

February 24, 1954

Letter, General James A. Van Fleet to Syngman Rhee

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Summary:

General James A. Van Fleet conveys his view on the "building up of native armies in Asia" to resist communist forces.

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President Syngman Rhee
Republic of Korea
Seoul, Korea

Dear Mr. President:

Mrs. Van Fleet and I flew up from Florida to spend a few days with our children at West Point and for business here in New York. We stopped over a couple of days in Washington where I was honored with a decoration from the Philippines and from the Netherlands. I accepted both of them as being won by the forces in Korea, with the greatest part being the Army of the Republic of Korea.

In Washington, I had a good talk with your Ambassador and with Dr. Han. We went over the present situation and possibilities. They were expected to convey to you my views concerning the building up of native armies in Asia, so that all those threatened fronts there, could build a strong resistance (and I hope an offensive) which would eventually destroy the Communist forces. These fronts of course need to be coordinated.

It has been suggested by many people in Washington that I should be given the job of building up these forces, as well as that of coordinating their combined efforts. That would be a great honor and would fulfill a tremendous ambition I have still burning within me. How I wish I could lead the battle, as you do the spirit, in defeating the Communists in Asia. I feel it must be done if any part of the world is to remain free.

Here in New York, Mrs. Van Fleet and I are attending a few parties--one in honor of President and Mrs. Bayar of Turkey. I am also spending a little time in the office of the American-Korean Foundation.



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I am glad to report that the Foundation is moving ahead and has ambitious plans for 1954-55. Recently we have made a substantial allotment for education and part of this is being spent for new pianos to be shipped to Korea. While in Korea, I was always impressed with the musical talents of your people, and yet all your pianos and other musical instruments were destroyed or stolen. Therefore, I wish it could be possible that all of them could be restored someday, so that every school which teaches music could have one or more pianos. The present shipment is thirty-three.

*Notes
by me
John-24*

Upon arrival in New York, Mr. Zeckendorf telephoned me at the Hotel Sherry-Netherlands, saying that his chief architect, Mr. Pei, was leaving for Korea and wanted me to give him a letter of introduction to you. Therefore, I wrote in longhand on Hotel stationery a brief note which I assume has been presented to you already by Mr. Pei. I find that Mr. Zeckendorf is still enthused with his building program for Korea, and both his organization and the American-Korean Foundation will help in the development of the plans. Of course, the construction must be undertaken by the rehabilitation funds at the disposal of Mr. Tyler Wood and General Coulter.

J. products

I have a letter from Mr. Edgar Queeny telling me that he has recently had word from you of your action in making it possible for private enterprise to invest in Korea. I remember that you promised you would do this, changing the Constitution if necessary, and both Mr. Queeny and I are so happy at your action.

I have just come from the American Bible Society, where Mr. Namkoong and I were presented with copies of the recent publication in Korean, of the Gospel of St. John. They also gave me some press clippings of a picture taken last summer, in which it was reported that the Bible Society was sponsoring this project, and that I was expected to present you with the first copy off the press. I send you these clippings to indicate that that publicity received National coverage. I am also enclosing a couple of the copies. I am told that over 150,000 copies are being shipped to Korea. I know that you will be pleased.

Mrs. Van Fleet and I will be in New York perhaps another week and then will return to Auburndale, Florida. I am naturally anxious for a decision from Washington. I would like to be on the way. But then again, maybe I am not wanted by certain groups in the Administration. But all

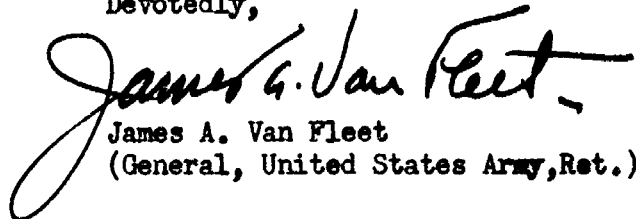


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the time I am dreaming and thinking and
planning and hoping.

We send our love.

Devotedly,


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

JAVF:bb