

War Threat Lures Tourists to Two Areas

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 United Press International
 TOKYO (UPI) — Two of the world's strangest tourist attractions gain part of their lure from the fact that war could erupt around them at any minute.

They are Panmunjom in Korea, and the Quemoy Island in the Formosa Strait.

Both have been right in the middle of hot war. Heavily armed troops glare at one another at both points. There have been no peace treaties. Sporadic fighting occurs in both areas, and World War III could explode without warning at either site.

Yet growing numbers of tourists — complete with sports shirts, sun glasses and cameras — are finding their way to Panmunjom and Quemoy.

The civilian tourists are being urged to visit Panmunjom by the Republic of Korea, the South Korean government. They are being invited to tour the fortified island of Quemoy just off the coast of mainland China by the Nationalist Chinese government now entrenched in Formosa.

Propaganda Valuable

The South Koreans and Nationalist Chinese obviously think there is propaganda value to be gained from letting the tourists see the two war zones. It is something like visiting the Berlin Wall.

About 3,000 tourists a month visit Panmunjom from South Korea. The North Koreans have equal access to the truce village, but only about 30 visitors a month come from the Communist North.

An official United Nations publication describes the Korean armistice this way:

"Korea is still at war. A peace treaty has never been signed. The United Nations and Republic of Korea forces are not engaged in active combat with the armies of North Korea and Communist China, but they still oppose each other along a 151-mile frontier."

"It is a period of suspended hostilities under an armed truce signed nearly a decade ago. Because a political treaty has never been signed, the Korean military armistice agreement remains in effect. It is the longest armistice in history."

The armistice was signed at Panmunjom on July 27, 1953. A demilitarized zone, called the DMZ, winds 151 miles eastward across the Korean peninsula from the Han river estuary in the west to the Sea of Japan.

Armed Forces

The DMZ is 4,000 meters wide and both sides pulled their forces back. Only at Panmunjom are there armed troops.

with both UN forces — mostly Americans — and Communist North Koreans patrolling the village.

It is here that American soldiers pass their North Korean counterparts without speaking. Sometimes the North Koreans attempt to strike up a conversation with the Americans, but the UN forces are under instruction not to answer.

The sightseers from South Korea are told they can take photographs of anything and anyone, but not to pursue it if the North Korean soldiers object to having their pictures taken.

The UN forces want no incidents at Panmunjom, and there have been no serious problems. There have been a few cases of pushing and shoving on both sides.

Stay on Own Side

The visitors are particularly warned not to attempt to strike up a political discussion with the Communists. The idea is merely to let the tourists see the village, and then they are given a military briefing on the situation. They are told what occurs during the periodic meetings of the military armistice commission at Panmunjom.

The meetings are held in the circular joint security area at Panmunjom. The military demarcation line bisects the 800-meter diameter area. The conference building is located on this line, which runs right down the middle of the long green felt covered table. The UN officials sit on their side of the line and the Communists sit on their side. Neither ever crosses to the other side of the table.

The tourist business on Quemoy, the fortified island just off the coast of mainland China, is stimulated by the same curious

fascination as at Panmunjom. Visitors to Panmunjom arrive by bus, truck and car, while the tourists get to Quemoy aboard low-flying planes which keep close to the water to escape the Red Chinese radar on the mainland.

Quemoy is still under periodic artillery bombardment from the mainland only a few miles away although most of the shells fired now contain only propaganda leaflets.

The Nationalist Chinese have honeycombed the rocky island with tunnels and bomb-proof compartments. They, too, give

military briefings to the visitors, explaining why they want to keep possession of the offshore island and why the Communists want to drive them off.

Waterway Divides

Quemoy is the Nationalist Chinese front line in the civil war with the Communists which began in 1935. The dividing line is a waterway only 5,000 yards wide at its narrowest point.

Visitors to Formosa are urged to see Quemoy before they leave. When the visitor lands at the Quemoy landing strip, he sees barbed wire and booby-trapped beaches. Each visitor

has a military escort, usually a colonel, who explains what can be photographed and what can not.

The tourists are given a look at Red China across the strait through telescopes, then they are taken through the maze of underground tunnels where the soldiers live and work. They see every few yards an artillery piece or a machine gun poking through holes cut in the solid stone.

See Warfare Center

One of the highlights of the tourist's visit to Quemoy is the psychological warfare center.

This is a small building divided into two parts.

On each side there is a display of propaganda leaflets of both the Communists and the Nationalists. The ingenious methods used for delivering the leaflets are explained.

The Nationalists print slogans inside matchboxes, insert messages in bars of soap, and even slip them into the mouths of dead fish which are left on the Communist shore by swimmers.

Sometimes the goods are sent across by raft and sometimes the leaflets are dropped over the mainland China from airplanes.

The Chinese Reds use many of the same techniques.

The visitor to Quemoy is then given a big balloon to which is attached a Nationalist slogan. He lets it go and it soars up into the air toward the mainland.

At both Panmunjom and Quemoy the tourist is fascinated by the fact that he is in a war zone. The thoughts that pass through his mind are his own, but he surely must wonder if either of these protracted struggles between East and West will ever end.

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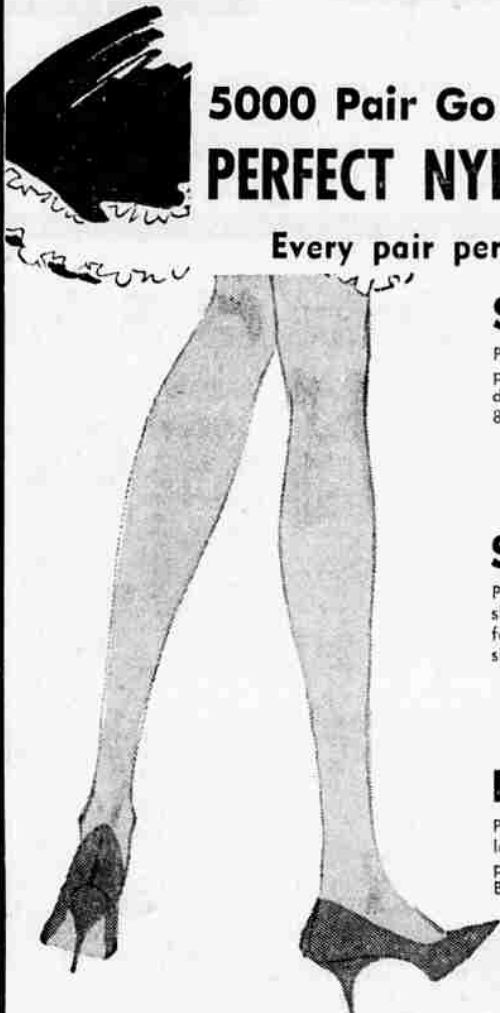
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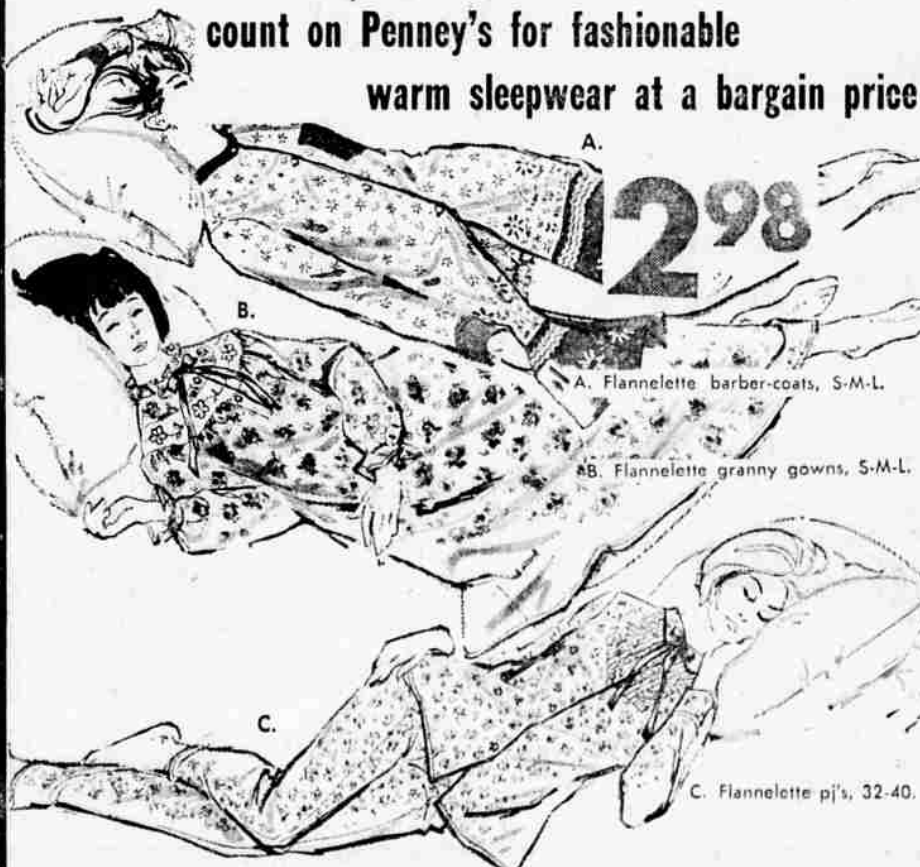
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