

Rhee Stubborn In Persisting For What He Believes Is Best For His Country

SEOUL (AP)—Allied troops reoccupied Seoul in September 1950, after landing at Inchon and routing the North Korean Reds. A throng of Koreans gathered in the battered capital city to hear an address by their white-haired President Syngman Rhee.

It was a momentous occasion for the little man who had endured in his long, relentless fight against monarchists, Japanese militarists and now the Communists. Americans present expected a dramatic, spine-tingling speech from the leathery-skinned Harvard and Princeton graduate.

Rhee fastened a fond gaze on his people and said:

"We have returned to our beloved city. Now let's get the stink out of the streets and get some trees on those mountains."

The incident illustrated several points in the character of the 70-year-old Chief Executive. He is a simple, direct man with no apparent affectations, but stubborn in persisting for what he believes is best for his Korea.

NATURE LOVER

He is a passionate lover of trees and flowering things. He has a mania for sanitation.

Today, in the midst of a great armistice crisis which has found him standing up both against the Reds and the United Nations at times, he still is exhorting Seoul residents at least once each week to clean up and plant.

The development of the country is as important as the armistice question," he explained.

His love is for a country in which he was born under a monarchy March 26, 1895; which threw him in prison when, as a Methodist mission convert, he tried to stir up the spirit of democracy; and from which he was exiled, fleeing for his life soon after the Japanese took control in 1910.

He returned to Korea in 1945 after Japan's defeat only to be caught up shortly in a war which kept him moving in and out of Seoul as its fortunes swayed.

Rhee lives in a fine, concrete and

tile mansion on a Seoul hillside. He spends many waking hours in his spreading, beautiful gardens.

This week, when Gen. Mark Clark flew to Seoul for an urgent conference over Rhee's bitter opposition to a truce with the Reds, they held their meeting in the "garden

then sketches Chinese characters on paper with a brush dipped in heavy black ink.

Rhee, who in boyhood received a classical Chinese education, is highly proficient at this form of painting. His characters spell out such mottoes as "Respect heaven and love humans."

At 8:30 a. m., he goes to a large pond and feeds bread and rice to more than 100 goldfish.

Then he walks to his office and receives reports on the war. He consults with his ministers. By 9:30 a. m., he is back in the garden receiving visitors and giving instructions to his secretaries.

Just before noon, he sits down to his typewriter to bang out personal letters or statements. Very often they are appeals to his people to plant trees, use coal instead of wood for cooking and heating.

EATS EVERYTHING

At 12:30 p. m. daily, he lunches with his Austrian-born wife, Francesca, 20 years his junior, whom he wed in 1924. His digestion is remarkable. He eats what he likes, including chicken, fish, beef and pork. He prefers Western food but occasionally eats rice and some Korean dishes.

After receiving visitors, from 2 to 4 p. m., he plunges into the work of receiving government reports and dictation.

After a walk and a 7 p. m. dinner, he listens to the radio, often reads American books and magazines. He was reading a book of poetry last Monday when a Communist plane dropped a bomb which shook his home. He was unperturbed, waiting calmly for a police report that told him the

office. A third party present was Rhee's little brown and white terrier Smartie.

PLAYS WITH BEARS

Visitors often find him playing in the garden with two bear cubs, gifts of South Korean Army units and with a second dog, Chindo.

Rhee toyed with the bears and stroked his terrier last Monday while telling newsmen: "I am being criticized by everyone—except the Korean people."

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bomb hit a school and injured two teachers.

Just before retiring, he opens his Christian Bible and reads passages aloud to himself and his wife. Saturday nights he allows himself a

special treat—films from the U. S. Eighth Army.

And while the crisis eddies about him, Rhee sits in his garden as impassive and seemingly as ageless as Korea's timeless mountains.

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