

Korean Troops End Vietnam Combat Role

NYTimes By CRAIG R. WHITNEY NOV 9 1972

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Nov. 8 — The 38,500 South Korean troops in Vietnam at the behest of the United States and South Vietnamese Governments have effectively retired to their rear bases and have stopped combat operations, according to their headquarters here.

They have been providing a military shield in a poorly defended section of the central coast in Binh Dinh, Phuyen and Khanhhoa Provinces, and until last week were keeping the vital An Khê pass open between Quinhon and Pleiku.

They had been scheduled to begin leaving early next year, but the departure was postponed at the request of American and Vietnamese officials—before the recent progress in negotiating a peace settlement—because the South Vietnamese were not yet ready to replace them.

They and the Americans still here would be required to withdraw within 60 days of the signature of an accord.

The Korean experience here has been checkered. The force, which numbered 48,000 at its peak in 1967 and was brought in at the instigation of the United States, is largely equipped and paid by it. Today the Koreans outnumber American troops in Vietnam.

Extra Pay and PX Privileges

The United States pays salary differentials — in Korea a private makes about \$2 a month, here \$40; brings them and their equipment on American vessels; provides helicopter transport and gunship support; flies soldiers home on vacation if they extend their tours of duty, and gives them privileges in post exchanges. The Koreans' liberal use of the privileges is legendary.

"It's all written into an international contract," said one of the American liaison officers with the South Korean Tiger Division near Quinhon. "Everything is in that contract — right down to the three grains of rice in the rattaps."

The Koreans, not mere parasites or fighting machines, have built many roads and have beautified downtown Saigon with several parks. They count among the most important of their accomplishments the spreading of the cult of taekwondo, or hand-to-hand self-defense, more widely known by its Japanese name, karate.

Despite the comfortable life of Korean troops in the rear, those in the combat divisions have earned a reputation among the Vietnamese for ferocity and cruelty even though their three-part code of conduct is: "Brave and fearsome to the enemy, polite and kind to the Vietnamese, well disciplined and reliable to our allies."

Lots of Spit and Polish

The Korean command — a spit-and-polish American-style headquarters halfway between Saigon and Cholon that is always surrounded by gleaming jeeps and limousines—claims

the killing of more than 41,000 Communist soldiers since 196 and puts its losses at 3,700 killed and 8,300 wounded.

The force is tightly disciplined, with officers commanding a kind of respect that disappeared from the United States Army before World War II. In the words of an American liaison officer, Lieut. Col. William R. Baldwin, the outposts are "absolutely right out of the book — these people learned their lessons well."

The Tiger Division's headquarters is a neat American-style camp with American plumbing and American barracks, tennis courts and jeeps, but Korean C-rations made in the United States. They come in cardboard cartons that say "a Korean meal." The Koreans seem to like them, but at the rear base they have real Korean food—barbecued beef and spicy kimchi, which they say is too hot because the Vietnamese red peppers they put into the pickled-cabbage staple are more fiery than the equivalent in Korea.

Assiduous occupation of rear bases has been a Korean trait irksome to American military commanders over the years. James G. Lowenstein and Richard M. Moose, who toured South Vietnam for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last spring, reported:

Big Conventional Battle

"We heard that the Korean had been of almost no assistance since the offensive, that they had been under orders to avoid combat and to minimize casualties, that it had required special efforts to obtain agreement to allow Korean units to reopen the An Khê Pass on Route 19 and that even after agreement had been obtained, it had been difficult to get the Koreans to move."

At the headquarters in Saigon, the battle from April 11 to 26 for An Khê Pass is described as the biggest conventional battle fought in Vietnam by Korean troops. The outcome, according to the Koreans, was more than 700 North Vietnamese killed, against Korean losses of 87 killed and 115 wounded.

Most other "battles," including those since the Communist offensive began March 30, are far less bloody. On an operation in the Dongxuan district of Phuyen Province last month, a regiment of the Tiger Division spent three weeks sweeping the hills and cordoning off the 2,000 inhabitants. The killing of 150 Communists, 40 by artillery fire, was reported, with Korean losses put at one man killed and 26 wounded—all, according to the regimental commander, Col. Park Sung Hwan, by booby traps. The enemy had left by the time the Koreans arrived, according to American advisers.

Repeated operations like that in the midst of the population have led to charges that the Koreans have deliberately killed civilians. "Our troops have been harassed for seven years about atrocities," the Ko-

rean information officer, Lieut. Col. Y. J. Chung, complained. "Whenever they have been investigated, they have been proven wrong. Our Korean forces have been the target of VC propaganda."

Reports Are Commonplace

The stories have become commonplace. Two former American Friends Service Committee volunteers, Diane and Michael Jones, who have spent four months interviewing village on the central coast, have written a study that says:

"In all, we heard from local sources reports of more than 45 specific incidents in which Korean soldiers were said to have killed groups of over 2