



Korea Between the Wars: A Soldier's Story

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History books are silent on the lives and experiences of the U.S. Army ground troops that occupied South Korea during the period between World War II and the Korean War. Ample material can be found describing the political events and military strategies of the time, but the realities of life during the occupation, as seen by soldiers on the ground in Korea, are locked in the memories of the men still living who served there -- men now approaching their seventh and eighth decades.

Korea Between the Wars is both a memoir and a history. It is the story of a young enlisted man, the author, who served in South Korea from January 1947 through February 1948 at Camp Hillenmeyer, a former Japanese air base now Kunsan Air Force Base. The story is told with liberal use of excerpts from many of approximately two hundred letters written from Korea by the author to his family. The excerpts are linked together by recollections refreshed by the letters and by never-to-be-forgotten memories of the time.

Korea Between the Wars is an account of a peacetime army of occupation forgotten, or neglected, by a military establishment in a decline that continued up to and through the Vietnam War. It tells of bone-chilling cold, shortages of fuel, dirty bodies and grimy clothes, and hunger to the point of starvation. Against this backdrop of privation, it describes the work and play, the frustrations and pleasures, and the everyday lives of enlisted men who served in the 63rd Infantry Regiment of the 6th Infantry Division.


The author's narrative contains much more than details of army life. In his letters to his family, he describes Korean towns and countrysides, the people, their homes, and their ways of life. His assignments at Camp Hillenmeyer brought him into close contact with Korean laborers and construction crews that provided him ample opportunity to study their work ethics and ways. The latter, some of which seemed primitive even fifty years ago, provided the author with material for letters home.

Korea Between the Wars also recounts the hardships of the Korean people imposed by food shortages, political turmoil, and difficult relations with American soldiers. And, it tells of the numerous portents of the war that was to come between North and South Korea.

In the final chapter of the book, the author looks back at his experiences as a young soldier in South Korea. In the intervening years, he has spent considerable time reading and researching the history of the period in an attempt to understand the events that led to the Korean War, the difficulties experienced by the ground troops during the occupation, and the fragile relations between the American occupation forces and the Korean people.

End papers include two appendices (a history of the 63rd Infantry Regiment; a list of references and recommended reading) and an index of people mentioned in the book. Copies of maps of Camp Hillenmeyer and surroundings, drawn by the author in his letters to his family, are included in the text. Also included in the book is a twelve-page section of pictures, enhanced and printed on glossy stock, taken by the author during his tour in South Korea.

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