

April 25, 1955

Letter, Harold Lady to Syngman Rhee

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Summary:

Harold Lady gives a proposal for building new houses suitable for families of American officials in Korea.

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MEMO
Memo No. 47

April 25, 1955

Dear President Rhee:

Subject: Providing Housing Suitable for Families of American Officials

Pursuant to your instructions I have studied the problem of providing houses suitable for rental to the families of American officials in Korea. Informal inquiry indicates that the FOA would be very pleased and cooperative if the Korean Government decided to build new houses and rent them to FOA employees because some FOA employees have resigned and others are threatening to resign because they are dissatisfied with their living accommodations in Korea and with the requirement that their families must live in Japan. The FOA personnel office advises that it is almost impossible to find well qualified Americans who are willing to accept a position in Korea under present conditions.

At least 50 houses are required and over 100 could be utilized if they are made available to high U.S. Army officers as well as FOA and State Department personnel. In this connection it might be mentioned that the quarters occupied by General Lemnitzer and Lt. Gen. Farenbaugh are very modest for officers of such high rank.

The FOA has on hand architects' plans and specifications, including itemized lists of material required, for houses it considers satisfactory. It would be glad to make these available. However, I believe the Korean government would wish to revise these plans to make the houses distinctively Korean in appearance and would also wish to build slightly better houses than the Americans had in mind on the theory that, if the American officials in Korea are happy, their attitude toward and reports concerning Korea will be more favorable, which could be a factor worth many millions of dollars when the size of the American aid program for future years is decided.

The best location I have been able to find for a housing project of this type is a hill in the Sobingo area which borders the Han River and provides an inspiring view. At present this hill is largely waste land with a few fruit trees and garden plots and a few refugee houses. It is conveniently situated, a little over one mile from the U.S. Eighth Army compound in which the new FOA offices as well as the UNKRA offices and Eighth Army Headquarters are located.

It is recommended that a project be commenced as soon as possible and that it contemplate the initial and simultaneous construction of eighty houses. The best Government agency to plan and execute such a project would, undoubtedly, be the Korean Army Engineers which, I understand, has proved its ability not only in the rehabilitation of the Bando Hotel but in other construction projects. Within two or three weeks the Army Engineers could probably decide on exact specifications and prepare a list of the imported materials required. The Office of Supply could purchase them through normal bid procedures and have them delivered to the site in less than three months. In the mean time, the Army Engineers could take care of grading, road construction, water, sewer and electric systems, the purchasing of locally produced materials, and make some progress in actual construction. It is, therefore, believed that the project, if approved now, could be completed by September or October despite the intervention of the rainy season.

It is suggested that the most satisfactory basic material would be cement mixed with Han River sand which is convenient to the site and that the Army Engineers be furnished with the relatively inexpensive equipment necessary to manufacture cement building blocks and cement roof tiles.

It is difficult to estimate the cost of this project until its details are decided. However, if the labor is furnished by the Army Engineers, the labor cost would be approximately zero. The cost of imported cement, when purchased by the Korean Government in shipload lots, is very low. Except for the small

amount of local materials used and the cost of acquiring the land, would not contribute to inflation.

In view of the controversy that took place last year on the subject of the use of American aid funds to furnish housing for FOA employees, it is recommended that this project be financed with Korean funds. A very rough estimate of the amount required, exclusive of the cost of furniture (which it is recommended that the Korean Government not undertake to supply), would be between \$400,000 and \$500,000 for the community of 80 houses plus probably not more than H/20,000,000 for local materials and services and an undetermined but not excessive amount for the purchase of the land. The houses should be equivalent to those now selling in the U.S. for \$35,000 to \$40,000 each, which would make the total community equal to one which in the United States would cost \$3,000,000.

Harold
Harold Wendell Lady