

## Geointeresting Podcast Transcript

### Episode 27: NGA's Olympic Legacy

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As we get ready to cheer on our teams in the Olympics, Team GEOINT is working behind the scenes to help security personnel ensure the safety of the audience and athletes at the Games. For special events like the Olympics, NGA analysts spend time studying and mapping locations of Olympic venues and hotels, the surrounding areas, and transportation infrastructure. Then we develop digital and hard-copy geospatial products to support event security — including efforts like transportation of world leaders and athletes — during the Games. Not only does NGA support Olympians, but an Olympian once supported us. But more on her later. First, we'll meet two NGA teammates who are supporting the Pyeongchang Winter Games.

Kristina: I'm Kristina. I'm the NGA lead for the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics.

Mike: I'm Mike. I'm the NGA mission manager for international special events.

NGA: Great. Can you talk to us a little bit about what support NGA provides to special events like the Olympics?

Mike: Sure. We work with the interagency community. There's an international special events group that's run through Department of State, but it involves the entire community — FBI, Secret Service, everyone you would think from the USG who's involved with providing support to these events and security for the events. Our support is done through them. There's a tier ranking system that they do for how events are ranked throughout the year. The Olympics is a tier 1 event, so that receives, really, the highest level of USG support that can be provided. With that, NGA will provide deployed support during the event, supporting a joint operations center in Korea. We will provide geospatial-intelligence products to the community through that joint operations center.

NGA: Can you give us some examples of products we might provide and what they would be used for?

Mike: The baseline information we provide is for situational awareness and mission-planning-type support. A lot of it is done prior to the events, so a lot of the production work has already been done for the Olympics, even though it's next month — the production side of it for the most part is complete at this point — because it's done for mission planning to allow people to get an understanding of where things are happening throughout the AOR; especially an event like this that's the size and scope that it is [and] covers a very large area in South Korea. We kind of provide a way to visualize and kind of interpret where things are happening in relationship to one another throughout the entire peninsula.

NGA: And Kristina, what's your day to day like, especially now, leading up to [the] Opening Ceremony?

Kristina: The thing about this job is that every day is different. It's a lot of coordinating and working with internal and external customers to figure out what were the requirements for State Department, and who in NGA has the data, or who can work on the products themselves.

NGA: How does an event like the Olympics differ from other special events we might support, and maybe, what are some of those other events?

Mike: Really, the type of support we provide doesn't necessarily differ because it's an Olympics. We also support things like G-7 summits, G-20 summits — the political summits that are out there as well that aren't as long in duration as the Olympics, so they may not receive that tier 1 rating but, obviously, they are also very important events to the protection and security of what's happening, wherever that may be. But, really, that baseline information we're providing, whether it's for an Olympics or for one of the political summits, it's the same kind of thing. It's just, obviously, something like the Olympics may be a little bit more magnified because of the size and scope of what that event is.

NGA: What about domestic events? NGA has supported things like the Super Bowl or something like that in the past, right?

Mike: We have. Starting back in 2002 with the Winter Olympics after 9/11 — that was really the first time we kind of got our feet wet in the domestic arena in terms of supporting special events. We deployed a team of folks out to Salt Lake City to support that event. And it kind of grew from there in terms of our support to FBI. Over the years, we have kind of taught other folks, other agencies, how to kind of do the same type of support. So a lot of the domestic, special event side of things more falls toward DHS and FBI at this point as opposed to NGA taking as much of a lead as we did back after 9/11.

NGA: So who uses the products NGA creates for special events like these?

Mike: Some of the unclassified stuff, like the map books that are produced, are done at an unclassified level so that they can be handed down to the first responders — the guys on the ground, the "boots on the ground" — that are responding to incidents that may happen. A lot of times for these events, especially something the size of the Olympics, where you're bringing in hundreds of people that may not be familiar with South Korea, it really provides them that kind of quick, first-look at what their area of responsibility is. If they're responsible for the ice center, they can quickly see an overhead imagery and map of what that area is like. So if they need to respond to that facility ...

NGA: Or even things like egress routes, too, like what's the best way to get out of a location if something were to happen.

Mike: Definitely. And again, we try to — everything we try to do, we try to do it at the unclassified level, as much of it as we can, so that the people that are on the ground that are doing the job have access to this information.

NGA: Are there different challenges depending on the location?

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Kristina: I don't think from us — we have any differences with that. We work really closely with the Olympics security coordinator from State Department. And they're responsible for working with that host nation who's organizing the Games.

NGA: Maintaining those relationships and things.

Kristina: Yes. And so we respond to his requests for information, and a lot of times we'll do stuff for them that also helps out the organizing team for Korea in this particular example.

Mike: That's the big thing; is we do it through the Olympic security coordinator, who is a Department of State-appointed person. But, again, everything that we do — not everything — the majority of the stuff we do is provided to the Olympic security coordinator, and then they have the ability to provide it to that host nation contingent of people as well.

Kristina: I think something else neat with all this processes — the Olympics security coordinator doesn't usually have a background, like an intel background. So they're not always familiar with NGA and the kind of work we provide and how we can help support them. So a lot of it is educating them on the type of GEOINT support we can provide and how it helps them with their day-to-day job.

NGA: Right

Mike: That can kind of be said for every event that we support, because every place we go — it's a new either regional security office or some other new person that's involved in the mix, and, obviously, we work through the headquarters elements, but the people forward deployed at the embassy or at post, obviously, are the ones who drive the requirements and what is provided.

NGA: They may not even know what to ask for if they're not familiar with GEOINT.

Mike: In most cases it's an educational process. Usually, we'll go out and meet with these folks prior to any kind of support that's provided. In the case of the Olympics, I know Kristina's been out two or three times to Korea to meet, actually, with the Olympic security coordinator [and] make sure we are providing information that is useful to them and not just something that we think is valuable, but it is something that is coming from a direct requirement from the folks in the field.

NGA: So how did you get into this team? How did you get into this line of work, I guess?

Kristina: You know, I don't really know! Like I said, I started as an intern and then went over to Analysis, and I've worked a variety of issues. I really like Korean issues, and so when this opportunity presented itself — I also used to work domestic stuff like Mike did, years ago, so it was kind of neat to come full circle.

Mike: Each event does come from different kind of lines of business within NGA based on the regional aspect of it. So, like, the upcoming summit of the Americas, which is in Lima, Peru, will be handled by the Western Hemisphere line of business. Also, the Pan-Am games that will be coming up in 2019 is in

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Peru as well, so the Western Hemisphere has a few different events they'll be helping support the community with.

NGA: So is it a brand new team every time, or is it some holdover and some new depending on the mission?

Mike: So it's a brand new team. Myself as the mission manager — my responsibility is to go back and coordinate across the lines of business for wherever that event may take place. So for the Olympics, it was the Asian Pacific line of business. For the Pan-Am games in 2019, it'll be the Western Hemisphere's line of business. So we don't have a central cadre of special events folks within NGA. We tap into each one of the different lines of businesses and rely on the analysts. There's obviously some training that's involved with that to make sure that the type of support that's being provided, regardless if it's in Korea or if it's in Peru, is similar, and people are getting the same kind of thing that they're used to getting from NGA, but it is a different group of people every time we support an event.

Kristina: Cool. And every event is also very different, too. Rio had a lot of issues with crime and Zika, and with Korea, we don't really know exactly what we're going to have — but especially with issues being on the peninsula right now. You know that's going to be interesting.

NGA: So it requires different skills, different people.

Kristina: Right, which is where the regional people come in.

NGA: Moving from support to participation, let's get back to that story of our very own Olympian: Helen Stevens.

Spectators in Berlin were treated to a monster physical culture display between events: 12,500 Berlin school children going through their routine with fine precision; the 400-meters women's relay, with America, Great Britain, Canada and Germany as course rivals for the prize. Germany gained the lead but a fumbled baton change put them out of the running. In the final stage, Barbara Burke couldn't hold the American sprinter Helen Stevens, who won for the States by about six yards. How these women can run!

NGA: Helen Stevens won two gold medals for track and field in the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, earning the nickname "The Fulton Flash," a shout out to her hometown of Fulton, Missouri. Following her Olympic career, Helen worked in St. Louis as a librarian at the U.S Air Force Aeronautical Chart and Information Center, a predecessor to NGA. Sharon Kinney Hanson published a biography of Helen's life and sat down with us to tell us a little bit more about our own Olympic librarian.

Hanson: The first chapter deals with her home setting — the fact that she is a very poor farm girl, very poor. Her father didn't want her to go to high school, even. He wanted her to get a job at a shoe factory and help with the farm, because he had one other child, a boy, five years younger than Helen, and he needed the work help. And we're talking the depression years. But Helen had a gift. And then from there; well, first off, her coach discovers her. She's one of the few athletic girls who he saw playing basketball in the Methodist Church basketball team for girls, because her high school didn't have

anything except the gym where they probably played badminton and maybe softball. But, mostly, it was an athletic thing. It was nothing too strenuous for girls. They weren't supposed to strain themselves. Then he put her on a cinder path with a few other girls to just clock her running speed, because he saw what an aggressive basketball player she was. She ran the 50-yard dash in the same time that the then-title holder Betty Robinson did. So he had her run it again — same time, and so he knew she had a natural talent. He had to get permission and money from the superintendent to send her to the Amateur Athletic Union Championships. They didn't have a girls' team, and she was going to be a one-woman team. The superintendent didn't want to send her to St. Louis at the arena to compete in this, but that's where her fame began; then off to the Olympics.

NGA: Would you mind touching a little bit more on her Olympic accomplishments? You talked about how there were certain restrictions as to how she had to code her diary and how she read "Mein Kampf." But what did she accomplish at the Olympics?

Hanson: Two gold medals. She, of course, was going to be running the 400-meter relay; four girls running in the relay. The German team was expected to win. But — this is a metaphor that I use and others have used — the German team dropped the baton. They dropped the baton in a big way, actually, right before World War II. But still, Helen set a record. Because she set a record with the 100-meter race and won her [inaudible] first with that, and then she was the anchor. And Dee Beckmen, who's also from St. Louis, who'd been in the 1928 Olympics but hadn't won anything, was Helen's Olympic coach then.

NGA: One other thing — would you mind touching on, or explaining a little bit more, about her interactions with Hitler when he invited her up?

Hanson: Well, she'd just won the 100-meter, and she looked a mess. She was tired and sweaty, and her hair was all over. Beckman was with her, and they were stopped by a little soldier. And I don't speak German, but he said, "You must come. Hitler wants to visit with you in his private booth. Come now." And Helen said, "No! We can't. We are going to be interviewed on" something like this. It wasn't for a podcast, but it was for a radio broadcast, "and Helen wants to get dressed up. She's going to have pictures taken of her, get cleaned up, fixed up, and we can't come right now." And he said, "Oh! I can't tell my Führer no! I will be shot!" And she said, "You won't get shot." Dee Beckmen did speak German, and so she made Hitler wait, and then when she came into the booth, the private booth — and the International Olympic Committee was not happy with Hitler, because he would periodically call the winning athlete to his booth to visit with him, and this was just another one. He called Helen because she was this amazing surprise, wonderful athlete. He called her in, and she and Dee went in, and then a bunch of soldiers came in with guns, Lugers, and Hitler's there, and then a photographer came in and took a picture. So there's this famous picture of Helen with Hitler. According to Helen, and this is out of her own mouth in a lost TV BBC presentation segment called "The Sporting Fever," she tells about how he put his arm around her and patted her and pinched her butt and invited her to [inaudible] in his mountain home and to consider being a German team member, changing her allegiance from the United States to run for Germany. She said, "No, thank you," shook his hand, got his autograph. When people see that picture, they think, she must have been a Nazi. These were strange times. They were always strange times.

NGA: So parts of Helen's story seems extraordinary. She tied a record in the women's 50-yard dash as an untrained high school student when the boy's track coach on a whim decided to time her after watching her play basketball. She was hit on by Adolf Hitler at the 1936 Berlin Olympics after she caught his attention with her athletic performance. And she was accused in a major news magazine of being a man masquerading as a woman to set world records. I mean, is this all for real?

Hanson: It is for real. I had time to visit with her and go through all the newspaper accounts and letters and so forth, and, I mean, there's no way to say this is made up. Even in the fact that it was during the [inaudible] Journalism, still, it's all true. I don't want to overlook the fact that it was compounded by the fact that she only ran about a second slower than Jesse Owens. It's for real. And then you would think, "OK, that's enough. Stop there." But no, she goes on and does other things. She was an athlete all her life. In fact, she died in 1994 in January, just a month shy of her next birthday, and she had competed in the Summer Games, the Senior Games, five months earlier.

NGA: People who knew her when she worked at NGA described her as quite a character. Does that sound about right?

Hanson: That's the one question I've thought about. Quite a character can mean anything. She was witty, outgoing, gregarious; expected life to be fun and work to be fun. She was pretty well-liked by higher ups.

NGA: Did Helen enjoy her life in a quiet government reference library after living such an eventful life in the public eye as an athlete?

Hanson: She didn't retire, really. She worked as — not worked — she managed and was captain of different corporate basketball teams: the Flyettes from Curtiss-Wright. I think the Defense Mapping Agency had softball and other events that she was active in. She was still the aging Olympian but still active and with great enthusiasm, because life's fun, and you have to do what you love to do, and she was a natural.

NGA: Thanks for listening to Geointeresting, and special thanks to Sharon, Kristina and Mike for giving us a behind-the-scenes look at NGA's Olympic legacy. NGA is proud to carry the torch for Team GEOINT, providing global support for special events like the Olympic Games. Subscribe to this podcast on iTunes and Soundcloud, and follow us on Facebook and Twitter to learn more about NGA's Geointeresting people and mission.