

Contempt turns to respect as GIs change

'Gook' to 'Korean Joe'



THEY'RE FIGHTERS NOW. South Korean troops proved their valor in the wintry hills, now hold more than half the front.

THEY trudged back up the shell-scarred hill. The men were tired. They had been fighting for days. Some had half-healed gashes; others were limping. Their uniforms were torn and dirty. Many of them looked scared.

"Ahead, a few hundred yards away, the ground was being churned into a brown haze by Communist artillery fire.

"As the troops vanished into that jarring hell near the crest of White Horse Hill, my heart went out to those Korean Joes: they're real soldiers."

The speaker, Cpl. Gene R. Smith of Haslett, Mich., is one of the few Americans to set foot on the strategic hill guarding the Chorwon Valley gateway to Seoul, Korea's threatened capital. For eight days of bitter seesaw fighting, the hill was defended by the outnumbered Republic of Korea Ninth Division. They held firm against waves of Chinese and North Koreans and nearly continuous barrages that hit a rate of up to 30 shells a minute, 2,000 an hour.

Meeting and beating back the heaviest enemy attacks anywhere along the front this year, these ROK troops made one of the great stands of the war—to prove beyond doubt the fighting valor of the men U.S. soldiers once knew as "gooks." They sent a stream of wounded back down the hill. But they held.

One ROK company, temporarily split from the main group, killed over 400 of the enemy as it closed the gap. Now defense of the entire sector has been assigned to the Koreans.

The Ninth is a good division. "But all the ROK divisions are good now," a high-ranking American officer noted recently. "They exhibit soldierly qualities in the highest degree—tenacity and patience; above all, patriotism."

Yet less than two years ago, ROK troops—often "recruited" at pistol point

General Eisenhower will find South Korea's army transformed from gunshy rabble into disciplined fighters—in one of the great feats of this war



RABBLE? ROK troopers are now a disciplined force.

and sent to the front after a couple of weeks of "training"—had to be backed up by Americans lest they break and run, abandoning their weapons, before a Red attack. Many an Allied unit with a ROK force on its flanks had to pull back to avoid being encircled through the hole the ROKs had left.

For the last 18 months, an intensive training program has pulled ROK units back from the front one at a time—until today, 12 trained and seasoned divisions are holding more than half the 155-mile battle line across Korea. They are the hard kernel around which may be grouped half a million semi-trained recruits and another 2 million potential trainees. Such an army could eventually take over the entire defense of Korea, relieving units of 20 other nations, who compose 40% of the frontline troops now fighting against the Communists there.

The changeover, however, may take anywhere from one to five years, according to a responsible officer of Gen. James A. Van Fleet's U.S. Eighth Army. The Koreans need more weapons and equipment; they lack officers, particularly above divisional level; they have almost no supporting elements, such as a quartermaster corps, transportation corps, medical units, etc.; they have no air force and a tiny navy. Meanwhile, enemy



WOUNDED. High casualty rate hasn't stopped ROKs.

strength in Korea is growing daily—and could be doubled or tripled to meet an increase in ROK units.

Battle-tested. But the 140,000 ROKs at the front and the 240,000 in rear echelons have won the right to be taken seriously. Here are some of the considerations that will face General Dwight D. Eisenhower when the President-elect is in Korea to evaluate the possibility of increasing the Korean military contribution:

- • The ROKs can fight. With more than 200,000 men killed and wounded in the two and a half years of fighting, their losses exceed that of all other nations put together.

- • The ROKs can attack. They were the first to fight through to the Yalu River in the North—reaching Chosan one month before a U.S. unit (the 17th Regiment of the Seventh Infantry) punched



VAN FLEET (LEFT). He trained and inspired ROK troops.

to the Manchurian border at the river town of Hyesanjin.

• • The ROKs hold in defense. Out-numbered four to one on the central front, one company fought for two days to defend an advanced post. The fighting got so close that the unit called back to artillery in the rear to fire on their own position. One man in three was killed—but the outpost was held. The only surviving officer, Lt. Cho Un Ho, said later the one thing that kept him in that hell was the new Korean battle cry: "*No yogi isora*"—"Stay, fight."

• • As individuals, ROK soldiers bow to none in courage. Take Lt. Chang Sih Lee's singlehanded attack on two enemy platoons near Fwa Yang Ri. He



OFFICERS. Training in U.S., they'll build Korean Army.

killed 35 Reds, captured ten and seized six machine guns. Or Cpl. Yun Dok Yong, who was scouting alone ahead of his company when he came upon an enemy roadblock readied for an ambush. Yun's lone attack brought in five prisoners, five trucks and two antitank guns, broke the planned ambush and opened a hole for a successful assault.

• • ROK morale is at peak. They stick to their weapons. Col. John E. Slaughter of Purcellville, Va., tells of a Korean he picked up: "He'd been shot in the mouth. His tongue was so swollen he was choking. But the boy wouldn't let go of his rifle—not even while I helped him into the jeep."

There are more South Koreans in the field today than the troops of all other countries combined. The induction rate of draftees has been doubled; two more divisions have just been thrown into the fight and a supplementary Korean budget has earmarked \$4 million to pay another eight divisions. ROK officers are being trained in growing numbers

“Korean Joe”

in the U.S.

Today, three out of 12 men in each “American” division are ROKs. They live and fight as equals, shoulder to shoulder with our boys. And where once the GI knew these Oriental fighters as “gooks,” now he hails them as “Korean Joes.”

Pathfinder