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THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA ARMY

Wartime expansion and doctrine
changes, 1951–53

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This chapter deals with the reorganisation of the Republic of Korea (ROK) Army during the Korean War, in particular during the second and third years of the war. The reorganisation began in earnest in the summer of 1951 in what became a sustained campaign of Americanisation.¹ This campaign transformed, both physically and psychologically, a seriously broken South Korean military. Two programs—General James A. Van Fleet’s project to increase the ROK Army’s combat effectiveness, and General Mark W. Clark’s expansion program to increase the ROK Army’s size to 700,000 men and 20 divisions—were most significant in transforming the ROK Army into a reliable Cold War military force. Despite many limitations and difficulties, both Koreans and Americans were finally ready to cooperate towards the same goal.

1 In this chapter, the term ‘Americanisation’ is used to mean the ROK Army’s introduction to the US Army’s models, including training, tactics, professionalism and military culture. My views on Americanisation borrow from E.S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890–1945*, Hill & Wang, New York, 1982.

Setting the stage

The ROK Army's inadequacies emerged as a prominent issue between the United States and South Korea from late December 1950. The issue intensified as the ROK Army's repeated collapses in the face of Chinese attacks in early 1951 spread panic throughout the ROK Army. Without significant improvement in combat effectiveness and self-confidence among South Korean forces, the entire UN force could expect grave difficulties in their efforts to turn back Chinese offensives.

Predictably, the ROK Government and US military leaders in Korea differed on how best to improve the ROK Army. Arguing that a shortage of soldiers and insufficient weapons and equipment were his military's gravest problems, President Syngman Rhee requested an increase in the ROK Army's total manpower ceilings, as well as increased logistical support from the United States. Lieutenant General Matthew Ridgway, the US Eighth Army commander at that time, opposed this request because he believed that it would not solve the ROK Army's fundamental problems.² Instead, command and combat observation reports of early 1951 had convinced him that the ROK Army's shortcomings resulted mostly from such factors as poor leadership and insufficient training. Ridgway thought that the ROK Army's combat performance would not improve until its officers became better leaders, so he wanted to focus on creating a loyal and professionally competent officer corps. He frequently told Korean military leaders and President Rhee that until satisfactory leadership could be developed, all talk of expanding and equipping the ROK military forces should cease.³ Rhee disagreed and tried to lobby the US Government directly. However, after the ROK Army's collapse in May 1951, Rhee lost his leverage over the ROK Army, and US military commanders were able to exert control over its reorganisation in the summer of 1951. Ridgway was transferred to Tokyo to take over from General Douglas as commander of UN forces. He was replaced by General James A. Van Fleet, who ended up playing the role of the confident American adviser.

2 Ridgway to Collins and JCS, 10 May 1951, RG 218, Geographic Files, 1951–53, Box 31, National Archives, College Park, MD [NA].

3 Ridgway to the Department of Army for Hull, 5 May 1951, RG 218, Geographic Files, 1951–53, Box 31, NA.

Van Fleet had led one of the D-Day spearheads on Utah Beach in June 1944. Promoted to brigadier general in September and to major general in November 1944, he guided his division through heavy fighting at Metz in the Ardennes, at Remagen in the Ruhr and in Austria. In February 1948, he was promoted to lieutenant general and given a tough new assignment as a military planner and educator. As a member of the Greek National Council, Van Fleet directed the building and training of Greek anti-communist forces in Greece's civil war. His experience in creating a strong Greek National Army that successfully suppressed communist guerrillas in Greece between 1948 and 1950 would serve him well in his new mission in South Korea.

Although he agreed with General Ridgway's argument that poor leadership was the gravest problem facing the ROK Army, Van Fleet soon discovered a range of other problems that needed to be addressed urgently. An analysis of the ROK Army's disappointing performance at the front in April and May 1951 by the Korea Military Advisory Group (KMAG) revealed not only a leadership deficit at all levels of the officer corps but also serious training problems, shortages of weapons and equipment, poor logistical support and, most seriously, a lack of confidence.⁴ Van Fleet concluded that the ROK Army needed to be comprehensively reorganised from the ground up in order to increase both its combat effectiveness and its self-confidence.

So Van Fleet reversed Ridgway's decision about expanding the ROK Army and increasing US logistical support. Ridgway had thought that the more logistical support the United States handed over to the ROK Army, the more it would be handing over to the enemy.⁵ Van Fleet's more optimistic appraisal led him to favour a short-term objective, focusing on ROK Army combat effectiveness as the first step in its reorganisation. Van Fleet also decided that Ridgway's evaluation of the ROK Army's overall performance was too harsh and reflected a failure to understand this 'Asiatic' military and its political leader. For example, Ridgway thought of President Rhee as 'a troublemaker'; he was at best 'standoffish with an oriental and impassive face'. However, Van Fleet believed that the

4 CG EUSAK to CINCFE, 'Personal for Hicky from Van Fleet', 20 July 1951, RG 554, United States Military Advisory Group to the Republic of Korea [KMAG], AG Decimal File, 1951, Box 41, NA.

5 Ridgway to the Army, 'Personal for Collins', 1 May 1951, Clay and John Blair Collection [CJBC], Box 62, US Army Military History Institute [USAMHI]; CINCFE to the Army, 'Personal from Ridgway to Hull', 23 July 1951, Van Fleet Papers, Box 86.

South Koreans' help would be essential to any reorganisation program, so he adopted a more cooperative attitude towards Rhee and the ROK Government.⁶

Van Fleet sent his final reorganisation plan to the US Department of the Army (DA) in late July 1951. Although doubtful about Van Fleet's ideas, Ridgway gave his endorsement. The plan emphasised training:

One will be school and basic training, another will be field training of units up to division size, and the third will be ROK Army frontline operations ... The schools and basic training are fairly well organized now but they will be greatly improved under [the new command] ... All of the ROK divisions need a minimum 60-day intensive cycle of training.⁷

In preparing the master plan for the ROK Army's reorganisation, Van Fleet's experience with the Greek Army and KMAG's accumulated knowledge of the ROK Army were the most essential elements. As the plan made clear, Van Fleet would do for the South Koreans 'the same as we did for the Greek divisions'.⁸ Van Fleet had a great deal of support from Washington. US policy-makers realised that if the ROK Army could not confront the communists, the other UN forces—mostly US troops—would suffer heavy casualties. It was probably for this reason that General J. Lawton Collins, US Army Chief of Staff, and Frank Pace Jr, US Secretary of the Army, supported Van Fleet's idea of increasing the ROK Army's combat effectiveness.

Van Fleet's plan enjoyed several advantages in South Korea as well. After the armistice talks began in July 1951, the battlefield became relatively quiet while policy-makers in both Beijing and Washington anticipated an end to hostilities, leaving Van Fleet and the ROK Army free to concentrate on the reorganisation project. Second, South Korean military commanders and senior leaders threw their full support behind the project, while Van Fleet shielded ROK officers from President Rhee's anger.⁹

Van Fleet was aided by the presence of an experienced group of KMAG advisers. In December 1950, even before Van Fleet started his mission in Korea, US military advisers had launched several training programs

6 Ridgway to Collins and JCS, 20 May 1951, CJBC, Box 62, USAMHI.

7 Van Fleet to Collins, 13 June 1951.

8 Ibid.

9 Van Fleet to John J. Muccio, US Ambassador to the ROK, 2 May 1951.

for the ROK Army, and prepared a detailed analysis of the ROK Army that helped Van Fleet start his program without serious delay. Realising KMAG's importance to the success of his project, Van Fleet requested an increase in the number of KMAG advisers, whose numbers rose to more than 1,300 in October 1951—four times larger than when the war started.¹⁰

What made the project truly successful, however, was Van Fleet's sincere effort to maintain good relations with both President Rhee and ROK military leaders. He visited ROK Army units to meet Korean officers and soldiers as often as he could. He also frequently met with President Rhee and the Secretary of National Defence and succeeded in building close relationships with them, just as he had with his counterparts in Greece.¹¹ As a consequence, less than two years after he arrived, most ROK officers and soldiers liked him immensely and regarded him as the 'father of the modern ROK Army'.¹²

Making a better army

In contrast to earlier stages, when US and Korean goals differed, Van Fleet's project progressed smoothly and swiftly thanks to his clear sense of direction, wholehearted Korean support and KMAG's accumulated know-how. To achieve his top priority—increasing the ROK Army's combat effectiveness—Van Fleet's first concern was to restructure the ROK Army's school and training system, created in 1947 but almost destroyed in the first year of the war. Although KMAG revived part of the system in January 1951, all new officers recruited after the beginning of the war suffered from a lack of both basic and advanced training. According to KMAG reports in early 1951, 12 service schools and two training centres operated almost independently, and most schools conducted their own officers' commissioning courses, officers' basic and advanced courses, and courses for enlisted technicians and specialists.¹³ There was virtually no

10 R.K. Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea: KMAG in Peace and War*, Army Historical Series, US Army Center of Military History, Washington, DC, 1963, pp. 141–51, 161.

11 P.F. Braim, *The Will to Win: The Life of General James A. Van Fleet*, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, MD, 2001, pp. 272–8.

12 Syngman Ree, address to US Congress, 28 July 1954.

13 K.W. Myers, *KMAG's Wartime Experiences, 11 July 1951 – 27 July 1953*, Camp Zama, Japan, Office of Military History Observer Manuscript, 1958, pp. 132–41; KMAG to Secretary of the Army, 'Korean Army Training Program', 11 April 1951; G-3 to Chief, KMAG, 'Advisors to Korean Army Training Installations', 26 February 1951, RG 554, KMAG AG Decimal Files, 1951, Box 57, NA.

central control or coordination. The Replacement Training Centre on Cheju-do Island to the peninsula's south, the only training centre for ROK enlisted men, was responsible for all replacement training. The lack of qualified instructors, equipment and facilities added to the problems in the service schools and at the Replacement Training Centre.

In August 1951, Van Fleet established the Replacement Training and School Command (RTSC) at Taegue in the south-east region of Yeongnam. Controlling all 12 branch schools and two replacement training centres, this new command would have complete responsibility for training throughout the entire ROK Army. The RTSC sought to standardise the training and education of the ROK Army for the first time, and published training regulations, standard tactics and training manuals.¹⁴

There remained some functional problems, such as scattered individual schools and poor administrative systems. After intensive inspection, KMAG reported that the ROK Army schools could work more effectively and efficiently in one location. Under Van Fleet's coordination, KMAG and the ROK Army decided to move the RTSC to Kwang-ju, a city in the south-western area of the ROK. Three key combat schools—infantry, artillery and signals—moved to the south-western city of Kwang-ju in the Honam region in early November 1951 and were placed under a new command, the Korean Army Training Centre, located at the Kwang-ju Military Post, while the remaining schools and training centres continued operations at their respective locations under the ROK Army Headquarters control.¹⁵

The opening of the Korean Army Training Centre on 6 January 1952 helped the entire ROK Army to get over the nightmare of its recent defeats. Serving as a model for future permanent establishments for the army, the Korean Army Training Centre was named Sang Mu Dae, meaning 'hail to the spirit of the warrior knights'. As many Korean officers later confirmed, Sang Mu Dae became the symbol of the new ROK Army's development and provided the basis for future victories over the Chinese in several bloody battles.¹⁶

14 Major Lyle E. Widdowson to Senior Advisor, RTSC, 'Programs of Instruction and Weekly Training Schedules', 18 October 1951, RG 554, KMAG AG Decimal Files, 1951, Box 33, NA.

15 Myers, *KMAG's Wartime Experiences*, pp. 129–30; Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, pp. 178–9; Addenda, Van Fleet Papers, Box 89.

16 Lee Han-lim, *Heosangrok: Ae-ki-yei geok-rang* [Memoirs: Violent Waves of Time], Plabokwon, Seoul, 1994, p. 224.

The 2nd Replacement Training Centre was established in the western province of South Chungcheon within the city of Non-san in November 1951. Its mission was, according to KMAG, 'to provide Korean Army basic trained infantrymen who were trained as infantry replacements and in all military subjects common to all arms and services'.¹⁷ It had been physically impossible for the 1st Replacement Training Centre, the only replacement centre in the ROK Army until November 1951, to offer training for more than 14,000 recruits, including basic training and some special programs. Because the centre lengthened its training cycles between February and July 1951 from four weeks to eight weeks, then to 12 weeks, its physical capacities, including housing and training facilities, were strained to the limit. With the establishment of the 2nd Replacement Training Centre near the Korean Army Training Centre, the army's replacement training system finally was able to provide well-trained manpower to field and other units without serious delay.

Van Fleet started another pivotal program that aimed to train most ROK units above the regimental level for the first time in their history. Less than a third of the ROK Army units had finished battalion-level training when the war started. Because they had been vigorously engaged in combat since, most divisions had had no opportunity for retraining, and the number of trained personnel in individual ROK units was too low to confront the enemy effectively in combat.

To train ROK Army divisions in combat, Van Fleet started a Field Training Centre program modelled on the one he had developed to train Greek Army units.¹⁸ Its main purpose was to increase the ROK divisions' combat performance through proper unit training. The plan was for each corps in the US Eighth Army to help with this program, with KMAG directing the whole process. The 1st Field Training Centre was organised at Pupung-ni, located in present-day North Korea, in the US I Corps area in August 1951 to train the ROK 9th Division.

Van Fleet instructed all ROK Army divisions to complete the nine-week program, providing divisions with one week of rest and eight weeks of individual and unit training in an area near the UN main line of action. Selected officers and non-commissioned officers were brought in from US divisions to supervise the training. They welcomed the chance to be relieved of combat duty and the opportunity to impart to Korean soldiers

17 'Replacement Training Center 1 & 2', KMAG, no date, Van Fleet Papers, Box 90.

18 Braim, *The Will to Win*, pp. 209–10.

the lessons they had learned in combat. In most cases, American officers were surprised to find Korean soldiers willing, cooperative and eager to absorb this training.¹⁹ One Korean division in each of the four corps of the US Eighth Army could undergo training simultaneously. KMAG established three more field training centres after September 1951. When the ROK Army began to expand from June 1952, three field training centres were made part of the Unit Training Centre, which took charge of training newly activated ROK units.

While the ROK Army made rapid progress in its Americanisation under both the new school system and the Field Training Centre program, Van Fleet moved to increase the ROK Army's combat firepower, one of its most serious weaknesses during the first year of the war. During that time, ROK Army divisions had no tanks, heavy mortars or aircraft; it had only one 105-millimetre howitzer battalion.²⁰ Even after ROK Army units received quantities of artillery and other heavy weapons in April and May 1951, they failed to use these weapons effectively and lost most of them to the enemy.²¹ An angry Ridgway had temporarily suspended US military support to the ROK as a result. When Van Fleet and the KMAG began to consider this problem in June 1951, they realised that they had to find a way to increase US military support to the ROK Army and train ROK artillery specialists and units.

They needed first to gauge ROK artillery needs, particularly where units had to operate in rough and mountainous terrain with poor roads that created resupply problems. KMAG developed a plan for ROK Army artillery units that stressed flexibility of organisation and the use of concentrated artillery power. KMAG envisaged creating in each ROK Army division one organic 105-millimetre artillery battalion and six artillery group headquarters, each of which would consist of one 155-millimetre battalion and six 105-millimetre battalions. Each headquarters would be approximately the same size as the US divisional artillery.²²

19 Myers, *KMAG's Wartime Experiences*, pp. 132–44; A.H. Hausrath, *The KMAG Advisor: Role and Problems of the Military Advisor in Developing an Indigenous Army for Combat Operations in Korea*, US Department of the Army, Washington, DC, 1957, pp. 172–4.

20 Chief, KMAG, to Deputy Chief of Staff, EUSAK, 'Memo', 25 May 1951, Van Fleet Papers, Box 86.

21 Major David E. Wright and Major Fred T. Shelton, Jr., 'Debriefing Report', 10 September 1951; Major Eldon B. Anderson, 'Debriefing report, no. 76', 6 March 1952, RG 550, Military Historian's Office, Organizational Files, Box 61, NA.

22 Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, pp. 183–4; Myers, *KMAG's Wartime Experiences*, p. 88; J.R. Wheaton, 'Korean artillery', *Military Review* 34, October 1954, p. 55; Widdowson to Commanding General, EUSAK.

Although these ideas seemed simple and straightforward, trial and error would guide the entire development between late 1951 and the middle of 1953. Because KMAG could not handle the increase in US military support to the ROK Army directly, Van Fleet took charge of this agenda from the first, especially focusing on contacts with the Department of the Army, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Department of Defense. Although KMAG bore the principal responsibility for training and advising ROK artillery units, US artillery units took charge of training the newly organised ROK units, then providing direct and close supervision of their activities. Additionally, Van Fleet directed US officers to rotate from US Eighth Army units to KMAG and ordered ROK units to be integrated into the US Eighth Army. In this way he hoped to maximise the speed and effectiveness of this program.²³

Another focus was on increasing the armoured strength of each ROK division. This project encountered strong opposition from some US officers on the ground, who believed that armour was ineffective in the rugged and mountainous Korean terrain. The scarcity of available stocks and a lack of sufficient ammunition also slowed the project. Only 10 armoured companies were authorised for the ROK Army by the end of 1952.²⁴ Moreover, unlike the artillery units, it took more time for KMAG advisers to train Korean tank personnel because of the tankers' lack of previous experience. Nevertheless, the activation of tank units in ROK divisions had a great psychological impact on all Korean soldiers, which was perhaps more important than the units' actual firepower.²⁵

Van Fleet and KMAG also sought to create a professional officer corps in South Korea. As Van Fleet wrote to the US Army Chief of Staff, General J. Lawton Collins, in September 1951, 'The basic problems with the ROK Army at this time are training and development of leadership qualities. This is a long-range project, especially the development of an officer corps, as would be true in any new army'.²⁶ He gave two programs priority: ROK officers' education at US service schools, and the establishment of two key military schools, the Korea Military Academy and the Command and General Staff College (discussed below).

23 Myers, *KMAG's Wartime Experiences*, pp. 98–9.

24 HQ, US Eighth Army, Commanding Officer's reports, September 1952, RG 550, Military Historian's Office, Classified Organization History Files, Box 76, NA.

25 Paik Sun-yup, *Heokorok: Kum kwa Na* [Memoirs: The Army and I], Daeruk Yunguso Chulpanbu, Seoul, 1989, pp. 232–5.

26 Collins, *War in Peacetime*, pp. 315; Van Fleet to Collins, 8 September 1951, Van Fleet Papers, Box 73.

The idea of educating ROK officers at US service schools had come from KMAG as early as 1948. By the start of the war, some 15 Korean officers had studied at US Army schools, mainly at the Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia.²⁷ Once they returned to Korea, they worked as instructors in ROK military schools, teaching what they had learned in the United States. Although this program had been ended abruptly at the outbreak of war in 1950, KMAG had great confidence in the program's value and requested in December 1950 that it resume. They believed that US-educated Korean officers would form the nucleus of a trained, professional ROK officer corps.²⁸ KMAG failed to make any progress on this project, however, until Van Fleet came to Korea. Although Ridgway had agreed to the basic concept behind KMAG's proposal, he did not give it his active support. Van Fleet, however, did.

KMAG then contacted both the US Army's Infantry and its Field Artillery Schools in the United States. The Infantry School agreed to set up a special 20-week basic course for 150 Korean officers; the Field Artillery School recommended a 20-week course for 100 students. This group of officers—the first to attend US military schools since the war had begun—departed Pusan on 10 September 1951 with 22 interpreters and two KMAG officers. The Department of the Army approved KMAG's request to fund the 250 students in March 1952, and agreed to extend the program over the following years. By April 1952, Korean officers had enrolled in more than 20 US Army service schools. A total of 594 Korean officers attended US schools in 1952, primarily the infantry and field artillery schools, with 829 spaces allocated for 1953 and 1,019 spaces requested for 1954.²⁹ In the event, no fewer than a thousand Korean officers travelled to the United States annually during the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s to attend advanced military courses.

This training in US service schools contributed in a major way to the overall process of Americanisation. In the opinion of KMAG, the positive effect on the ROK Army far outweighed the expense. One KMAG officer, who was to a large extent responsible for the planning of this program, defined this arrangement as 'a package plan to provide maximum instruction at the least possible expense in the least possible time'.³⁰

27 Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, pp. 88–9.

28 Collins, *War in Peacetime*, pp. 315; Van Fleet to Collins, 8 September 1951, Van Fleet Papers, Box 73.

29 Myers, *KMAG's Wartime Experiences*, pp. 174–7.

30 KMAG G-3, General Reference Files, no date, quote from Myers, *KMAG's Wartime Experiences*, p. 180.

Brigadier General C.E. Ryan, chief of KMAG, looked for the graduation of Korean students in the United States to produce a 'chain reaction' in ROK training establishments.³¹ The effect of this program went well beyond Ryan's expectations. Korean officers competed intensely for this golden opportunity, and those selected were proud of their success and worked hard to learn as much as they could from what they regarded as the best military in the world. To the surprise of their American instructors, the first two Korean classes in the Field Artillery School achieved better scores than US officers in the same course.³²

Van Fleet also established two symbolically important military schools in Korea: the Korea Military Academy and the Command and General Staff College. President Rhee had first asked General Walker, commander of the Eighth US Army at the beginning of the war, then Ridgway after Walker was killed in December 1950, to revive the Korea Military Academy. Both of these commanders considered Rhee's request impractical, but Van Fleet agreed with Rhee, and in late October 1951 the ROK Army Chief of Staff proposed an academy with a four-year course modelled after the US Military Academy at West Point. KMAG soon created a temporary site for the new school at Chin-hae, near Pusan, and appointed three West Point graduates to oversee this program. Van Fleet sent Brigadier General Ahn Chun-sang, superintendent of the new school, to visit West Point in late 1951 to observe and learn. After he returned from his two-week visit, Ahn wrote to Van Fleet that West Point had left him 'overwhelmed'.³³

The Korea Military Academy from its inception followed the US model. Its mission was 'to provide the Korean Army with a permanent nucleus of professionally trained junior officers who have the essential qualities of character, leadership and aptitude'.³⁴ At the school's opening ceremony on 20 January 1951, Major General Lee Jong-chan, ROK Army Chief of Staff, wrote to his US Army counterpart, 'The Korea Military Academy

31 Myers, *KMAG's Wartime Experiences*, p. 180; Brigadier General C.E. Ryan, Chief, KMAG, to Chief of Staff, ROK Army, 'Subject: Korean Army attendance at US service schools', 3 November 1951, RG 554, KMAG AG Decimal Files, 1948-53, Box 33, NA.

32 Major General Reuben E. Jenkins, Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, to Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Administration, 'Republic of Korea Army students attending the Artillery and Infantry Schools', 21 November 1951, RG 319, Chief of Staff, Decimal Files, 1951-52, Box 742, NA.

33 Ahn Chun-sang to Van Fleet, 4 July 1952, Van Fleet Papers, Box 72.

34 'Korean Military Academy', United States Military Advisory Group to the Republic of Korea, no date, Van Fleet Papers, Box 90.

is the hope of our people ... We are also assured of our contribution to the new institution by firmly establishing an honourable and respectable tradition like that of your Military Academy in America'.³⁵

If the academy was the favourite of the Koreans, the Command and General Staff College was the US priority. Van Fleet and KMAG gave considerable thought to a school system that would improve the quality of leadership among senior officers. The function of the college, which opened in late 1951, was similar to that of the US Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The course of study lasted six months and was patterned after the associate course at Fort Leavenworth. American instructors taught the first cohort of students in English with the aid of interpreters. Instruction for subsequent classes was presented in Korean, 10 students from the first class having been retained as teaching staff. Because a large number of students were having trouble understanding English, a plan was adopted in January 1952 to allocate one hour a day to language instruction. Starting with the second cohort in July, the number of students was increased to 50, the maximum that KMAG believed the ROK Army could spare from combat duty.³⁶

The introduction of new, modern warfare tactical and training principles promoted Americanisation in this period. By learning close air support tactics while operating under US units, for example, Korean officers could see how ground forces and air power could coordinate effectively. Also, for the first time they received up-to-date training in nuclear and biological warfare.³⁷ New administrative systems that Korean officers learned from KMAG effectively supported the ROK Army's growing administration.

A small investment in Americanisation under Van Fleet's command had produced a large benefit for the ROK Army. In this process, both Americans and Koreans finally achieved what they had failed to achieve in the previous period: developing respect for, and confidence in, each other. Based on this mutual regard, Van Fleet's reorganisation programs soon paid off by achieving a rapid increase in the ROK Army's combat effectiveness.

35 Lieutenant General Lee Chongchan, Chief of Staff, ROK Army, to General J. Lawton Collins, Chief of Staff, US Army, 5 February 1952, RG 319, Army Intelligence Project Decimal Files, 1951-52, Box 164, NA.

36 Myers, *KMAG's Wartime Experiences*, pp. 205-6.

37 'Chemical, Biological, and Radiological Training', United States Military Advisory Group to the Republic of Korea, no date, Van Fleet Papers, Box 90; HQ, US Eighth Army, Commanding Reports, April 1952, RG 550, Military Historian's Office, Classified Organization History Files, Box 71, NA.

Making a bigger army

If Van Fleet's project was to strengthen the ROK Army's value as a reliable military by increasing its combat effectiveness, General Mark W. Clark's project was to strengthen its role in the global Cold War by increasing its size. Clark's idea was to replace US ground forces in Korea by increasing the ROK Army size to nearly 700,000 men, grouped into 20 divisions. Each division would be combat-effective and led by well-educated officers. Despite many problems, as well as opposition from Washington, Clark was able to proceed with his project, beginning in June 1952.

Since the activation of the Bamboo Plan in early 1946, the US Government had controlled the ROK Army's physical size, keeping it as small as possible. Although President Rhee had argued that increasing the size of the ROK Army would save US manpower in the war, US military commanders in Seoul and Tokyo strongly opposed the idea of increasing the ROK Army's numbers. Ridgway set a limit of 10 divisions, which he thought was the most the ROK economy could support, and he criticised Van Fleet's proposal in late 1951 to double the size of the ROK Army. General Ridgway thought the Japanese Self-Defense Forces, the Nationalist Chinese and US commitments in South-East Asia had higher priority for the United States.³⁸ Finally, in early 1952, he endorsed Van Fleet's plan to increase the ROK Army's size from approximately 252,000 to 383,000 men, mostly in supplementary units, but Ridgway made clear that in no case would he allow the number of ROK Army divisions to be increased.³⁹

Clark dramatically shifted the US position. He suggested increasing the ROK Army to 20 divisions, which would relieve US forces in Korea, with the ROK Army taking charge there. Clark was impressed by the ROK Army's rapid achievements under Van Fleet's Americanisation program: 'I have been favourably impressed with the fighting abilities of ROKA soldiers and with the effectiveness of present ROK Army units. I consider their future potential is high and should be developed to the maximum

38 Collins, *War in Peacetime*, p. 314; Hull to Ridgway, 8 April 1952; Ridgway to Department of the Army, 9 April 1952, RG 319, Records of the Office of the Chief of Staff, Top Secret Correspondence, 1948-62, Box 5, NA.

39 Ridgway to Department of the Army, 9 April 1952, RG 319, Records of the Office of the Chief of Staff, Top Secret Correspondence, 1948-62, Box 5, NA.

during this critical period.⁴⁰ He believed that expanding the ROK Army would result in a corresponding reduction in US casualties and would give US military units increased flexibility for future operations.

Clark's plan to '[bring] American soldiers home' was appealing not only to policy-makers in Washington but also to the American public. But it encountered difficulties, above all because the increase to 20 divisions would be costly, requiring an increase in the budget of the US Government. Europeanists inside the Truman administration opposed transferring funds from what they regarded as the primary European front to the secondary Asian front. Most importantly, Clark had to prove to sceptics the potential value of the ROK Army as a Cold War military force. Although Van Fleet's reorganisation programs had improved South Korea's military dramatically, its value as a reliable military had yet to be tested. US policy-makers could not shake memories of the ROK collapse during the first days of the war.⁴¹

Despite opposition from Washington, Clark started his expansion project in June 1952, and it progressed smoothly and swiftly with strong support from Van Fleet, KMAG and the ROK Government. By stabilising the ROK Army induction system with the cooperation of the ROK Government, KMAG could produce 7,200 men per week from the two ROK Army replacement training centres. This manpower became the most fundamental resource for the new ROK Army units. By transforming the existing field training centres into unit training centres in late 1952, the US Army corps took charge of the newly organised ROK unit training programs. This put the US Army in control of how new units were organised, equipped, trained and prepared to go to the front.

However, expected difficulties soon arose. One was a shortage of personnel and materials in KMAG, in the US Eighth Army in Korea and in the Far Eastern Command in Japan. Another was criticism in Washington that the additional logistical support needed in Korea would hurt the US Army's ability to meet other overseas military commitments. Critics argued that Korea should wait until supplementary US budgetary action provided additional support. Nevertheless, Clark submitted his plan to the Department of the Army on 3 October 1952. It called for a two-year

40 Clark to Department of the Army, 23 June 1952, RG 218, Geographic Files, 1951-53, Box 40, NA.

41 Major General Frank E. Lowe to Truman, 15 December 1950, 20 January 1951, 14 February 1951, Frank E. Lowe Papers, USAMHI.

program to increase the size of the ROK Army by 10 divisions so as to reduce the number of UN forces deployed in Korea.⁴² Clark argued that this would allow the United States to withdraw five divisions, two corps headquarters and some service troops from Korea; after 1 July 1954, the number of US ground forces in South Korea would have fallen by 70 per cent. Until such time as the ROK Army could assume full defence responsibilities, it would be necessary to retain four US Eighth Army divisions in Korea.

Both the Department of the Army and the Joint Chiefs of Staff finally agreed with Clark that expanding the ROK Army was essential.⁴³ They were especially attracted by the prospect of reducing US casualties by increasing the number of ROK troops on the battle line. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also agreed that augmenting ROK forces would permit reinforcement of the defensive lines and provide reserves essential to the operational flexibility of the US Eighth Army and the entire US Army.⁴⁴ The now-authorized expansion project would bring the ROK Army to 12 divisions and 463,000 men.⁴⁵

With the Joint Chiefs of Staff still needing the president's approval, the presidential campaign settled the matter in favour of expansion. In a speech on 29 October 1952, Republican Party candidate Dwight D. Eisenhower criticised the Truman administration's reluctance to expand the ROK Army. Emphasising the necessity of letting Asians fight against Asians, Eisenhower released a personal letter from Van Fleet that criticised Washington for delaying the decision to increase the size of the ROK Army.⁴⁶ Approval now came swiftly. On 31 October, President Truman supported the Joint Chiefs of Staff's recommendation to increase the ROK Army to 14 divisions.⁴⁷ Several days later, the Department of the Army asked Clark to prepare a plan to use ROK manpower to reduce demands on

42 Major General C.D. Eddleman to Chief of Staff, US Army, 'Proposed Two-year Program for the Augmentation of the ROKA to Reduce United Nations Forces in Korea', 3 November 1952, RG 319, Records of the Office of the Chief of Staff, Top Secret Correspondence, 1948-62, Box 5, NA.

43 JCS to Clark, 30 October 1952, RG 218, Geographic Files, 1951-53, Box 41, NA.

44 J.E. Welch and B.R. Eggeman, 'Joint Chiefs of Staff Decision on JCS 1776/317', 26 September 1952, RG 319, Records of the Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, Top Secret Decimal Files, 1952, Box 20, NA.

45 JCS 1776/328, 27 October 1952; JCS 1776/332, 31 October 1952; JCS to Clark, 30 October 1952, RG 218, Geographic Files, 1951-53, Box 41, NA.

46 'Background on Korea Issue Enlivening Presidential Race', *New York Times*, 31 October 1952; 'Lovett Denies Van Fleet's Charge of Delay in Training Korean Troops', no date, Van Fleet Papers, Box S-24.

47 DA to CINCFE, 31 October 1952, from Myers, *KMAG's Wartime Experiences*, p. 62.

US troops while lowering US battle casualties and rotation requirements. Clark was specifically asked what was needed for the Pentagon to cut the number of US troops in Far Eastern Command by 50,000 men, withdraw two US divisions from the Korean front by the end of 1953, and turn the defence of the entire front over to the ROK Army by the end of 1954.⁴⁸

Fearing that the army and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were suddenly moving too fast, Clark began to take a more cautious attitude to the project he had initiated. In submitting his final plan, Clark emphasised that it was feasible only if the stalemate continued in Korea without any substantial increase in enemy forces, and only if adequate and properly phased logistical support was forthcoming from the United States.⁴⁹ He also felt that the Department of the Army's 18-month timeline for this project was unrealistic, even dangerous.⁵⁰ As a result, the 20-division plan underwent further study in Washington until mid-November 1952.⁵¹

Once elected, Eisenhower hesitated over the expansion program, and the Department of the Army, Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Defence Department moved in different directions. First, several military studies warned that the US military suffered from serious matériel shortages as a result of budget reductions: to support the ROK Army expansion, scheduled projects in other areas such as NATO and South-East Asia would have to be delayed.⁵² Second, US policy-makers worried about the ability of the Korean economy to support the expansion, leaving the US Government to pick up the bill. According to the Joint Chiefs of Staff's staff report, the estimated cost of the expansion was approximately \$2 billion in the first year (approximately \$19.4 billion today), bringing the total cost of maintaining the ROK Army to \$3 billion (approximately \$29.1 billion today).⁵³

48 Eddleman, Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, to Chief of Staff, 'Proposed Two-year Program for the Augmentation of the ROKA to Reduce United Nations Forces in Korea', 3 November 1952.

49 Clark to the Department of the Army, 28 October 1952, RG 218, Geographic Files, 1951-53, Box 41, NA.

50 CINCFE to DA, 28 October 1952; General Clark to C/S, 1 November 1952, RG 218, Geographic Files, 1951-53, Box 41, NA.

51 Eddleman to Chief of Staff, G-3, 3 November 1952; Eddleman, 'Memorandum for the Chief of Staff, US Army—Subject: Development of Wartime Republic of Korea Army', 4 November 1952, RG 319, Records of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, Top Secret Decimal Files, 1952, Box 20, NA.

52 Omar N. Bradley, 'Memorandum for General Collins', 19 November 1952, RG 319, Records of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, Top Secret Decimal Files, 1952, Box 20, NA.

53 Lovett, 'Memorandum for the Joint Chiefs of Staff'.

While fierce debates continued inside the Pentagon, President Eisenhower, in mid-May 1953, finally granted authority for the ROK Army's support strength to be increased to 655,000 men and 20 divisions. Despite the potential problems, allowing American soldiers to return home by increasing reliance on Korean military forces was the most crucial aspect of this decision. Most policy-makers in Washington hoped the expansion would quiet Rhee's opposition to an impending armistice.⁵⁴

The actual expansion in Korea progressed faster than Clark's schedule. Despite the lack of matériel, the ROK 12th Division was organised, trained and in action at the front by the end of December 1952, while the ROK 15th Division was similarly deployed by the end of January 1953.⁵⁵ Once these two divisions were activated, the prospects for other divisions seemed much better.

President Rhee and the ROK government strongly supported this project. Quietly, behind the scenes, Rhee had argued for expansion. He told US Senator H. Alexander Smith, 'We do not want you to sacrifice your own boys. All we ask for is that you give us equipment and that you train our own people. It is much better for Asians to fight Asians'.⁵⁶ Making new laws and regulations to start the large induction of manpower beginning in May 1952, the ROK Government supported KMAG's request to implement Clark's plan.

The ROK Army officer corps was the single biggest beneficiary of this project, because the expansion of the army would provide enormous opportunities to Korean officers, including increased chances of promotion, better assignments and higher expectations for their military careers. Promotion from major to lieutenant colonel took less than 10 months in mid-1952. For example, it took just five months for Major Lee Byung-hung to be promoted to lieutenant colonel with a new assignment as G-3 of the ROK Army 2nd Division, a post he had long hoped for.⁵⁷

54 Clark to the Department of the Army for JCS, 13 May 1953, RG 218, Geographic Files, 1954-56, Box 44, NA.

55 Myers, *KMAG's Wartime Experiences*, p. 66.

56 Syngman Rhee to Senator H. Alexander Smith, no date, quote from D.C. Skaggs and R.P. Weinert, 'American Military Assistance to the Republic of Korea Army, 1951-1965', draft manuscript, p. II-1, RG 319, Military Historian's Office; unpublished manuscript, 'KMAG in Peace and War', Box 1, NA.

57 Lee Byung-hung, *Yun-dae-jang* [Memoirs: Regimental Commander], Bung-hak-sa, Seoul, 1997, pp. 11-12.

The newly organised units also gave Korean officers useful experience for their future professional careers. Colonel Kim In-chul realised that he was the first man to arrive at his new unit, which would be organised as the 58th Regiment in November 1952 in the north-eastern county of Yang-yang. With help from neighbouring units and KMAG advisers, Kim was able to organise his unit within two weeks. Fortunately, Kim could appoint able and well-trained personnel as his subcommanders, staff officers and even non-commissioned officers from other existing units. After finishing a four-week Unit Training Centre program under the US X Corps, Kim's regiment became one of three in the ROK 20th Division, which was activated in February 1953. Right after the US X Corps' combat inspections in March, this new regiment arrived at the combat line less than six months from its activation.

This and other new units performed impressively in combat. In its first combat mission in April, Kim's regiment scored an impressive victory over the Chinese, for which it won the Corps Commander's decoration.⁵⁸ During June and July 1953, the ROK II Corps demonstrated a similar effectiveness against a major Chinese offensive that was meant to influence the final stage of the armistice talks. Although the Chinese first blow in the vicinity of Kum-sung was strong enough to penetrate the defence of two front-line ROK divisions, the 5th and 8th, the other division of this corps, the 3rd, soon filled this gap. While the US Eighth Army provided rapid reinforcement to this area to back up this ROK corps, all three Korean divisions launched counter-attacks less than 24 hours after the enemy's attack had begun. Surprising even US military commanders, this ROK corps inflicted more than 50,000 casualties on the Chinese forces. Many American observers, military and civilian, praised the ROK Army units for standing firm against the communists by themselves. General Maxwell Taylor, who assumed command of the US Eighth Army after Van Fleet retired in December 1952, acknowledged the achievement: 'This is really the first time that the South Korean divisions have been engaged on their own in large-scale operations. They are acquitting themselves magnificently and are holding their main lines which the Communists have nowhere penetrated.'⁵⁹

58 Kim In-chul, *Yuk-i-o Jun-jaeng Heokorok: Sam-pal-sun-yei-seo Hui-jun-sun-ka-ji* [Memoirs: From the 38th parallel to the Demarcation Line], Bo-mun-dang, Seoul, 1992, p. 376.

59 Lieutenant General Maxwell Taylor, interview with William Courtenay, 7 July 1953, quoted in Myers, *KMAG's Wartime Experiences*, p. 358.

Conclusion

As early as the summer of 1952, the Republic of Korea Army had become a reliable military, a fact that many observers both inside and outside the ROK Army recognised. In particular battles against the communists, ROK Army units were proving the value of what they had learned and achieved under the US Army's direction. The success of the ROK Army's Americanisation project had two instant consequences for Americans and Koreans. First, as US policy-makers expected, major US ground forces were able to withdraw from South Korea, leaving the Cold War mission to the ROK Army, and enabling the United States to improve its Cold War manpower situation. Koreans also benefited by achieving their old aspirations: with this strong military force, South Koreans could preserve their national pride and security through their own efforts.

During the last two years of the Korean War, the ROK Army underwent a fundamental transformation. Physically, the small and outdated Asian military force became a well-trained and effectively equipped first-class army. No longer Asiatic, it had become Westernised, following predominantly the US Army's model. The Korean War was not only the most decisive turning point but also the best opportunity for the ROK Army's Americanisation. In its first year this war demonstrated the value of military Americanisation to Koreans, who had been suspicious on that point. The war itself served as an ideal classroom for the ROK Army's new learning. Its officers tested in combat what they had learned and affirmed the value of their new learning.

Also significant was the relationship between two field actors, American advisers and Korean advisees. Although policy-makers in both Washington and Seoul decided on the basic framework for this project, details were decided by actors on the ground. As a result, the relationships formed between the US and Korean participants accounted for much of the overall success of the Americanisation efforts. Cultural problems and different expectations led to confrontations at the start, yet US advisers and ROK officers managed eventually to cooperate with each other and to develop friendships, while fighting together against a common enemy to achieve a common goal. Without the so-called perfect partnership between these two sets of soldiers, military Americanisation in the Republic of Korea might have failed.

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