

US Troops Stationed in Korea — (8)

GI Influence Fading From Itaewon

This is the eighth in a series of articles about United States troops presence and effects it has had on Korea. HD.

By Oh Young-jin
Staff Reporter

A couple of crew-cut Americans in plain clothes sit on stools in one corner of a dimly lit bar, nursing beers.

The two have the whole place to themselves, and as if to prove their territorial claim, their conversation is loud and spiked with military jargon.

At the other corner of the bar are several bar girls in their early 20s throwing darts and giggling among themselves, completely indifferent to their American customers. The bar sees no more patrons for the rest of the night.

"The situation is about the same in other bars," said Nana, 43, the Korean owner of the bar, referring to dozens of speakeasies known as GI haunts located along the uphill streets in the middle of Itaewon.

The 10-year veteran of Itaewon said that business has not been good for quite some time. "I am thinking of closing and starting again somewhere else," she said. "Three girls have already quit for room saloons in Kangnam."

"Bad as business is, Americans often sit for hours and drink a 3,000 won bottle of beer or a couple of 5,000 won gin and tonic cocktails, which doesn't help much," she said, pointing to the two GIs still sitting at the bar.

However, there is still a distinct American military flavor in Itaewon as seen in the English signs of some bars along these streets. One reads "Just Lovers Labor."

Until the mid-1980s, these bars brimmed with GIs, who could get instant sex in return for a couple greenbacks along with cheap drinks.

Despite Nana's statement, the "big clubs" are still doing relatively well as GIs flock to so-called "Sobang (firefighting) streets," so named because of an old fire station still located near there.

An employee at the Lucky Club, one of the big bars, said, "Most of the some 300 tables are occupied by American soldiers on weekdays and on weekends there is hardly any standing room."

The Lucky is a discotheque for foreigners only. Other such clubs include the Seven, Grand Ole Opry



Korea Times
Shops with foreign names line both sides of the 1.4km main thoroughfare in Itaewon, accommodating people of all nationalities. The district, which owes its birth to the custom of American soldiers stationed at the nearby U.S. base, has lost its distinctly American flavor and has become truly internationalized.

and King.

Even here there are signs of unmistakable signs of waning American influence. The employee said, "Saturdays are for GIs and Sundays are for Asians."

"It is as if they agreed to avoid each other," he said. "There are occasional fights in the club, usually over women."

Speaking on the spending habits of his customers, he said, "American soldiers dance a lot but don't drink much, which I assume doesn't count much in sales."

GIs are no longer major customers for the hundreds of shops lining the 1.4km Itaewon thoroughfare and selling shoes, bags, leather goods, clothes and suits.

A decent leather jacket costs more than 200 dollars. The shop owner said, "Most of our customers are Koreans, Japanese and Taiwanese. American GIs lack purchasing power."

Thousands of foreigners visit the shops but Americans no longer account for the lion's share as can be heard from the Chinese, Russian and other snatches of conversation spoken in unfamiliar languages.

Perhaps reflecting this, there are few crimes involving American GIs reported in Itaewon these days.

The chief of the Yongdan police-box, which covers the Sobang streets, said that there few crimes involving GIs are being reported.

"It is because fewer GIs venture out into Itaewon," he said. "When I patrol the area, I see so few customers at the bars that I feel sorry for the bar owners."

According to a police officer, there are two two-man patrols of a U.S. MP and a KATUSA on weekdays and double that on weekends to keep an eye on GIs.

A sober GI recalled that a few years back it was possible to buy a few drinks for a Korean woman and have a few bucks left.

"But this is no longer true. So I stick with the clubs on the camp," he said.

A GI's monthly pay is about 1,000 dollars, although it depends on their rank.

A corporal with less than one year in grade gets about 1,081 dollars a month, while a sergeant with a couple years in grade gets around 1,680 dollars. After taking care of personal expenses they don't have much money to spend.

Most American soldiers here also send the bulk of their pay to support their families back home.

While their pay hasn't increased much over the years, Koreans' standard of living has leapedfrogged and acquired purchasing power surpassing that of American soldiers, Itaewon residents say.

"Itaewon is truly international now," a former Itaewon resident said. "The American sun is setting on the horizon in Itaewon."

Gov't Launches Crackdown on Gender Tests of Fetus to Prevent Artificial Abortions

By Hong Sun-hee
Staff Reporter

The Health-Welfare Ministry is getting tough with tests done on pregnant women for the purpose of finding out the sex of the fetus.

The ministry, in concert with employees of public health centers across the nation, has launched a crackdown on the gender tests which take place at hospitals and midwives' homes a ministry official said yesterday.

Doctors are supposed to conduct such tests to check the health of the embryo, and can recommend abortion if the embryo shows signs of birth defects or other abnormality.

In Korea, where sons are preferred over daughters, however, such tests are often used as a way to find out the sex of the fetus in the early stages of pregnancy and to terminate the pregnancy if it is found to be a girl.

Gender tests leading to abortions of female embryos are resulting in a

serious imbalance between boys and girls in school these days.

From now on, the Health-Welfare Ministry jointly with the Korea Medical Association and the Korea Hospital Association will carry out surprise checks at least every three months of clinics, health centers and hospitals, the official said.

Doctors found to have performed gender tests will have their licenses suspended for up to one year the first time and revoked if caught a second time.

Furthermore, they will face imprisonment of up to three years and a 10 million won fine.

Nurses helping doctors conduct unlawful tests and midwives giving the tests themselves will also be punished.

Only 10 doctors were discovered conducting illegal gender tests in 1990 and their licenses were suspended for one month.

It is difficult to uncover such illegal tests as they are carried out

surreptitiously and the results are a secret shared between the doctor and the pregnant woman, according to ministry officials.

There are a number of ways to find out the sex of a fetus through legitimate tests which are, in principle, intended to check whether the fetus is normal.

A chromosome analysis of the embryo is one way to find out the sex of an embryo, but the Service is provided only by pathologists working at major hospitals and it must be done within the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

An ultrasonic diagnoses and amniotic fluid analyses are cheaper and more common though still accurate, the latter being possible on embryos around 20 weeks old.

However the amniotic fluid analysis may cause infection in the uterus and furthermore, the abortion at such a late stage of pregnancy entails a high degree of risk to the mother.

AFKN Will Move to UHF Channel 34 May 1

The American Forces Korea Network will move to UHF channel 34 from the present VHF channel 2 by around the end of April, a United States Forces Korea spokesman said yesterday.

Preparations to transfer AFKN to UHF 34 are "nearly complete," said Ira Wheeler, a USFK communications-electronics officer in charge of the conversion.

Beginning March 8, AFKN TV programming will be broadcast simultaneously on VHF channel 2 and on UHF channel 34.

The current channel will be turned off around April 30, Wheeler said in a statement.

ROK, US Troops to Have Exercise in Texas March 2-8

Three hundred Korean and American soldiers will take part in a military exercise March 2-8 with the U.S. 3rd Corps in Texas, the U.S. Forces Korea said yesterday.

The fighting exercise is geared toward improving war deterrence and combined defensive prowess to enhance readiness in the event of armed conflict on the Korean peninsula, as well as allowing commanders and staff to practice operational procedures.

The drill will be conducted under the direction of Deputy Commander Jang Sung of the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command.

The change was agreed upon by the USFK and the Information-Communications Ministry in 1990, and was originally slated for 1992.

Technical problems and other related matters, however, delayed the process, particularly the issue of

stereo television broadcasts.

"They (technical and other problems) have all been successfully resolved, and we can expect to make the switchover about May 1," Wheeler said.

Civic Group Plans 'March 1' Ceremony in Front of Japanese Parliament Building

With the Tok-do issue seriously straining Korean-Japanese relations, a civic group here will hold the 77th March 1 Independence Movement ceremony in front of the Japanese parliament building in Tokyo, Friday.

"Kugilimdong Yonhap," or the Civic Coalition to Overcome Japan, plans to stage the rally to condemn Japan's claim to the island. The group plans to erect placards saying, "Tok-do Is Korean Land," and "Never Encroach Upon Korean Sovereignty," in front of the Japanese Diet, Hwang Paek-hyon, leader of the civic group said yesterday.

During the ceremony to mark the independence movement against the

then Japanese colonial rule on March 1 in 1919, the anti-Japanese group will also drive around the parliament building and put up a 2-meter-wide color picture of the island in front of it.

At the ceremony, the civic group will call for the Japanese government to apologize for making a claim to the island.

"The Japanese government is intentionally raising historical disputes to divert public attention from the current financial scandal, Hwang claimed.

To get ready for the rally, Hwang and three others left for Japan yesterday.



ROK Army Chief of Staff Gen. Yun Yong-nam, left, and his Paraguayan counterpart Lt. Gen. Lino Oviedo review the honor guard at the parade ground of Kyeryongdae Army headquarters in Taejon Tuesday.

Lt. Gen. Lee Designated Air Force Chief



Lt. Gen. Lee

The government has designated Lt. Gen. Lee Kwang-hak, superintendent of the Air Force Academy, as the next Air Force chief of staff, a Defense Ministry spokesman said yesterday.

The Cabinet at a meeting yesterday decided to promote Lee to general and appoint him as Air Force chief of staff, succeeding current Chief of Staff Gen. Kim Hong-rae, he said.

Lt. Gen. Lee, 57, will take over as AF chief of staff on March 8 when Gen. Kim's term of office expires, he added.

Fire Guts Lotte Store in Chongnyangni

-No Casualties Were Reported-

A fire broke out at the Lotte Department Store in Chongnyangni, eastern Seoul, yesterday afternoon, gutting parts of the upper floors of the seven-story building. However, no casualties were reported.

According to witnesses, smoke was first detected at 1:42 p.m. somewhere between the fourth and seventh floors. The cause of the fire is being investigated.

About 60 fire engines with 245 firefighters arrived on file scene soon afterwards, scrambling to bring the blaze under control. The fire was put out one hour later at 2:36 p.m.

Chief investigator Yu In-gil of Tongdaemun Fire Department said that about 2,640 square meters (800 pyong) of floor space were damaged along with most of the merchandise placed there. Interior repairs were underway on the floors where the fire

took hold.

Store management estimated that about 30 million won worth of merchandise had been lost in the fire, and that total losses amounted to 46 million won. But firefighters said that the blaze left 250 million won in property damage.

Police said that there were some security personnel in the area at the time of fire but they escaped unhurt and there was no loss of human life.

They said that about 1,200 customers had been on the floors below but that they had been evacuated through emergency staircases by store employees before the blaze spread. About 100 others, who fled to the rooftop, were brought down with the help of fire trucks with extension ladders.

There were about 800 employees working in floors below the fourth

floor.

The Are also tied up traffic at the Chongnyangni intersection for about two hours and cut electric supply.

The building, which Lotte bought last year, saw three fires in the early 1970s, in which a total of 97 people were killed.

Coups Trial of Chun Roh to Start March 11

The trial of the 1979-1980 coup by former presidents Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo will start on Mar. 11, the Seoul District Court said yesterday.

Eleven others will also be tried on their roles in the 1979 military mutiny and 1980 coup. They include Lee Hak-bong, former anti-espionage director of the Defense Security Command and Chung Ho-yong, former Special Warfare Forces commander.

Prosecutors Question Rep. Shin About Bribery in Oil Spill Case

SUNCHON, Cholla-namdo — Prosecutors were questioning Rep. Shin Soon-beom of the opposition National Congress for New Politics about whether he accepted bribes from Hoyo Shipping Co., owner of the "Sea Prince," which ran aground and leaked oil into the South Sea last July.

Rep. Shin, 63, a four-term lawmaker from Yochon, off whose coast the oil spill took place, appeared at the Sunchon branch of the Kwangju District Prosecutor's Office yesterday morning, accompanied by NCNP lawmakers Park Sang-chon, Shin Ki-ha and Lee Won-hyung, who all are attorneys.

Shin earlier admitted to having accepted 10 million won from the shipping company, but claimed the money was not a bribe but a "donation."

The prosecutors are concentrating on determining if the opposition lawmaker received more than he said he did.

If Shin is found to have received more what he claims, he will be charged with violating the Law on Aggravated Punishment of Specific Crimes concerning payoffs of more than 10 million won.

Shin allegedly told the prosecutors that he did not use the money offered by the shipping firm for his own "personal use. He said he spent the money buying gifts for lawmakers, their aides and stenographers of the National Assembly who visited the scene of the oil spill during an Assembly inspection of the disaster.

• Sources at the prosecutor's office indicated that Shin might be indicted without physical detention.

The prosecutors were also investigating whether Yoo Sang-sik, chief of the Maritime Police Agency, accepted bribes from the shipping company, tracing the checks the firm allegedly gave to Kim Tuk-su, then chief of Yosu Maritime Police.

Weather Forecast

TODAY

Generally clear skies are expected across the nation. Morning temperatures will be -10 ~ -1°C (14-34°F), and midday highs 6-11°C (43-52°F).

Sunrise: 7:07 a.m.
Sunset: 6:24 p.m.

Seoul: Generally clear
-4°C (25°F) / 7°C (45°F)
Pusan: Generally clear
1°C (34°F) / 11°C (52°F)
Taegu: Generally clear
-3°C (27°F) / 9°C (48°F)
Kwangju: Generally clear
-4°C (25°F) / 8°C (46°F)
Taejon: Generally clear
-6°C (21°F) / 8°C (46°F)
Chunchon: Generally clear
-8°C (18°F) / 7°C (45°F)
Kangnung: Occasionally cloudy
-3°C (27°F) / 9°C (48°F)
Cheju: Occasionally cloudy
1°C (34°F) / 8°C (46°F)

TOMORROW

Cloudy skies and rain or snow are expected across the country. Early morning lows will be -6 to 3°C (21-37°F) and daytime highs will be 0 to 12°C (32-54°F).

Sunrise: 7:06 a.m.
Sunset: 6:25 p.m.

Seoul: Cloudy, rain or snow
0°C (32°F) / 5°C (41°F)
Pusan: Clear to cloudy
2°C (36°F) / 12°C (54°F)
Taegu: Clear to cloudy
-1°C (30°F) / 12°C (54°F)
Kwangju: Cloudy, rain or snow
0°C (32°F) / 8°C (46°F)
Taejon: Cloudy, snow or rain
-2°C (28°F) / 6°C (43°F)
Chunchon: Clear, rain or snow
-4°C (25°F) / 5°C (41°F)
Kangnung: Occasionally cloudy
1°C (34°F) / 7°C (45°F)
Cheju: Cloudy, rain
3°C (37°F) / 7°C (45°F)

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기업투자/ 순수투자/ 독립 (취업) 이민 / 자영 이민

연락처 KBIC

담당변호사 : Colin R. Singer (연방이민청 자문위원)

담당자 : 강철구 실장

전화 : 733-2821, 738-8551, 725-5994

팩스 : 738-8551, 735-5006

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남미이주공사

(서울 중로구 수송동 51-8, 거암빌딩 202호)