

December 15, 1953

Letter, General James A. Van Fleet to Syngman Rhee

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Summary:

General James A. Van Fleet writes about charitable activities of the American-Korean Foundation, and issues related to Korean military forces.

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President Syngman Rhee
Republic of Korea
Seoul, Korea

Dear President Rhee:

Your wonderful letter of December 10th has just come, and I am so happy to hear from you. I returned yesterday from Florida, where I spent a few days looking over my orange grove. Tomorrow, I am flying out to Los Angeles to be with Mrs. Van Fleet for a few days before the two of us return here to be with our children and grandchildren at West Point for Christmas.

These notes are hurriedly dictated in the hope that they may reach you for Christmas and convey to you and Mrs. Rhee warmest greetings from Mrs. Van Fleet and me for "a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year". I know it is difficult, quite impossible, for you to be either merry or happy when there is so much suffering by your people and so many questions unresolved. But, anyway, the Christmas season especially, will be a period when all of us will be thinking of you and hoping for the best.

Cardinal Spellman is leaving to spend Christmas again in Korea, and I hope I may see him before he departs and ask him to take these lines to you. I hope also that I may have time in the morning to buy some little gift for Mrs. Rhee that Cardinal Spellman may also deliver. It is most difficult to shop and I do not know yet what is available that Mrs. Rhee may like. And of course, it is even more difficult to shop for you, so I shall just send you my personal greetings of love and devotion.

Before leaving for Florida last week, I asked the Board of Directors to approve a grant of \$25,000 to be spent in Korea during the Christmas season for such worthy cases of distress, which some of your good women will know about. When the Directors asked me how the money could be spent, and who would spend it, I said let a committee of ten decide, that these women of Korea would know better than we how to spend it, and that we can have full confidence that they will place the money where it is urgently



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needed. I named a few of the women, such as Mrs. Rhee, and Mrs. Briggs as Honorary Chairmen, and Mrs. Lee Ki Poong as Chairmen, and such others as the wife of the Mayor of Seoul, the wife of the Mayor of Pusan and others who Mrs. Lee Ki Poong or Mrs. Rhee may wish to ask. I remember that such a group helped me to spend some money donated by Mrs. Anna Rosenberg, and that we decided to purchase yarn and let the Korean women and boys and girls knit their own woolen garments. But any way at all which the women may decide will be satisfactory to me in spending the \$25,000 for this Christmas. They may give it outright as a cash grant in Dollars or in Whan, or in goods which may be purchased in Korea, or later in America and be shipped over. The main thing is to give many of the needy individuals and institutions something at Christmas time. And I know these ladies will do a wonderful job for us.

The Foundation also made a grant of \$25,000 to help in several of the clinics operating in the Pusan area, to help some of the victims of that disastrous fire.

We have also chartered a ship, which will sail from San Francisco on January 15th, and on which there will be several thousand tons of clothing, blankets, food and medical supplies to help specifically in the Pusan area.

I have read your letter of December 10th, and am very unhappy to learn about the delay in the various programs of rehabilitation by the official agencies of UNKRA and FOA, headed respectively by General Coulter, and Mr. Tyler Wood. I do hope their programs will get underway soon.

I will support you and Ambassador Yang to the very last in your recommendation not to send to Korea anyone who does not meet with your approval. I am so glad to know of your views concerning Mrs. Bernard Kim and Mrs. Mary Lee.

I have an appointment with Mr. Crowell and hope to see him before I leave tomorrow for California. I am most anxious to learn from him about the Korean army.

My article has been tentatively accepted by "Reader's Digest". I must however, work it over a little more, which I hope to do by the end of the month, at which time I will send you an advance copy. I have advocated the creation of regional pacts as a substitute for the U.N. Security Council and I am of course, continuing to advocate strongly, native forces in all countries who are willing to fight for their freedom. I am using Greece and Korea as the finest examples of allies that America has ever had.



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Our daughter is rapidly recovering from the surgery she underwent some six weeks ago. Mrs. Van Fleet likewise, is regaining her health and strength and we all look forward to being together during the holidays. We will be thinking of you and our millions of friends in Korea, and of the happiness we had together there last Christmas in our service of love.

I must write you more when I return from the west coast concerning Japan and better public relations for you in supporting your just position. And also, I must say again how I wish Korea to have a greater army of 25 or more divisions, then you might be ready to meet the inevitable danger in North Korea.

I keep busy all over the country talking about Korea as our most worthy ally, and about its great President and courageous people. I pray for your continued health and strength and courage.

Devotedly,

James Van Fleet
James A. Van Fleet
(General, United States Army, Ret.)
Chairman

JAVF:bb