and the *Glenn Transcript* printed the story of Park Hee Sung's plane crash. Park proved to be a person of strong character when he retook the pilot's license examination only three weeks after he was released from the hospital.⁴³ On May 22, he passed the pilot's license examination, and on July 7, 1921 he officially received his pilot's license from the FIA.⁴⁴

Lee Yong Keun graduated from Pyongyang Japanese School in 1912. When he moved to Los Angeles in 1917, he became a member of the Young Korean Academy.⁴⁵ Lee was learning how to fly along with other Korean students at the Redwood Aviation School before the Korean Aviation School was established. After finishing their initial aviation training at Redwood, Lee and several other Korean students transferred to the Korean Aviation School on June 17, 1920. Lee was initially scheduled to take the pilot's license examination on the same day Park Hee Sung's plane crashed. He took the exam at a later time and earned his pilot's license.

The Korean Provisional Government passed a resolution to appoint Park Hee Sung and Lee Yong Keun as aviation officers and rewarded them with monetary compensation for their training and services. They were officially appointed to their posts four days later on July 18, 1921.⁴⁶ However, Park was unable to participate in any independence war activities against

Japan due to injuries he sustained after his crash. He suffered prolonged complications and never fully recovered from the accident.⁴⁷ In 1937 he passed away from pneumonia in Los Angeles at the young age of 41 without seeing Korea's independence realized.⁴⁸ He is buried in the public cemetery in Los Angeles. At Park's burial site, one can see his tombstone clearly marked with the words, "Son of Korea," and the Korean national flag.⁴⁹

Conclusion

From this research project, we made many significant findings and accomplishments. More importantly, this research project found that the Korean Aviation School was first initiated and established by leaders of the Korean American community in California, and the Korean Provisional Government in Shanghai approved the plan.

This research project made significant contributions to the study of the early Korean immigrant independence movement in California: In particular, this research project focused on the Korean Aviation School in Willows, California. Major contributions of this research projects are: 1) discovered many valuable documents and newspaper articles on the Korean Aviation School, and reevaluated historical importance of the Korean Aviation School; 2) we were able to identify the Standard J-1 as the aircraft used by the Willows Korean Aviation School. Previously, scholars and researchers assumed that the Curtis Jenny series JN-4D or a similar aircraft was used to train Korean pilots; 3) previously ignored or underestimated the role of Kim Chong-lim (1884-1973) in the independence movement in California. He was the first Korean American millionaire, an independence activist, a newspaper publisher, and a volunteer in the Korean American community; 4) there is a need to rewrite Korea's aviation history as this research newly discovered that George Lee is the first Korean pilot; 5) Park Hee Sung and Lee Yong

Keun graduated from the Willows Korean Aviation School and both were appointed as aviation officers by the Korean Provisional Government; 6) this research project clearly proved that the Korean Air Force Academy of the Republic of Korea is actually a continuation of the Korean Aviation School in Willows; 7) the Korean Provisional Government of Shanghai understood the importance of building an air force to gain the independence of Korea as it was one of ten nations that established aviation schools during the 1920s.

Despite these major accomplishments, however, there are still many unanswered questions about the Korean Aviation School in Willows, California; there is still a need for additional research.

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¹ Takaki, p. 281.

² Ibid, p. 278.

³ Ibid, p. 279.

⁴ Chang, p. 83.

⁵ Bong-Youn Choy, *Koreans in America*. Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1979; Takaki, p. 281.

⁶ Chang, p. 83.

⁷ Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*. p. 281.

⁸ Bong-Youn Choy. *Koreans in America*. Chicago: Nelson Hall Press, 1979.

⁹ Choy, p. 146.

¹⁰ *50 Year History of the Korean Air Force Academy*. The Korean Air Force Academy. 1997: 29.

¹¹ *The New Korea*. August 12, 1920.

¹² *50 Year History of the Korean Air Force Academy*. 1999: 25. According to this book, the Willows Korean Aviation School graduated 25 cadets in July 1920, 41 cadets in June 1922, and 41 cadets in 1923, it seems to be an error since the School shut down sometime in middle of 1921.

¹³ The Independence Newspaper (February 4, 1920) reported that Ro's declaration used the term liberation army as it read "20 million Koreans should organize and participate as a member of liberation army systematically." Sun Pyo Hong, "Military Independence Movement of Korean American Community." In *Korean American Community and Independence Movement I*. Committee to Commemorate the 100 Year History of Korean Immigration to the U.S. Seoul: Pak Young Sa, 2003.

¹⁴ Interview with Sun Pyo Hong, A researcher at the Center for Korean Independence Movement. Yun Jung Hong, Investigator, Committee to Investigate Pro-Japanese and anti-Korean Activities; *50 Year History of the Korean Air Force Academy* suggest that the Korean Air Force Academy is continuation of the Willows Korean Aviation School. 1999: 27-29.

¹⁵ *Willows Daily Journal*, February 19, 1920.

¹⁶ Sun Pyo Hong, "Military Independence Movement of Korean American Community." In *Korean American Community and Independence Movement I*. Committee to Commemorate the 100 Year History of Korean Immigration to the U.S. Seoul: Pak Young Sa, 2003; Interview with Young Duk Ro (Niece of Roh Baek-lin), Los Angeles, California.

¹⁷ *Willows Daily Journal*. February 19, 1920.

¹⁸ *50 Year History of the Korean Air Force Academy*. 1999: 25.

¹⁹ *The New Korea*. March 16, 1909.

²⁰ *The New Korea*. January 29, 1914.

²¹ *The New Korea*. August 26, 1920.

²² *The New Korea*. November 18, 1919.

²³ *The New Korea*. January 17, 1918.

²⁴ *The New Korea*. July 15, 1919.

²⁵ *The New Korea*. August 12, 1920.

²⁶ *Ibid*.

²⁷ *The New Korea*. August 5, 1920.

²⁸ *The New Korea*. August 26, 1920.

²⁹ One can see a caption "California Korean Aviator Unit Under the Leadership of General Roh Baek-lin" in picture taken in August 5, 1920. It shows three aircrafts; Japanese Secret Document, High Command No. 29493 Secret No. 12219.

³⁰ Interviews with Alan Renga, Assistant Archivist, San Diego Air and Space Museum; Miles Todd, Archives Volunteer, San Diego Air and Space Museum; Michael Lombardi, a Historian at the Boeing Aircraft; Robert Johnson, Ret. Air Force Lieutenant Colonel. This is one of the major findings of this research project. They all confirmed that aircrafts in picture are Standard J-1 not a Curtiss Jenny as previously known. Therefore, it seems logical to change the type of aircraft and set the record straight.

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- ³¹ Sun Pyo Hong, "Military Independence Movement of Korean American Community." In *Korean American Community and Independence Movement I*. Committee to Commemorate the 100 Year History of Korean Immigration to the U.S. Seoul: Pak Young Sa, 2003: 319.
- ³² *The New Korea*. April 9, 1920.
- ³³ *The New Korea*. June 14, 1923.
- ³⁴ Interview with the second son, Kim Du Won. As of 2009, he was residing in Boulder City, Nevada. He passed away in 2009.
- ³⁵ *The New Korea*. May 5, 1921.
- ³⁶ *Willows Daily Journal*, June 1, 1921.
- ³⁷ Unable to verify the page number.
- ³⁸ A death certificate of Park Hee Sung issued by Los Angeles County on October 27, 2009.
- ³⁹ *The New Korea*. March 19, 1920.
- ⁴⁰ *The New Korea*. March 31, 1921.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid*.
- ⁴² *Willows Daily Journal*. April 11, 1921; *The New Korea*. March 31, 1921.
- ⁴³ *The New Korea*. May 26, 1921.
- ⁴⁴ Pilot's license issued on July 7, 1921.
- ⁴⁵ Lee Yong Keun's Young Korean Academy membership card; Interview with his daughter Lee, Eun Sook who resides in Maryland.
- ⁴⁶ The Korean Provisional Government official document, July 20, 1921; *The Independence* newspaper, August 15, 1921.
- ⁴⁷ A written testimony by his nephew Park Hong Nam, October 10, 2009.
- ⁴⁸ A death certificate of Park, Hee Sung issued by the Los Angeles County on October 27, 2009.
- ⁴⁹ See attached pictures.