

DASPO Cover LBJ in Korea

We all hated the idea of going to Korea. We were in the tropics with short sleeves shirts, shorts and light weight clothing. No body had cold weather jacket or even heavy socks with us, yet we were going to a latitude of Baltimore or Washington at halloween, wearing summer clothing.

We flew out of Manila the 28th of October. My momory of this trip is thin. I knew I left Korea in Feb 1964 and now I was going back. Most of what I remember of LBJ's trip there is bad memories. Arriving at Tokyo Airport, there was major construction on-going and the plane was parked about a mile from the terminal. We were bused to baggage claim. That seemed to take forever. At customs there was some problem. I can't remember if it was with our camera equipment or if our visas were for Korea, not Japan. I'm thinking we spent the night in the airport terminal, at least it was warm.

Saturday we travelled onto Korea. There we needed several taxies to transport the team and equipment to a hotel near the American Embassy. On the trip into town I was shocked to see pet shops in Seoul. Hell just 20 months prior and 25 miles North of Seoul people ate dogs, now I see pet shops. Another shock was the massive amount of construction projects I witnessed.

Being the weekend, the American Embassy usually didn't work. However they had someone on duty to answer the telephone and take messages. It seemed like hours passed before USIS people contacted us. Finally the embassy sent a vehicle. That may have been Sunday. The car took us to 8th Army Headquarters enabling us to visit the post exchange to at least buy a warm jacket or coat to wear. We also needed a statement of non-availability. That the army wouldn't give us. The housing officer told CPT Penny they had room for us on post in the bachelor officer and NCO quarters.

In Manila there was no American military except for the American Embassy Marine Corps Guards, therefore no problem with getting a statement of non-availability. Korea was a totally different story, with 38,000 troops in Korea, the U.S. presence was all over the country. Thus it was back to the hotel and pack for the move onto the 8th Army HQS. far from the embassy and U.S.I.S. This definately adversely effected our mission.

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In the tropics, the daylight is 12 hours all year, but in the temperate climate in the fall the sun sets before 5PM. As Air Force One touched down all I got was a silhouette of the plane against the setting sun. At the press truck there was one spot left open in an other wise over packed truck. I grabbed that last open spot, but not for long. That spot was reserved for secret service agent. As the police escorted presidential motorcade pulled out of the airport, the secret service agent just yanked me tossing me onto the driveway, badly ripping my pants. The rest of the press inched over just enough for me to get a toe hold on the truck and hold on for dear life.

In short sleeves, because it was warm when we arrived at the airport in the middle of the afternoon, it was now hovering in the upper 30's. The presidential motorcade was racing 50 miles an hour toward Seoul. By the time I got back to U.S.I.S., I was shaking from the cold, bruised, torn clothes and bleeding. I could barely write any captions or unload the camera.

In the few days that the First Family were in Korea, I remember two outside the city of Seoul trips. One day President Johnson and Korea's President Park travelled South of the capitol to a ROK (Republic of Korea) Army Base. The slides cover that trip, where the two Heads of State saw a demonstration of judo or karate. Both Presidents spoke briefly stating the high state of readiness of the Korean forces and continued support for the South Korean freedom.

The trip North was familiar territory to me. I had been assigned in I-Corps. Part of my duties were to fly to the DMZ in H-21 (banana) helicopters with 100 and 200 inch lens cameras to film North Korean DMZ violations.

For the president's DMZ visit, U.S.I.S. drove us North to Uijongbu to the avaition unit. There I-Corps and 8th U.S. Army somehow cannibalized, scrapped and fabricated parts to get three H-37 helos to carry the press. I had only seen photos of these choppers, now I was to fly in one. Even the avaition unit's personnel stated they never saw three fly at the same time.

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Army general flew the president to the DMZ from Seoul. Where LBJ was shown a display of North Korean weapons, money and documents captured from enemy infiltrators. President Johnson was escorted to a bunker where using a periscope, he could look across the DMZ into North Korea.

I'm certain DASPO filmed the First Family departure from the Korean Capitol, but I can't recall. On the 3rd of Nov the DASPO Team left Seoul for Japan and onto Hawaii.

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