

# Pennsylvania Libraries: *Research & Practice*

Interview

## In the PaLRaP Spotlight: Ann L. Kemper

*Supervisory Librarian, United States Army Garrison Casey,  
Camp Red Cloud and Camp Hovey, South Korea*



Interview by Stephanie Campbell

*Stephanie Campbell is a Collection Development Project Librarian at Brodart, [stephanie.campbell@brodart.com](mailto:stephanie.campbell@brodart.com)*

**Tell us a little about yourself, specifically, your career trajectory and what led you to this position in special librarianship?**

My career path has been very interesting. My undergraduate degree is in Christian Education. After college, I worked as a United Methodist missionary in Nigeria. I taught in a public secondary school and then in a private mission-run school for a total of six years. I returned to the United States to earn my Master of Divinity degree and then went back to Nigeria to help organize and start a post-secondary seminary. While working at the seminary, I enjoyed selecting materials and setting up the library, so I decided to earn my MLS and become a librarian. For most of my library career, I worked in Pennsylvania, first at Lancaster Theological Seminary, then at the State Library of

Pennsylvania as a cataloger, and then at the new Harrisburg Area Community College (HACC) York Campus as the campus library director. From there I filled a temporary nine-month reference librarian position at West Chester University, and then worked for three years at Marymount University Library in Arlington, VA. I decided to take a break from full-time employment and enjoyed some “time off;” but even during my “time off,” I thought again about living and working outside of the United States. I discovered the opportunities to work for military libraries and applied for positions in a few different locations before I was offered the position in South Korea.

## Who are the primary users at your libraries?

Most military libraries are similar to public libraries and offer services and programs geared toward military personnel and their families and children. My particular location is comprised of Army soldiers who are on nine-month rotational tours or two-year permanent tours, so the primary users of the libraries are 18 to 24 year-old single soldiers. All tours are “unaccompanied,” which means they are not allowed to bring their families. We have a few exceptions, but very few, which means this summer, when other military libraries were planning children’s summer reading programs, I was racking my brain to find an activity that would appeal to soldiers in the 18 to 24-year-old age range! Army civilian support staff, military retirees, and their spouses may also use the library.

## Briefly describe your libraries’ services.

Most of the soldiers come to the library to use the computers for their online training. I have found that working with young soldiers is very similar to my experience at HACC. I help soldiers use the computers and navigate their Army online training modules. I work with the Education Center staff to help soldiers prepare for the College Level Examination Program (CLEP), DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSST), and other exams such as the exams for officer candidates. We also provide interlibrary loan services. Soldiers can request books and DVDs from other Army libraries in Korea, but since the materials go through the regular mail system, it might take 1-2 weeks for the items to arrive.

## What do you have in your collections?

Our most popular items are the movies and TV Series in DVD and Blu-ray format. Some of the soldiers pay for private accounts and use Netflix and Amazon Prime to watch movies, but there are still a large number who check out the movie titles in our collection. We have a few reference materials and a small collection of non-fiction and fiction book titles and magazines in print. We also have materials related to the Joint Chiefs of Staff’s Reading List and other military reading lists and a few Korean language materials for the Korean soldiers who work with our American soldiers. We offer a variety of library online resources (Overdrive, Mango Languages, EBSCO products, Gale Virtual Reference Library, RBdigital eBooks and magazines, etc.), provided by the Army’s Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation (FMWR) Division.

## What are some of the challenges of your assignment?

I am the supervisory librarian for three very small libraries with all Korean staff. The cataloging has been done by a variety of people over the years with different abilities and perspectives, so it is not consistent. The Korean staff members are reliable and hard-working, but most of the materials are in English, which is a challenge for them. The United States military is in the process of closing Army posts in Korea, so during my year here, one of my jobs is to

close one of the libraries and reallocate the equipment, furniture, and materials. The Korean staff working at that library will all be required to retire, which is hard for some of them. They have all worked for the Army for 30 to 36 years, so it is a bittersweet time.

## Tell us a little about your life in South Korea.

I have no prior experience with the military, so I really did not know what to expect and I have been pleasantly surprised. I have a very nice three-bedroom, fully-furnished apartment about 15 minutes from the Camp Casey Army post. The Army paid to ship my household goods to Korea, which mostly consisted of clothing with a few dishes, pots and pans, and folding chairs. The Army also paid to store my furniture from my house in Pennsylvania. Public transportation is readily available. I used that for my first month or so, but now I have been fortunate to be able to borrow a car for the rest of the year I am here. The Army bus transportation between the three Army Camps is free and very convenient.

On post, there is a commissary, Post Exchange (PX), United States Post Office, bank, theater, three gyms, two bowling alleys, two community activity centers with TVs, video games, pool tables and ping-pong tables, and a variety of fast food restaurants (Subway, Popeye's, Burger King, Baskin Robbins, etc.), which all accept American dollars for purchases. The commissary offers a good selection of American food products. The PX sells electronics, sheets and towels, and household goods. The electricity on the post is 110 volts, but off post, in my apartment, the electricity is 220 volts. My realtor provided two transformers for my use, but she also gave me a microwave and TV which run on the Korean 220 electricity. My paycheck goes to my bank in Pennsylvania, but I opened a bank account on post so I can transfer money in and have U.S. dollars to convert to South Korean won. There are also several dining facilities and a few Korean restaurants on post and lots more just outside the gate. Off post, there are even more American chain restaurants within walking distance of my apartment (Starbucks, McDonalds, Burger King, etc.), as well as Korean restaurants. There is a medical clinic on post with a pharmacy and a hospital off post.

The area where I live is very well developed. I am in the northernmost section of South Korea, close to the Demilitarized zone (DMZ). I live in Dongducheon, which has a population of around 100,000. There are some cultural venues, parks, walking and biking paths, libraries, and many other interesting things to see and do. The Army schedules trips to various locations and activities, like a tour of the DMZ, Everland (a theme park similar to Disney), Caribbean Bay (a water park), the Seoul Zoo, white-water rafting, a Korean folk village, wine tasting, etc. As a civilian employee, I am allowed to go on these trips, which is great. Activities are advertised in the monthly FMWR publication, "In the Zone" ([issuu.com/area1fmwr/docs/itz\\_cc\\_for\\_issuu](http://issuu.com/area1fmwr/docs/itz_cc_for_issuu)).

The Korean people are very gracious. The local grocery store prices are written in numbers I can understand, and some of the products use English words. I have learned a few words in Korean, but I can usually communicate pretty well without it. I prefer to buy some products in the local grocery store as the crackers and produce are much fresher than those sold in the commissary. If I find myself wondering about something, there is usually someone nearby who speaks enough English to help me understand what I need to do. If the first person does not understand, they ask other passersby to help out. They truly are an amazing and very hospitable people. I have found a pizza delivery store with an owner who communicates well in English. What more could I want?

## Describe how you made this career leap.

I found and applied for this position using the USAJOBS website ([usajobs.gov](http://usajobs.gov)) . I signed a one-year contract, knowing that my roundtrip flight to Korea and my living accommodations and utilities are fully paid for by the Army. It is shorter than my three-year contracts as a missionary, so I thought this would be a perfect time in my life to travel to another part of the world and still be able to work in an English language library.

Of course, I miss my friends and family, but being able to e-mail and video-chat is wonderful. Most of my salary I can save, as I have very few expenses here other than purchasing food, fuel for my car, a few household items and some clothing. I am fortunate to have a tenant living in my house in Pennsylvania, one friend who takes care of the house, and another friend who is keeping my car until I return.

## Can you tell us why you became a librarian/why you do what you do?

I began my career as a missionary. I have always appreciated my upbringing, the opportunities I have had in my life, and felt that I should reach out and help other people whenever possible. I enjoy teaching and showing people all of the incredible resources available through the library. It is so rewarding to help someone find a book that suits their interests/meets their needs. Similarly, I enjoy seeing the reaction when I show someone an online resource they did not know existed. Libraries are incredible, and I am a strong advocate of lifelong learning. My experience in South Korea, working as an Army librarian, is an extraordinary opportunity for me to continue my own ongoing journey in lifelong learning.