

March 23, 1954

Letter, General James A. Van Fleet to Syngman Rhee

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Summary:

General James A. Van Fleet shows willingness to accept a position such as Ambassador in South Korea if it is offered. He also recommends General Christenberry as a executive director.

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Auburndale, Florida

March 23, 1954

President Syngman Rhee
Republic of Korea
Seoul, Korea

Dear President Rhee:

Your letter of March 4 has been forwarded to me from your Embassy and I have read it with great interest. I wrote to you under date of March 6, outlining some of the same views you expressed in your letter. I suggested certain minimum positions for Korea.

I am leaving tomorrow morning for New York City and early next week - 29, 30 and 31 March - I will be in Washington, then back to New York for 1, 2 and 3 April, and then back here in Auburndale, Florida. In New York I will devote my time to the American-Korean Foundation and Webb & Knapp, Inc., (Mr. William Zeckendorf) of which I have recently been made a director.

In Washington I will see your Ambassador and Dr. Han and be brought up to date on the current situation. I will also see Admiral Radford and Senator Knowland, and others, and endeavor to find out what is being planned for the Far East and how I may help - and actually to find out whether or not the Administration wishes me to help.

I am sure that the United States will agree to your request for the training and equipping of your total available military manpower. That should produce thirty divisions. I recommend you ask for the full amount with corresponding increases in the navy and air force. I also recommend that other friendly nations in Southeast Asia be granted increased help and that all of their efforts be tied together and coordinated. I would love to be the person in command.



President Syngman Rhee

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March 23, 1954

I believe I can implement the program and have it well on to its completion in six to twelve months time. A good part of my time could be spent in Korea, but also I would visit frequently so as to insure the effectiveness and progress of the military forces in those other countries.

If this position is offered me I will accept. It will mean a sacrifice by my family and by my business associates - but my heart is set on the mission. I cannot rest here in Florida knowing that there is so much to be done in Asia, and that you and I can show our friends the way.

We have sent Palmer Bevis to San Francisco as a regional representative. We could not carry him longer as the executive director. He did not have the ability nor the high ideals to occupy that important position. We hope that we can secure General Christenberry who you will remember was my assistant chief of staff, and is now on duty with the Far East command. General Christenberry has a real feeling for the Korean cause, and I feel confident he will make a highly successful executive director.

You are correct in what you told Ambassador Briggs. I am not desirous of becoming Ambassador to Korea only because I do not believe that I could accomplish the greater mission.

This is just a hurriedly dictated letter which I am sending to your Ambassador for the diplomatic pouch on Thursday.

With all good wishes to you and Mrs. Rhee,

Devotedly,

James Van Fleet
James A. Van Fleet
General, U. S. Army (Ret.)

enclosure

P.S. I enclose copy of a letter I have written Edison Marshall. I am still working on the story and motion picture for Korea.